

Team Meetings

There are five types of staff meetings:

- A **morning huddle** is useful to review charts, discuss particulars about certain patients in order to personalize care for each individual, plan patient flow, time to work in emergency patients, etc.
- **One-on-ones** can be impromptu or planned in advance. In these sessions the doctor and one team member or two team members or two doctors communicate. Performance appraisals are an example of productive one-on-ones.
- A **general meeting** with the entire staff, including part-time people, should be held minimally once a month.
- An **area meeting** can also be scheduled once a month in which business staff meet while clinical staff meet, each group discussing details of systems pertinent to their areas in order to improve efficiency and effectiveness. Decisions, analyses, results, and news from area meetings should be shared during the monthly general meeting so that staff members in each work area stay aware of activities and/or changes in the entire office. "Front" and "Back" are, after all, one whole team that must work together to best serve patients.
- An **annual or semi-annual planning retreat** provides time to understand the vision the doctor has for the practice, write and assess the group mission, evaluate work systems, and plan new goals.

Regular team meetings are a prerequisite for a practice committed to total quality. One general staff meeting per month is minimal. Each meeting should have an agenda to which all auxiliaries have contributed, including ideas determined during the workday. To facilitate collecting ideas, each auxiliary should carry a small note pad to jot down ideas on slips of paper which can be deposited in a central location to be added to the agenda by the staff person writing the meeting outline. Copies of the agenda should be distributed prior to each meeting.

The privilege of leading a general staff meeting should rotate among the dentist(s) and staff members alphabetically by last names, in order to encourage participation by all auxiliaries. Presentation of "health reports" is another method of encouraging individual's participation. A staff member can present a 3-to-5-minute report on a health-related subject at the beginning of each meeting. The report presentation also can rotate alphabetically by staff last names. Another idea to encourage participation: every team member has a topic to report on, to discuss, or simply update the group on activities in her/his work area—in short, everyone should speak at every meeting.

Another excellent tool to keep staff abreast of changes in dentistry and to improve communication among the group is a brief (5 -10 minute) clinical "lesson" presented by the dentist at the end of each general staff meeting. In this way, the entire team, even business staff, can be made aware of clinical updates, new methods, new materials, etc.

Don't forget to schedule a fun staff meeting occasionally. Invite resource speakers (travel agent, CPR instructor, color consultant, etc.) or plan a party at meeting time. "Fun" is a necessary ingredient for thriving dental practices.

To further enhance practice efficiency, business staff and clinical staff may meet separately at least once per month. During these area meetings business and clinical details can be discussed. Improvements and methods of implementation can be decided. Information from each area can be shared at the monthly general meeting.

The planning retreat is one of the most important meetings for any dental group. Interpersonal surveys, games, and exchanges can be used to strengthen communication and teamwork. Work systems, scheduling, production, collections, patient flow, OSHA, emergency procedures, inventory control, budgeting and such, can be scrutinized, improvements planned, and deadlines set for implementation. Practice goals for the next six to twelve months can be established.

The office that is "too busy" to have all or some combination of this variety of meetings is, indeed, too busy. Declaring no time for team meetings is like going into the woods, starting to fell trees with an adequately sharp saw, taking no time ever to sharpen it, and then getting upset when the saw no longer cuts the trees you want harvested. Saw sharpening time is mandatory for continued success.