The Journey to Better
The Top Areas That Must Be Addressed

What successful practices are doing to be more efficient and productive
Humans tend to have basic existential questions, including:

- **How can I be better?** It is one of the most eternal questions.

- **How do I compare?** We simply have a very basic need to know if we are keeping up with best practices and want to understand what our colleagues are doing.

- **How do I get from here to there?** Information is power and power does not get activated without action.

Humans have to commit to action plans to make change happen and improve. Against the specific lens of dental and dental practice owners, what are the answers to these questions? In the modern, contemporary world into which dental is evolving, what has to be solved and what are the best ways to do that? How can dentists and their teams be better?

At Dental Products Report, we are fascinated by all of this. So much so, that in conjunction with our partner, Hu-Friedy, we went right to dentists and dental team members to identify the biggest everyday challenges in the practice and provide solutions and guidance for practical ways to address those issues.

We surveyed dental professionals and discovered the top problems and biggest stressors dentists face today. The survey, conducted over a two-and-a-half-week period in April 2017, collected responses from 223 participants, 82 percent of whom were dentists. The questions pertained to practice composition, staffing and areas of specialization. Respondents were asked how confident they are in their safety protocols and if they believe they do a good job of ensuring compliance with state and federal guidelines and regulations, including OSHA, the CDC and their state dental boards. We also asked who at the practice is responsible for specific tasks—especially in regard to instrument reprocessing—and how confident practice owners are in their team members.

Overall, the study provided great insights into dental professionals’ biggest concerns and frustrations, many of which can be addressed by standardizing procedures for instrument management and organization. Here’s what we heard from the dental industry.
From finances to compliance to time management, there were plenty of areas where practices strive to improve. While some of these issues can be complicated, solutions exist. Taking appropriate action can help the practice alleviate some of these frustrations, preserving an impossible-to-replace resource: time. In short: Here are some challenges faced by most dental professionals, and some ways that those same professionals can be better.

Compliance

Survey results indicated that, above everything else, compliance is the most important issue to dental professionals. Interestingly, 58 percent of respondents stated that their instrument reprocessing protocols couldn’t be improved, yet they also indicated that it’s one of their biggest challenges.

Adhering to various regulations can seem overwhelming, but an instrument management system (IMS) is an easy way for practices to help ensure both instrument and staff safety. Procedural setups contained in cassettes provide a safer workflow for team members by removing the need to handle contaminated instruments. This helps practices adhere to CDC and OSHA guidelines and regulations for how instruments are transported and reprocessed.
Healthcare workers experience 384,000 sharps injuries each year, which is approximately 1,000 a day, according to DentalCompliance.com. Depending on the treatment provided, these sharp injuries can cost dental practices from $500 to $3,000, according to the CDC’s Sharps Injuries Prevention Workbook.

While utility gloves are required in protecting staff from sharps injuries, it’s also important to consider that less opportunity means less risk. When instruments are kept in a locked cassette, the team members have fewer chances of getting stuck with a contaminated instrument when transporting, cleaning, packaging, sterilizing, and preparing for patients.

Using a manual process for instrument reprocessing may lull some into a false sense of compliance. If a practice answers “Yes” to any of these questions, then their protocols might need to be re-evaluated.

1. Does the office hand scrub instruments?
2. Does the office transport contaminated instruments to the sterilization area loose on a tray?
3. Does the office use a pouch and tray instrument management system?

Practices can also assess their infection control protocols with Hu-Friedy’s online Infection Control Self Check. For a deeper look, they can reach out to a local Hu-Friedy representative for more information on an in-house sterilization observation.

**Time Management**

It’s no secret that time is money. Unsurprisingly, time management was another issue that came up over and over again in the survey, with respondents indicating that there is never enough time in the day to do the things they need to do, even with a full-time staff.

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**PRACTICES WANT TO GROW**

Our survey results showed that **85% OF RESPONDENTS** are not satisfied with and/or want grow their patient base.

Are you satisfied with the number of patients you’re able to see each day?

