

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PROTOCOLS IN DENTAL PRACTICE PROCEDURES

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ABSTRACT

The implementation of standardized protocols in dental practice are essential for ensuring a stress-free practice. Protocols are essential to a predictable and efficient modern dental management. They should cover every aspect of the practice's work. We will thus have clinical protocols for each type of treatment and protocols for cleaning, disinfection and sterilization. For the administrative part the practice should have material acquisition protocols and communication protocols. These standardized procedures must ensure the optimisation of clinical outcomes, to enhancing patient communication, imagine and safety.

This article addressee the importance for the development and implementation of protocols, the challenges in their adoption, and strategies to successfully integrate them into daily dental practice. A good set of protocols should be characterised by improve procedural efficiency, clarity, compliance, and predictability.

Key words: Protocols, clinical, dentistry, strategies, communication, dental team, material acquisition

INTRODUCTION

A professional dentist's dream is to have a stress-free practice where they can focus on performing high-quality treatments, accompanied by empathetic and effective doctor-patient communication. The dentist can have several roles in the dental office. In addition to the professional aspect of the provider of medical services, of the practitioner, he can also be a mentor but also a company administrator, manager, medical manager, "human resources expert", responsible for promoting the office, etc. [1,2] Dividing time and attention between these roles can lead to an overload of the doctor, which can influence the quality of treatments, can create friction between members of the medical team and finally a poor communication with patients. Also, the way in which the health services market in dentistry evolves, the increased number of

medical offices, the expansion of dental clinic chains, the appearance and evolution of new technologies, causes an increase in pressure, stress on both managers and professionals in the field. Thus, we often encounter cases of burn-out that negatively influence both the capacity and quality of the services offered by the doctor as well as his quality as a teammate, manager, which can undermine the performance of the medical team altogether [1,2].

Contemporary dental practice requires a structured approach aimed at increasing the predictability of the medical act, minimizing errors and promoting evidence-based decisions. Standardized protocols represent a set of clear instructions that guide the medical team in practice, covering both medical and administrative aspects. They facilitate standardized practice, reduce variability between practitioners and improve patient

safety. The implementation of protocols in dental practice plays an essential role in ensuring the quality of treatment, reducing risks and improving patient satisfaction. [8,9,10,11,12]

The definition of the protocol is a set of predetermined rules, procedures and standards, which guides the activities and decisions of dentists and the dental office team.

The purpose of a protocol is to ensure that all treatments and administrative activities are consistently, efficiently and safely carried out, according to the best practices in the field and in compliance with legal regulations while increasing their quality.

Consistency is the characteristic by which standardized operating procedures ensure the same level quality of the treatment, regardless of the practitioner's experience. The same rigor applies to the other types of protocols, whether we are talking about administrative protocols, communication or disinfection and sterilization[4,5,6,7]

A second characteristic would be the flexibility to ensure increased quality. Standardization of processes helps to maintain a high level of quality of treatments. Thus, clinical protocols incorporate the latest evidence-based practices, leading to improved treatment outcomes.

Efficiency is another characteristic that results from rigorous adherence to optimized protocols. As a result, we will have an efficiency in the type of work and, of course, an economy of resources will be achieved.

Responsibility and traceability can be achieved by clarifying the roles and responsibilities of each member of the medical team, with the possibility to follow and evaluate their activity.

Well-defined protocols reduce the risk of complications and legal liabilities. If standardized clinical protocols, cleaning,

disinfection, sterilization, easy to follow, along with communication and information management protocols are used, the risks of malpractice are minimized. [3,4,13,14]

Predictable and transparent protocols create the image of a well-trained team that knows what it's doing and works without friction. These aspects lead to increased confidence among patients.

Creating a protocol involves a structured approach and a detailed development process that includes:

- identifying the objective,
- planning the steps,
- documenting and implementing it
- monitoring, feedback, control

The first step is to identify the need and objective of the protocol. This is followed by clarifying the reason why the protocol is needed (e.g. cost efficiency, predictable management of dental materials). It is important to define the specific objectives and purpose (what results are sought by implementing the protocol).

The second step is to document relevant information, which consists of collecting existing information and data, including reviewing the specialized literature and applicable standards. The team members involved and, if necessary, experts in the field should also be consulted.

The third step is to create the protocol structure and divide the process into clear and specific steps, with indications for each step. It is necessary to establish a standardized format for ease of implementation and understanding

The fourth step is to define responsibilities by identifying the people responsible for each step of the protocol, specifying the roles of each team member to ensure clarity and traceability. Here, the job description plays an important role.

The fifth step is to test and evaluate the protocol by implementing the protocol on a

small scale to observe its functioning in practice.

It is important to listen to feedback from users and adjust the steps that need improvement.

The sixth step consists of implementing the protocol and training the team, by training the staff in using the protocol and clarifying expectations. This will establish a monitoring system to evaluate the correct and effective application of the protocol.

