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## Dental Manager's Role in a Dental Office

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### The Office Manager's Role in a Dental Office

Virtually every modern medical practice has an office manager with specific management and oversight duties, who delegates tasks to staff so that valuable time of the practitioner (or practitioners) can be spent efficiently and things get done in a timely manner. Modern dental practices should be no different. However, many dental offices rely on the office manager to do more, to the detriment of the practice. Why is this so, and what should the manager's role actually be?

The reason most offices have this wrong side up is that the evolution of the dental practice hasn't evolved in conjunction with the evolution of the dental industry, especially concerning the growing role of dental insurance. In the past, there was minimal insurance involvement in dentistry, and offices had significantly less to do regarding insurance. The office manager was able to manage insurance claims along with their other duties. As the industry has become increasingly insurance-heavy, insurance claims management (preauthorization, claim submission, payout handling, and more) has become a full-time job; yet for many practices, the office has not changed to reflect this. Instead of adding manpower or outsourcing, the office manager is expected to pull double duty, and often needs to delegate some of these tasks which places greater strain on busy subordinates as well. The outcome is obvious. Things do not get done when they should, and quality of work suffers. Patient care inevitably suffers as well. This is nobody's fault but the dentist or business owner. All ancillary staff should have enough work to justify

their presence, but not be constantly overwhelmed. This affects morale, which can significantly impact staff turnover and productivity in the long run.

Dental billing is now a full-time position or, in many cases, is outsourced, especially if the practice deals with insurance, which most do. In no other modern industry is the manager asked to perform management and financial tasks; most businesses have an accountant or bookkeeper to handle finances and related duties, but relatively few dental offices invest in this kind of specialized role. When the office manager is expected to manage the office and handle the financial and insurance aspects of business as well, one side or the other—or both—will inevitably suffer.

Clinical and business operations require immediate, daily attention and must come first, so billing is often what falls by the wayside. The office manager simply does not have time to be isolated from operations and work on the financial aspects of the practice, yet this is often what is expected. Reduced attention to billing, patient balance management, and insurance claims will inhibit cash flow, and every business needs a steady income stream to maintain day-to-day operations, let alone make a profit for the business owner.

The dental office manager manages and supervises the clinical and business operations of the practice. This includes ensuring the schedule for practitioners (including hygienists) is always filled, making sure the re-care and treatment outstanding lists are worked and up-to-date, and overseeing front office tasks such as time-of-service collections as well as adherence to establishment of treatment plans and estimated financial agreements for patients. They ensure timely execution of tasks by staff and achievement of daily, weekly, monthly and yearly goals for productivity; they usually manage treatment plan presentation and acceptance, plus financial agreements and options presentation. Office managers help keep everyone together, promote office morale and, when needed, hire or let go staff. These things occur in real-time throughout the day, every day.

How does this person have time to handle insurance claims? Phone calls may exceed an hour in length and the related tasks require focus to be completed thoroughly and accurately, so successful work is unrealistic unless the office is closed, or the dentist is out of the office. Add to this the burden of patient balance management and collections. Additionally, this is work that does not require the skill and experience of the office manager. Are you paying this person to sit on the phone for an hour with an insurance company? Someone can be specially trained for that job. Often, however, office space is at a premium, and it takes time and energy to train staff properly.

This is exactly why dental billing companies emerged, to promote the efficient management of the financial aspects of insurance involvement and patient billing. This allows the office manager to function properly without being overworked, so that the dentist can focus on clinical care confidently while the business grows and thrives. The practice's manpower needs can be filled with individuals focused on the day-to-day operation of the dental office, improving patient care and satisfaction in a competitive marketplace. The medical industry recognized this long ago, which is why few medical practices do in-house billing and insurance management. When medicine became insurance-dependent, as is rapidly becoming the norm within the dental industry, there was no way to cost-effectively perform these tasks even if the facility was able to accommodate the necessary manpower.

By confining the role of the office manager to business operations management in the dental practice, this individual is empowered to succeed. By outsourcing billing and insurance claims operations, staff is free to focus on the work they should be doing, setting them up for success and job satisfaction as well.

In the end this leads to a happy, healthy, and profitable practice everyone—including patients—can be confident in and proud of.

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