

Improving Office Efficiency

An Instrument Management System can enhance safety, increase profits, and streamline organization. Nancy Andrews, RDH, BS, explains how.

DO YOU WONDER IF YOUR PRACTICE could be more efficient? Would you and your staff like more time to spend with your patients? An Instrument Management System (IMS) is the answer.

So what is an IMS? It combines sterilization, storage, and organization of instruments into one integrated procedural-based system. Cassette based instrument management systems improve staff and patient safety, maximize office efficiency, streamline instrument organization, and protect instruments from breakage by storing all of your valuable instruments in procedural cas-

sets. By adding an IMS to your practice, you are able to realize a number of benefits that will result in improving the efficiency of your office.

Cleaning

After use, cassettes aid in rapid organized cleanup, with easy placement of instruments in the cassettes. It is easy to spot missing, damaged, or extra items, eliminating the chance for incomplete

up to 10 minutes per patient, while reducing risk of injury due to handling sharp, contaminated instruments. Each phase of instrument cleaning, sterilization, and storage can be done faster than manual instrument processing, allowing the staff to do more value-added activities.

enhances the effectiveness of the automated cleaning process, whether performed by an ultrasonic or a dental automated washer. These automated units should be designed to accommodate cassette shapes and sizes, and the cassettes should be rinsed and dried.

Color coding and identification systems should be utilized to facilitate recognition of setups without opening cassettes. Cassettes prevent instruments from being bent, dropped, or caught on wire mesh baskets.

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Cassettes save time and money

The value of cassettes, which combine all of the instruments required for a procedure into one unit, is measured in time savings and safety. Cassettes improve operational flow by reducing the number of items staff members need to handle, from hundreds of instruments to far fewer setups, while

keeping your procedural setups organized. Using cassettes save

setups. Closing the cassettes creates a locked container that isolates the contaminated instruments from staff contact and reduces the chances of injury. Transporting the instruments to sterilization areas is made safer if the instruments are enclosed in cassettes. Tubs and lids can further protect workers, and comply with OSHA regulations. Loose, contaminated instruments should not be transported on a flat tray without additional isolation and protection, such as a tub with a locking lid.

Enzymatic pre-cleaners (gel sprays), like Hu-Friedy's full line of Enzymax products, can be applied, or cassettes may be

soaked or sprayed and rinsed to prevent bioburden from adhering to instruments, particularly if instruments are not immediately processed. This

the time-intensive process of sorting and handling loose instruments. Tightly packed instruments rub against each other, wearing, damaging, and breaking fragile parts. The intended cleaning action of the ultrasonics or solutions in washers also may not reach tightly packed instruments. Cassettes are an easy and efficient alternative, allowing the instruments to be effectively cleaned while remaining together and protected during processing.

Sterilization

Cassettes should be wrapped or pouched for sterilization, with both internal and external indicators. Improvements in wrap offerings have resulted in flat wrap or pouches in all sizes, and can be used after opened as tray or counter covers. Some pouches are printed with internal and external indicators.

Wrapped cassettes neatly fit in sterilizers on racks, allowing space around the instruments for steam to flow and reach every instrument surface. Sterilizers are now designed for cassettes, with ample

space, cycle selections, computer readouts and logs, and efficient drying cycles to avoid wet packages that may compromise sterility. Sterile cassettes in packaging should be stored aseptically, protected from contamination.

Procedural tubs are flexible tools to organize and transport items, such as consumable products, and can be color coded to match your cassettes, creating the most efficient IMS. Procedural tubs standardize your materials required for a specific procedure, eliminating time-consuming tray preparation. Disposables, cassettes, and other items can be safely transported in tubs, using locking lids to protect contents from airborne contamination. Color coding and customization of procedural tubs increases the workflow and office organization of your disposable materials. Instruments and supplies can be stored in operatories or a sterilization room, and safely transported when needed as one unit. Racks can be used to help organize and store tubs and cassettes.

In addition to product design and systems, some new materials also exhibit antimicrobial properties, such as Hu-Friedy's Microban Antimicrobial Product Protection. This material continually inhibits activity, growth, and reproduction of microorganisms that may stain, cause odors, or degrade materials. These procedural tubs will exhibit this property indefinitely, and can be cleaned and surface-disinfected (not sterilized).

Instrument cassettes should be the unit that instrument sterilization processes and equipment are designed around. Automating the tedious manual tasks practiced by a majority of offices will greatly improve the efficiency, profitability, and satisfaction of dental teams, as well as improving staff safety. The benefits are measurable in time saved, instruments preserved, workers protected, and production increased. More subjective benefits, such as happier staff and reduced aggravation due to instrument flow interruption, may be just as important! ■

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