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<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>56%</strong></td>
<td>Yes, but I’m always looking for ways to increase that number.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>26%</strong></td>
<td>No, and I’m actively trying to increase my patient base.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>3%</strong></td>
<td>No, but I lack the staff or resources to add more at this time.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>15%</strong></td>
<td>Yes, and I’m not interested in adding new patients at this time.</td>
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It’s essential to optimize the practice’s procedures, and a major time thief is instrument reprocessing. Consider that an IMS saves five to 10 minutes per procedure. That totals an hour or more per day in time savings.

An IMS helps save time for various tasks:

- Keeping instruments organized for easy cleanup
- Ensuring compliant transportation of soiled instruments
- Virtually eliminating hand-scrubbing
- Reducing the chance of losing or misplacing instruments
- Offering quick and organized loading for sterilization
- Organizing storage of procedural setups
- Training of new or temporary team members
- Faster patient prep

A manual process increases the risk of damaged instruments and sharps injuries, and it wastes time by requiring instruments to be sorted and pouched. This process also poses an increased risk of overloading the sterilizer. Plus, chairside presentation is messy and time-consuming, requiring extra time to search through pouches for patient prep.

“Using the cassettes has really benefited our office from the time-savings standpoint,” says Dr. Michael Drone of Drone Dentistry & Prosthodontics in Valparaiso, Indiana. “We can get all of the unsterilized instruments out of the room quickly. When we go into the sterilization unit, we can go directly into the sterilization protocols. In the past you’d have to scrub them, soak them, take them out, dry them, put them in a bag. This is now all in one contained system.”
“There are some doctors who may not want to implement [an IMS] in their office. I would say they should give it a try because it’s simple, effective and safe,” he continues. “It saves time for the staff, and that’s important to make sure the staff isn’t staying late to turn rooms over and redo the sterilization after hours. It’s probably the best thing I’ve bought in my practice. The cassette system is by far the best way to go.”

**Staffing**

When asked what most impacts the ability to run an efficient dental practice, the effectiveness of staff was a frequent response. Respondents want their staff to be able to do their best work, but time and resources tend to be stumbling blocks. The key is finding a balance where the team can effectively utilize available resources in the time available during the average business day.

Making work easier for the staff can free up time for the functions that can help practices succeed. It’s not about hiring more people for the office—it’s about helping the existing team do the best job they can. One task that can take a lot of time is instrument processing; easing that task can make a difference in the staff’s work. It can alleviate the stress that comes with delegating tasks, allowing the practice owner to feel confident and know that systems are compliant with guidelines and regulations.

For example, when all the instruments are prepared and ready for use, the team member’s workflow is much more efficient.

“I know all my instruments are right there [in the cassette], and that I’m not getting doubles [instruments] in some [packs], while some [instruments] are missing in other packs,” says Tiffany Ulanowski, RDH at Drone Dentistry & Prosthodontics. “It’s easy. Everything is cut and dry. It’s all there.”

While an IMS gives staff the freedom to remove a tedious task, it does so without sacrificing quality or efficiency. In fact, it makes the process easier by standard-
izing the cleaning, sterilization, storage and organization of instruments in one system. Meanwhile, staff can perform other important activities in the practice.

“It also allows time for us to focus on non-procedure-related activities such as team building, continuing education courses, administrative duties, marketing and social media outreach and taking part in community service,” says Dr. Angela Cotey, DDS, a general dentist at Village Smile Care in Mt. Horeb, Wisconsin. “One of the best perks of IMS is the extra time we have to get to know our patients on a personal level.”

Additionally, practices that use an IMS have shared stories about how it promotes teamwork. A team that enjoys working together is less likely to experience high turnover rates, saving tens of thousands of dollars a year on hiring and training costs.

An IMS also encourages all staff to assist with instrument processing. With a simple, standardized system, an IMS helps enhance the practice’s workflow while making it easy to cross-train team members as well as train new employees and temps.

Revenues & Profits

Respondents were asked—on a scale of 1 to 5—to rank the importance of revenue and profits. Not surprisingly, they ranked it quite high—4.4. Increases in overhead, the high cost of supplies and equipment and changes in insurance are all major concerns for practice owners that want their businesses to grow and succeed.

