

Running your Clinic on Time

by **Andrea Cook**

One of the ways a patient is judging your office is if they are seen on time for their appointment. Many offices see this as "if I get them in on time I am good". Not completely true! Getting them seated on time is only half of the goal. We must be able to finish each procedure on time in order to be able to seat our next patient on time. Parents may not be happy if the front office has told them they have a 20 minute appointment and they are in the clinic much longer than that. With today's busy schedules (theirs and ours) we must be respectful of our patients' time. If we are respectful of their time they will learn to be respectful of your time by being on time for their appointments.

There are several components that contribute to your ability to run your clinic on time. First, we must have a schedule that is reflective of the doctors' delivery of patient care. How much time do they realistically need in each appointment and where is that time in each appointment. I am often asked, "How many patients should I be seeing per day?" There is no magic number. I have offices that see from 50 – 120 patients per day. Any of these can be successful if it is an accurate picture of what you and your team can do.

The next component is having a team that fully understands the schedule and how to make that perfect schedule work in a not so perfect world. Seating your patient on time is the goal but before we can seat our next patient on time we must be able to finish our last patient on time. The best way to make sure the clinicians are able to achieve this is to be aware of the finish time of each appointment. The clinician can then work backwards from that point to prioritize the work in the procedure. If a patient is late for their appointment or has breakage the clinician can make the call chairside as to what can be accomplished while still meeting their out time. I encourage doctors with a strong clinical team to empower them to make clinical decisions as to what can be accomplished today and what may need to be rescheduled.

If an office is running a doctor time schedule the clinicians and treatment coordinators must also be aware of where that time is in their appointment and how many minutes they have. TCs can have a big impact on the clinic if they are not following the doctor time in the schedule. Clinicians and TCs should do what they can and still be calling for their doctor at the correct time, not the time they are ready for the doctor. If a patient is late for their appointment the doctor time and out time for the procedure does not change. The clinician will make the call on what can be accomplished and make decisions to meet these marks. This may mean working at a faster pace or making adjustments in today's procedure.

Another factor in a clinician's ability to keep on schedule is the importance of good clinical organization. If the clinic and side units are well organized and the clinicians have everything they need they can easily adjust the procedure for late patients or patients with breakage. Spending valuable minutes searching for items will not allow them to accomplish as much as possible during an appointment.

Empower your team and let them run your schedule. Give them all the tools they need to be successful: organization, training, instruments, and your support. Their ownership of the schedule and the day will build a stronger team and enable them run your clinic on time. ☺

About the Author



Andrea Cook's in-office, hands-on training is based on practical knowledge gained through 20 years of chair side experience. She is a clinical consultant and trainer for premier orthodontic offices across the country.

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