

# Practice Management Can Make a Difference

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Every day in dental practice there is the opportunity for crisis. Major decisions need to be made on a continual basis. But there are certain times in the life of a dental practice when practice management help can make a difference in both the success of the practice and the enjoyment of the profession.

The first of these is in the formative years immediately after graduation. Practice management instructors in dental schools are like road line painters in Italy. They both are providing an excellent service, but nobody pays any attention to their work. With the tremendous amount of new and essential material about the actual practice of dentistry coming at students, it's very difficult for them to absorb material for later use after graduation. Still, when that day comes, business decisions need to be made and a successful future can depend on some astute choices.

The first article in this issue addresses some of those starting in practice important decisions in a very practical way.

The second article turns to considerations for the established practice. Once the private practice is well established and the team is in place and the patients are comfortable, the tendency is for the owner-dentist to start to fill his/her time with other activities that may cause him/her to lose focus. One of the most prevalent goes under the heading of "midlife crisis," but teenage children might be another, or even just

the loss of interest in driving to the office day after day, week after week, and year after year. Instead of powering the practice to be all that it can be, the dentist finds the numbers starting to flatten or even shrink. The second article addresses ways for a practice in the doldrums or on autopilot to reinvigorate itself. From self-analysis to team building to image enhancement, a number of tools and interesting exercises will be provided to fire up a practice and lead to a whole new vitality in dental care.

The last, and perhaps the most important time in the life of a dental practice, is that period leading up to the inevitable transition to retirement. The variables at that time are numerous,

but the importance of planning and good decision-making cannot be understated. For some, the planning begins at age 45. For others, the serious decisions are made much later. But for every dentist, the more knowledge and understanding of the options, opportunities, and possible pitfalls, the better the chance they can make a smooth transition into retirement and, in the process, provide a viable business for a new dentist and continuing quality care for patients. The third article looks closely at what can be done to prepare for a smooth transition. ■■■■