Dealing with insurance companies is an unavoidable cost of doing business. Many respondents to our survey indicated that

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intrusion, government interference and poor reimbursements are among the chief concerns of practitioners and business owners.

The only way to reduce some of the stress is to ensure the team has the necessary time and training to make processes as efficient as possible. However, practice owners feel it in their pocketbooks when they have to keep up their practices with new technology.

Smart practices do two important things: First, they identify how long it will take to see a return on investment for major purchases. Second, they protect their investment in equipment. An IMS can help dental practices achieve both of these goals.

Dental practices continually invest in high-quality instruments; switching to an IMS is a smart way to protect that investment so that instruments don't need to be replaced as often. When cleaned manually, instruments constantly bump against each another so they don't remain as sharp. It also leads to instruments handled individually, where it is easy for them to be dropped, damaged, lost, or thrown away by accident. With instruments ranging in cost from $20 to more than $100, it is easy for practices to recoup their investment with an IMS.

“The instruments are kept nice,” says Gina Handrigan, RDH at Always There Dental Care in Chicago, Illinois. “The mirrors aren’t scratched up. The probes are straight. Our explorers are sharp. We’re very delicate with our instruments, and we’re taking good care of them like we would take care of our patients.”

Implementing an IMS costs only a few thousand dollars, and it provides practices with an immediate savings in both time and money. With IMS, the staff has more time to get caught up on tasks, eliminating the need for overtime at the end of the day. The extra time also allows staff to see additional patients.

“We are able to see more patients on a daily basis, making us more productive and increasing our bottom line,” Dr. Coteys says. “Implementing IMS has helped us impress existing patients and attract new ones.”

To see the rate of return by implementing an IMS system, Hufriedy offers an IMS calculator that assesses how long it would take to see a return by comparing the initial investment to the potential added revenue. For example, a practice with an average monthly revenue of just $3,000 can recoup their investment in cassettes in just under a month.
WHERE PRACTICES CAN IMPROVE

Our survey results showed that dental practices can be more efficient in how they reprocess their instruments.

58% of practices think their reprocessing protocols can't be improved, but...

60% of practices are still manually reprocessing their instruments, which takes more time and means more risk of a sharps injury.

81% of practices have dental assistants process instruments, leaving less time for their other office responsibilities.

A BETTER SOLUTION

An IMS is more than instrument storage

While approximately 58 percent of respondents said that their instrument reprocessing procedures couldn’t be improved, nearly 57 percent are still using a manual process.

Survey results indicate that in 81 percent of dental practices, the dental assistant is solely responsible for instrument reprocessing. That requires a lot of time and attention for someone who must also be available to patients, doctors and even front office staff.

Many practice owners recognize the benefits of an IMS, but remain hesitant for a variety of reasons, including:

Reason: They don’t have enough space

Several survey respondents said their practice simply wasn’t big enough: Either they felt their caseload wasn’t large enough to warrant automation or they felt they didn’t have the space for the cassettes.

A dental practice doesn’t need to have several doctors and see hundreds of patients on a weekly basis in order to see value from automated instrument reprocessing. Even small practices can benefit from the time savings, structure and efficiency of an IMS.

Cassettes require less space since the instruments are processed together in a single cassette, and the need for trays is eliminated. In addition, an IMS can save a dental practice anywhere from four-and-a-half to seven linear feet of counter space when compared to trays.
With an IMS, there is no longer a need to disinfect and store the trays separate from instruments. Take a look at the division of the steri-center with an IMS:

- **Receiving/cleaning/decontamination**: Cassettes are brought directly into the receiving area and placed into the ultrasonic cleaner or automated washer. There is no need to separate or bundle instruments. After the cleaning step, simply remove the cassette, rinse it, and place it to the side to dry. There is no need to spread the instruments out on a towel to dry. If using a dental instrument washer, take your dry cassette straight to the prep and packaging area to be prepared for sterilization.

