Modernize your collection system for maximum profit

By Keith Drayer

In today’s economy there are many dental professionals who are faced with the challenge of their accounts receivable. Uncollected receivables turn into pure losses. Yet embracing a systematic approach to collections can help practices collect more funds and on a more timely basis.

One mistake providers make is not recognizing the signs of early default. When a patient doesn’t pay a bill within 60 days, hasn’t set up or is discussing a payment plan, the patient is telling you that he/she is not going to pay.

Should you use your staff’s time trying to collect these accounts? As a dental provider, you are implementing state-of-the-art methods to treat your patients’ dental needs. Isn’t it also important to employ the most up-to-date methods to keep your practice fiscally healthy?

In the past, collection agencies were the only “act on the block” and viewed as the last resort to collecting your money. They can be expensive and often care little about your relationship with your patients. You had no control over how they treated your patient and you never knew if they collected your money or not.

Often the collector, who is paid on a commission basis, “cherry picked” over your accounts and attempted to collect only the larger ones and did not work the smaller ones.

In addition, many of your accounts that were collectable were deemed too small to work. Thus, you lost money when you didn’t need to.

What is needed is a proactive, systematic business model that will work all of your delinquent accounts equally.

Providers must take an approach that will reduce losses as well as speed up cash flow from past due accounts. You need to work with your patients quickly and effectively.

Outsourcing your collection problems to a service bureau can be much more cost effective than working them in-house — and certainly more effective.

Utilizing a third-party collection method that will keep you in complete control of the collection process is a must.

Recognize the signs of early default to increase collections.

Invest in your practice with HSFS

Henry Schein Financial Services (HSFS) business solutions portfolio offers a wide range of financing options that make it possible for you to invest in your practice for greater efficiency, increased productivity and enhanced patient services. HSFS helps health care practitioners operate financially successful practices by offering complete leasing and financing programs. HSFS can help obtain financing for equipment and technology purchases, practice acquisitions and practice start-ups.

HSFS also offers value-added services including credit card acceptance, demographic site analysis reports, patient collections, patient financing and the Henry Schein Credit Card with 2% cash back or 1½ points per dollar spent.

For additional information, please call (800) 445-2756 or send an e-mail to hsfs@henryschein.com.

Making sense of digital radiography

By Lorne Lavine, DMD

In my last article, we discussed the advantages of digital X-rays and looked at how to develop a positive return on investment, specifically focusing on improved diagnostics, efficiency, reduced exposure times and co-diagnosis.

While many dentists will spend a lot of time evaluating the pros and cons of sensors vs. phosphor plates and the resolution of various systems, many offices still fail to realize the importance of improving their infrastructure to be able to handle digital radiography.

A good digital system won’t do you much good if you’re struggling to make it work on outdated hardware and networks. Here are some key areas that should be addressed while you are also evaluating the digital X-ray systems.

The computer server

The server is the lifeblood of any network. Many dentists fail to understand that the storage needs for digital X-rays are exponentially higher for images than if you just have practice management software data.

The server must have enough memory to allow the server to multitask, should have fast hard drives to push the data out to the workstations quickly, should have an operating system that allows for control over the entire network and include a replacement part policy that delivers new parts in hours, not days.

I currently recommend a Dell T500 server with RAID 1 (mirrored) 500 GB hard drives, 4 GB of RAM, Windows Server 2003 or Server 2008 (if your dental software supports 2008) and a four-hour contract.

One thing to be wary of are new operating systems. For example, while Windows Server 2008 has been out for a year, many dental applications still do not work properly with it. Check with your software and hardware vendors for compatibility issues before you purchase new systems.

The network

Make sure that besides the server, you have proper network infrastructure throughout the office. Digital images are quite a bit larger than practice management data and you’ll need to be running at a speed of a gigabit (1,000 MB) per second.

Make sure all network cards are 10/100/1000 network cards, use a switch (a smarter version of a hub) that can handle the faster speed and use either Cat5e or Cat6 cabling. Cat6 cabling is recommended for new offices because it will be able to handle a faster speed once that becomes the industry standard.

