



CE is good business

In today's economy, we must use and incorporate new, sound business practices to succeed. Continuing education is a powerful and necessary tool to achieve this end. Enhanced profitability, better patient care, improved communication, scientific advances and increased marketability are just a few of the benefits we can attain through CE.

Traditionally, much of dental school tutelage focused on clinical techniques and expertise. In a volatile and changing marketplace, this is not enough. In addition to practicing our craft to the most professional level, we must excel on other fronts. We must also be a business person, psychologist, communicator and healer. CE can equip us with the needed tools to achieve these ends and more.

Like in other businesses, profitability doesn't occur by accident. Dentistry requires sound business acumen. Large corporations make large profits on small margins. CE courses can teach us essential business principles to increase profits.

Courses on newer techniques and materials enable the practitioner to offer his patients cutting-edge technology. I am always amazed by the huge variability in services and procedures from practice to practice. The most successful ones incorporate the latest proven advances.

At a recent meeting sponsored by the American and Latin Colleges of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons, I was greatly impressed by the current state-of-the-art in-office 3-D facial scanning. As a result, our practice has incorporated this cutting-edge technology. We have greatly improved diagnoses and treatment. Implant planning has risen to a new level. Anatomy we used to only guess at is now visible in the office. Sinus problems, facial pain, trauma, lesions and inferior alveolar nerve localizations are seen much more clearly. Accuracy is attainable to the nearest 0.01 mm.

Practice management seminars help us to increase the bottom line. Communication skills, staff maximization and phone techniques are just three of the many benefits gained from practice management courses and consultants. Better communication results in better care, which results in happier patients and increased profit. Communication is our biggest ally in averting problems and litigation. Disgruntled patients are those with whom we have not communicated, nor have we heard their concerns. They leave our practices and we never bother to ask why.

Our office instituted new phone answering techniques as a result of a practice management course. We are currently enrolled in an extensive, hands-on phone certification process. The phone is our lifeblood, the hub of our business. Patients must be communicated with in an honest, open, caring, accommodating and entrepreneurial way. Consistent office policies must be adhered to. We have to serve, but we also need to increase our business in order to survive. Practice management programs have been a great investment in our practice.

Increased marketability results from sound business principles, better care and communications-focused initiatives, as well as interacting with your peers. CE courses enable fellow practitioners—locally, nationally and internationally—to interact on similar business issues and dilemmas. Sales representatives who are often present can be quite helpful. I've picked up many pearls from others attending CE seminars.

Keeping up with scientific advances is another benefit of CE. At a recent course, I learned much about tissue engineering or regenerative medicine. Huge advances are being made with adult stem cells, which are derived from bone marrow instead of embryonically. Wounds have been closed, new tissues generated and surgical defects filled successfully in animal models. Adult stem cells can differentiate into bone, cartilage, muscle, fat and nerve tissue. This most likely will lead to new cures and treatments that were never deemed possible.

CE is necessary for license renewal. The Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation requires 32 hours every two years. If a dentist has an anesthesia permit, an additional four hours are needed. A dental hygienist requires 24 hours of continuing education as well as a CPR certification.

With the help of continuing education, we become better business people. We are more directed and discriminatory in how we practice. This in turn leads to increased personal satisfaction. Satisfaction at work makes it fun and profitable. CE is good business. ■

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