A final step is to evaluate and update periodically with continuous monitoring of the effectiveness of the protocol. The protocol created must be flexible and easily adaptable to periodic updating based on feedback, technological progress and new discoveries in the field. [8,10,12]

As an important note when designing the protocol, it is necessary to consider: the necessary technological equipment, equipment and materials specifically needed, then the arrangement of the space in terms of surface area, dedicated furniture. To these elements is added the number of people involved and their training and specialization.

The literature only offers references for protocols related with clinical protocols, disinfection and sterilisation protocols. The management of the dental practice also should cover protocols related with administrative aspects, communication and human resources.

The types of protocols that we find in the management of a dental practice are:

Clinical protocols – describe the steps and operative techniques necessary to carry out treatments, to ensure their predictability, quality, safety and efficiency. Writing the protocols allows you to standardize the organization, analyse the practices, improve quality, and provide clear instructions to the dental assistant. The assistants know how and what to prepare for each type of treatment. This leads to a decrease in friction between

team members and, most importantly, to an increase in the quality of treatments by providing the doctor with a framework that allows him to focus on the medical act and less on the necessary instruments and materials. Statistics show that 80-90% of the time the dentist does not have to tell the dental assistant what he needs. 10-20% of the time the practitioner may ask for something different from the protocol specific to the case. The office assistant works relaxed due to the low number of instructions she receives from the dentist. The clinical protocols lead to the design of kits and trays of instruments specific to each type of treatment. These must be standardized according to the specific clinical protocol, designed to ensure optimal ergonomics and comfort for assistants. In this manner the medical team saves valuable time, optimizes available resources and helps to provide easier evidence of the traceability of the instruments. [16,17,18,19]

Hygiene and sterilization protocols – define the methods of disinfection, decontamination, sterilization of instruments and preparation of the clinical space to prevent contamination and to ensure a sterile controlled environment. Define steps for instrument cleaning, packaging, sterilization, and storage. Include guidelines for disinfection of dental chairs, surfaces, and operator spaces. The practice should develop a manual for each type of procedure. It is recommended to delegate a person who should supervise these protocols.

Emergency protocols – contain instructions, recommendations and scenarios for managing medical emergencies.

Administrative protocols –streamline the operational workflow and administrative tasks, ensuring the clinic runs smoothly. Part of them refers to rules regarding the management and organization of stocks, the purchase of materials, the management of documents and patient information. The

acquisition protocols for dental materials should ensure a constant flow of quality materials for an uninterrupted dental activity. Also, should optimize costs and avoiding waste through efficient inventory management. A dental assistant or the front office should be responsible of this protocol. Protocols should: establish procedures for ordering consumables and equipment, including approved suppliers and reorder levels; Implement a tracking system to monitor stock levels, expiry dates, and usage rates.

Communication protocols – imply rules that optimize communication within the medical team, with the dental laboratory and, of course, very importantly with patients, to avoid communication errors and ensure transparency.

Protocols regarding communication with patients:

- Patient Records Management should cover standardize documentation of medical history, treatment plans, and clinical notes.

- Treatment Planning and Case Documentation where should create templates for treatment planning and standardized workflows for patient consultations, including protocols for obtaining informed consent [14,23,24]

- Patient Communication Protocol focus on enhancing patient satisfaction and building trust. Protocol should detail explanation of procedures and treatment options.

An important aspect of team communication is represented by the job description properly designed and detailed. Clearly defines the responsibilities and duties of each employee. This ensures efficient organization and eliminates confusion, serves as a basis for evaluating professional performance, contributes to compliance with applicable legislation and avoiding conflicts, and facilitates the integration of new team

members.

Other element is represented by collective and individual meetings keep daily, weekly, monthly.

Human Resources Protocols in this area ensure smooth coordination and management of the clinic's team. These protocols should address staff onboarding and training (a step-by-step process for integrating new employees, including training on clinical protocols and software), performance evaluation (define criteria and timelines for evaluating staff performance); conflict situations (outline steps for addressing conflicts among team members or between staff and patients) [4,8,10,25].

Protocols should periodically review to align with the latest discoveries and technologies in the dental field, thus ensuring modern care and in accordance with quality standards.

Challenges in Protocol Implementation

Despite their benefits, implementing protocols faces several barriers:

Resistance to Change: Practitioners may be hesitant to alter established habits.

Time Constraints: Initial development and training can be time intensive.

Cost: Some practices may perceive protocol implementation as an added expense.

Knowledge Gaps: Lack of awareness or understanding of evidence-based practices.

CONCLUSIONS

Well-implemented protocols in dentistry are the pillars of an efficient, safe and patient-oriented practice.

They provide a basis for a more organized work environment, improving both the quality of the medical act and the satisfaction of patients and the medical team.

In the long term, protocols support the development of a solid reputation and a standard of excellence in dental practice.

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