Computers in the ops

These computers typically need to be faster than front desk computers. One area to focus on is the video card. Cheaper computers often ship with the video chip fused on to
Dealing with stress in the 21st century

By Ros Edlin, United Kingdom

The recent NHS Dental Contract for the U.K. is a prime example where it can be argued that dentists have a loss of control over their own destinies. It also illustrates the importance of our management in the process of change for the best results to be achieved. “Today’s dental environment is not going to change, and it is going to be up to the individual. It’s the individual who needs to learn to accommodate to the environment if he or she does not want to pay the price of being left behind.”

There is no doubt that we all need pressures and challenges in our lives to get us up in the morning and to keep us going. These can be difficult challenges to stress. Not only are they required for the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) definition, “the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed upon them.”

The HSE also makes an “important distinction between the beneficial effects of reasonable pressure and challenge (which can be stimulative, motivating and can give a ‘buzz’) and work-related stress, which is the natural but distressing reaction to demands or ‘pressures’ that the person perceives they cannot cope with at a given time.”

The concept of perception is particularly relevant in that, faced with the same situation, a difficult procedure or a demanding patient, one dentist may relish the challenge and yet the other be trembling in his shoes! Also pertaining to the definition of stress are the notions of control and change. It is clear that we function best when we are in control of our circumstances, when we feel we are responsible for our successes or failures due to our personal attributes. This could also include the responsibility of the welfare of both patients and staff. As is often the case, however, bureaucracy mitigates against this feeling of control, which could result in work-related stress.

The recent NHS Dental Contract for the U.K. is a prime example where it can be argued that dentists have a loss of control over their own destinies. It also illustrates the importance of our management in the process of change for the best results to be achieved. “Today’s dental environment is not going to change, and it is going to be up to the individual. It’s the individual who needs to learn to accommodate to the environment if he or she does not want to pay the price of being left behind.”

There is no doubt that we all need pressures and challenges in our lives to get us up in the morning and to keep us going. These can be difficult challenges to stress. Not only are they required for the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) definition, “the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed upon them.”

The HSE also makes an “important distinction between the beneficial effects of reasonable pressure and challenge (which can be stimulative, motivating and can give a ‘buzz’) and work-related stress, which is the natural but distressing reaction to demands or ‘pressures’ that the person perceives they cannot cope with at a given time.”

The concept of perception is particularly relevant in that, faced with the same situation, a difficult procedure or a demanding patient, one dentist may relish the challenge and yet the other be trembling in his shoes! Also pertaining to the definition of stress are the notions of control and change. It is clear that we function best when we are in control of our circumstances, when we feel we are responsible for our successes or failures due to our personal attributes. This could also include the responsibility of the welfare of both patients and staff. As is often the case, however, bureaucracy mitigates against this feeling of control, which could result in work-related stress.

The recent NHS Dental Contract for the U.K. is a prime example where it can be argued that dentists have a loss of control over their own destinies. It also illustrates the importance of our management in the process of change for the best results to be achieved. “Today’s dental environment is not going to change, and it is going to be up to the individual. It’s the individual who needs to learn to accommodate to the environment if he or she does not want to pay the price of being left behind.”

There is no doubt that we all need pressures and challenges in our lives to get us up in the morning and to keep us going. These can be difficult challenges to stress. Not only are they required for the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) definition, “the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed upon them.”

The HSE also makes an “important distinction between the beneficial effects of reasonable pressure and challenge (which can be stimulative, motivating and can give a ‘buzz’) and work-related stress, which is the natural but distressing reaction to demands or ‘pressures’ that the person perceives they cannot cope with at a given time.”

The concept of perception is particularly relevant in that, faced with the same situation, a difficult procedure or a demanding patient, one dentist may relish the challenge and yet the other be trembling in his shoes! Also pertaining to the definition of stress are the notions of control and change. It is clear that we function best when we are in control of our circumstances, when we feel we are responsible for our successes or failures due to our personal attributes. This could also include the responsibility of the welfare of both patients and staff. As is often the case, however, bureaucracy mitigates against this feeling of control, which could result in work-related stress.

