

WHY ADD TECHNOLOGY TO MY PRACTICE?

Written By: Greg Mellin, President - Mellin Technology Management

These days there is a growing need for technology in our practices, and if you have not already started adding different technologies you may wonder, why? Why add technology into my practice? The bare-bones answer is to enhance patient care and create a higher level of efficiency. Let us take a few minutes to look at some of the different reasons to add technology into your practice.

Some of the different technology systems that are out there include: network cabling, computers, software, music systems, imaging solutions, cameras, phone systems and so on. However, they all have one common thread; to improve your practice. Technology can enhance patient care, practice efficiency and revenue.

For the sake of this article, we will look at three technologies (software, phone and music systems) and how they can impact three areas of your practice:

- 1) Administrative/Office
- 2) Operatories
- 3) Patient

Administrative/ Front Office

In the front office area there are a few technologies that can impact your office today. These different technologies will make your staff more efficient, comfortable and happier to serve. The obvious solution that is going to have the single biggest impact on the staff is the software program you implement. This software, and there are many, will centralize all data in your office. This centralized data will include: charts, insurance, billing, patient notes, scheduling and treatment information. Having all of this information in a single location makes it easily accessible from any of the rooms or computers in the office, thus providing quicker results for the task at hand. It will also help you and your staff have cleaner recordkeeping with virtually no loss of information. These systems also help to streamline record and image sharing with patients, colleagues, labs, etc. Filing claims can be done electronically providing better tracking and compliance. You need to look at this as part of a plan; a solution with an end result in mind. Digital recordkeeping will also provide your office with better record storage via digital backups, both on and off site, not to mention you will no longer have to keep rows and rows of paper charts. Now this “Super Software” is going to have to run on computers and like the software solution there are many choices out there. We will not discuss the different types, but I will add that you should not just run out and purchase computers.



There are many other systems that can affect the administrative side of your office as well, such as a phone system and music system to name a few. The phone system, albeit everyone has one, can be a very useful tool for interoffice communication. By selecting the proper phone system you can configure it therefore, call handling can be done in a more efficient way, moving calls and messages from one place to another with the push of a button. This system can also be used for interoffice communication as a paging/intercom system. One other system is the background music system. This system is not going to make administrative tasks easier, but it can create an atmosphere for the staff, and we all know, state of mind is important. All these systems and others will improve your office flow and production, in addition to, making many tasks easier with less frustration and headaches on the staff's part. You know what they say, "A happy staff is a productive staff."

Operatories

The exam rooms are ever changing, but right now we are seeing some of the largest changes in history with the addition of computer technology. Again, the main focus of computers in the room is to offer



better patient care while being more productive. There are many technologies that work in the room, along with computers and software, thus making some tasks easier to do with the same or better accuracy.

The placement of the computer and other tools in the room is crucial, the positioning will affect their use and effectiveness. Another benefit of technology in the room is delegating additional tasks, this will help streamline your systems allowing you to see more patients in a day.

Let us look at some other ways the software you run in your operatory can help your office. For starters, when the patient arrives you can collect more detailed information during consultation. Entering the data while in the rooms will help cut down on errors whether for treatments, billing or future appointments. The image acquisition is quicker, easier to capture, store, access for later, and will make for better comparison in the future. This will also lead to better information analysis and a more sophisticated diagnosis. One of the other powerful parts of having this data at your fingertips in the room will be for sharing with the patient. This provides a clearer understanding of what you are explaining. As they say, "A picture is worth a thousand words". Using the different tools will make for better patient participation in the diagnosis, therefore, increasing the likelihood of acceptance.

One of the common practices we see around the country is to use the phones as an interoffice communication system. Phones placed in the operatory, private office, lab, and other strategic rooms will allow a very cost-effective office communication system. With hands-free response you will be able to communicate with staff easy and effortlessly.

As previously mentioned, a background music system in your office will create an atmosphere for your staff. This same system will also create a relaxing and comforting distraction for your patients. Another major reason for having this system is to create noise cover. Creating privacy between the rooms is very important in a practice. Not only for HIPPA regulations, but privacy is key during conversations between you, staff and patients.

The Patients Perspective

As they say, perception is everything, but a job well done speaks for itself. That is why we need to make that great first impression. By adding technology to your office we will accomplish many underlying things that you may not know when it comes to your patients. These days purchasers are savvier than ever. This is no different when it comes to your patients who at the end of the day are buying your treatment/services. These days, patients have come to expect technology and new innovations in all aspects of their lives. This is no different when it comes to their Healthcare. Just as your business operates on systems, you will now have the systems to “WOW” your patients from the moment they walk through your office doors. Giving your staff the appropriate tools will enhance their ability to do their job, thus they will enjoy the great environment your new technologies have created. From the second they check into your office they will be impressed with your staff and the fact that they have all of your information at their fingertips. This feeling will carry with them as they move through the office and experience the smooth streamlined systems of your practice. Once in the room, you will be able to use the solutions available to deliver a high level of information, whether through patient education or visual examples. The patient education software will increase communication levels with the patient and provide him or her with visual confirmation, thus providing them with reassurance as to what you are explaining to them. As the patient leaves you can present them with customized forms. This will increase their ability to understand your recommendations, as well as, reinforce their visit and experience once home.



The patient experience starts when they first call your office. If used properly, a phone system is a very basic technology that can impact their experience and overall impression. That impression can start with a custom Message-On-Hold recording or through better call handling. Lastly, when they call and do not get a response, you can give them clear directive on what to do, or how to get in touch with you in case of an emergency.

While in the room the patient may have some nervous energy and there are a number of things that can help with this comfort level; some technical and some not. However, a little background music can go a long way, providing a relaxing and inviting environment will take some of the edge off. Also, as previously mentioned, they will appreciate the privacy of your conversations.

There are many technologies that can improve your office. However, making these decisions can be very overwhelming. Mellin Technology Management helps Dentist create and implement technology plans. Find out more about Mellin Technology Management at www.mellintech.com .

This article was written by Greg Mellin and is courtesy of Mellin Technology Management.