- **Preparation and packaging**: After the cassette and the instruments within it have dried, the entire cassette can simply be wrapped or pouched. There is no need to separate the instruments and place them in multiple pouches.

- **Storage**: Disinfected trays and instrument packs no longer need to be stored in separate places. With an IMS, instruments and their cassettes live in one place.
Instrument reprocessing is faster, easier and safer with an IMS. Take a look at the flowchart to show how IMS streamlines instrument reprocessing.

But it’s not just about making one part of the practice’s workflow a bit easier: It’s about raising the standard of patient care, increasing revenue and improving staff morale by easing their burdens and providing a safer workplace.

“We have a pretty small steri area,” says Teagan Knudtson, RDH, of Always There Dental Care in Chicago. “We have seven people—assistants and hygienists—that have to be in and out of there getting instruments ready.”

“With nine patients a day, four days a week, the amount of instruments that built up was overwhelming,” observes fellow hygienist Gina Handrigan. Still, she says she was apprehensive about the IMS at first. Four months after implementing the system, she couldn’t imagine going back.

“To go back to that basket of instruments would be a nightmare,” Handrigan says. “Now we just close our cassettes, soak them, and push the button. When they come out, we rinse them, [dry them], put them in the bag, seal it, and done. It’s so much easier. We don’t have to fish through these instruments and endanger our fingers.”

“I think for the staff it’s a very easy sell,” Dr. Jeff Wojno, DDS, of Always There Dental Care adds. “Who wouldn’t like spending less time cleaning dirty instruments and repacking clean ones? Who wouldn’t appreciate less of an opportunity to get their finger poked by a sharp instrument?”
An IMS is a great system for the dental team that is responsible for reprocessing instruments each and every day, but for the practice owner, utilizing an IMS makes sense from the business perspective as well.

“We are an extremely busy practice, with about 30 to 40 hygiene patients a day,” says Dr. Izzy Naem, DDS, of Floss & Co. in Chicago, Illinois. “When it would get really busy, patients would have to wait longer to be seen because we were waiting on instruments. That doesn’t happen anymore. We have a faster turnover rate and because of that, we’ve been able to see more patients and have enjoyed steady month-to-month growth.”

Patients also appreciate seeing first-hand the steps the team takes in order to provide the safest standard of care. There have been cases in which infection control protocols were not met in dental offices, and they have been covered thoroughly in the media. It is logical for patients to be concerned about their dentist’s infection prevention procedures, and being able to put their minds at ease is important for dental practices.

“Patients appreciate that instruments have been carefully processed for them and their intended procedure,” Dr. Marie Fluent, DDS, an educational consultant for OSAP says. “A cassette on a bracket table that is unwrapped immediately prior to patient care offers comfort, confidence and an air of professionalism to the dental patient. It exhibits that infection control is a high priority for a dental practice in both perception and reality.”
Reason: They don’t want to invest in new equipment

No one wants to spend money they don’t have to spend. Even for the doctors who do see value in an IMS, it can still be a hard decision, especially if they’re concerned about investing in new equipment. However, Hu-Friedy cassettes fit most reprocessing equipment used today. This capacity chart shows which cleaning and sterilization equipment are most compatible with Hu-Friedy cassettes.

An ultrasonic cleaner of at least three-gallon capacity and/or a dental instrument washer, and at least a large 10-inch chamber sterilizer is all that is needed to make the transition to cassettes. These are standard pieces of equipment that should be implemented in a practice, regardless of the use of cassettes, in order to keep up with the office’s patient base and growth. Remember, the goal is to not spend the entire day reprocessing instruments. The money saved on increased production, less overtime and longer-lasting instruments (not to mention a better patient experience, which leads to more referrals) typically exceeds the initial investment within the first few weeks.

Get in Touch

To understand how an IMS can help your practice, sign up for an in-person consultation.
START YOUR JOURNEY TO BETTER

Evaluate your protocols with our Infection Control Self Check at https://www.hu-friedy.com/sterilizationquiz.

Visit us online at Hu-Friedy.com or call 1-800-Hu-Friedy