The recent NHS Dental Contract for the U.K. is a prime example where it can be argued that dentists have a loss of control over their own destinies. It also illustrates the importance of our management in the process of change for the best results to be achieved. “Today’s dental environment is not going to change, and it is going to be up to the individual. It’s the individual who needs to learn to accommodate to the environment if he or she does not want to pay the price of being left behind.”

There is no doubt that we all need pressures and challenges in our lives to get us up in the morning and to keep us going. These can be difficult challenges to stress. Not only are they required for the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) definition, “the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed upon them.”

The HSE also makes an “important distinction between the beneficial effects of reasonable pressure and challenge (which can be stimulative, motivating and can give a ‘buzz’) and work-related stress, which is the natural but distressing reaction to demands or ‘pressures’ that the person perceives they cannot cope with at a given time.”

The concept of perception is particularly relevant in that, faced with the same situation, a difficult procedure or a demanding patient, one dentist may relish the challenge and yet the other be trembling in his shoes! Also pertaining to the definition of stress are the notions of control and change. It is clear that we function best when we are in control of our circumstances, when we feel we are responsible for our successes or failures due to our personal attributes. This could also include the responsibility of the welfare of both patients and staff. As is often the case, however, bureaucracy mitigates against this feeling of control, which could result in work-related stress.

The recent NHS Dental Contract for the U.K. is a prime example where it can be argued that dentists have a loss of control over their own destinies. It also illustrates the importance of our management in the process of change for the best results to be achieved. “Today’s dental environment is not going to change, and it is going to be up to the individual. It’s the individual who needs to learn to accommodate to the environment if he or she does not want to pay the price of being left behind.”

There is no doubt that we all need pressures and challenges in our lives to get us up in the morning and to keep us going. These can be difficult challenges to stress. Not only are they required for the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) definition, “the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed upon them.”

The HSE also makes an “important distinction between the beneficial effects of reasonable pressure and challenge (which can be stimulative, motivating and can give a ‘buzz’) and work-related stress, which is the natural but distressing reaction to demands or ‘pressures’ that the person perceives they cannot cope with at a given time.”

The concept of perception is particularly relevant in that, faced with the same situation, a difficult procedure or a demanding patient, one dentist may relish the challenge and yet the other be trembling in his shoes! Also pertaining to the definition of stress are the notions of control and change. It is clear that we function best when we are in control of our circumstances, when we feel we are responsible for our successes or failures due to our personal attributes. This could also include the responsibility of the welfare of both patients and staff. As is often the case, however, bureaucracy mitigates against this feeling of control, which could result in work-related stress.
or going out at lunchtime to listen to music or having a relaxing bath. The importance of relaxation is that it enables you to switch off and recharge your batteries.

Equally important is physical exercise. Exercise burns up the excess adrenaline resulting from stress, allowing the body to return to a steady state. It can also increase energy and efficiency. Do find an exercise that you enjoy and that will motivate you to continue doing it.

Balance your diet. Eat breakfast, drink sensibly and include lots of water to rehydrate the system. Include complex carbohydrates (whole meal bread, jacket potatoes [with the skin on]) in your diet, to counteract mood swings, and fruit and vegetables to provide vitamin C to support the immune system.

Manage your time (and yourself) efficiently. Again, taking a step back and reviewing your working practice is essential.

Do you have an allotted time for dealing with emergencies and administration? Are you constantly running behind schedule, causing your stress levels to escalate? Developing leadership and organisational skills will enable you to feel more in control of your working environment.

Ensure that your staff members are properly trained and aware of their individual rules and responsibilities. Encourage a culture of mutual support, whereby asking for help is not viewed as weakness.

Talking over your problems with someone you trust can be such a help. As mentioned previously, some dentists may be excellent practitioners but sadly lacking in interpersonal skills. An ability to listen is a gift. If you feel you need some training in communication, there are plenty of courses available.

By incorporating at least some of these strategies into your everyday life and your working life, you could create an environment that is stress-free and an environment in which it is a pleasure to work. It could make the difference between a good practice and an outstanding one. Who wouldn’t want that?

References are available from the publisher.

Ros Edlin is a freelance stress consultant from Hale, United Kingdom. She can be contacted at ros@stresswatch.co.uk.