Making the most of practice management software

Ryszard Jurowski gives us the lowdown on how to get the best out of your practice management software, and what software systems of the future will offer

In an ever-changing digital world, a plethora of software companies are offering their programs for use in the modern dental practice. Almost all dental practice management software (DPMS) offers the basic functionality of appointment booking, dental charting and clinical notes.

With pricing structures varying vastly from one provider to the next, it is important to understand what you, as a business, require from your DPMS.

A good DPMS is one that answers your business requirements, ensuring enough functionality to facilitate future growth. The software should be intuitive, easy to use and offer clarity of information.

Utilising the features

Basic DPMS packages on the market can be a cost-effective solution for moving from paper into the digital world; however, these are often a short-term solution, meaning that your practice will experience some disruption when you are finally ready to make the move to a more feature-rich solution.

Dentists that choose a powerful DPMS – such as Systems for Dentists' SFD, Software of Excellence's Exact or Carestream Dental's R4 – should ensure they fully understand the features at their disposal. Many dental practices in the UK have purchased such software and utilise a small fraction of the functionality on offer.

Properly configured and supported, these solutions will reduce wasted surgery time, streamline the clinical recordings processes and enable the entire dental team to focus on patient care. This in turn can improve profitability, efficiency and patient perception.

To make the most of any software, training and support services are vital. Not only do these services offer piece of mind, they also empower the dental team to utilise their DPMS with confidence and accuracy.

Ryszard Jurowski is managing director of Systems for Dentists. He took over the role from his dentist father after leaving university in 1988, having studied civil engineering. A keen computing enthusiast at the time, Ryszard quickly proved his superior programming skills, having written a database and indexing system. After taking over as managing director and principle developer, Ryszard continued to grow the company to its current size, one of largest dental practice management software companies in the UK.

Data capture

Software simplifies tasks, reduces duplication and ensures structure; however, it is nothing without the data we enter. Accurate data capture is everything when it comes to DPMS.

In addition to the operational benefits, simple data capture can assist with marketing. If your patients complete a questionnaire that shows they are interested in tooth whitening or unhappy with the shape of their smile, you can (with patient consent) market your services, including any special offers.

The future efficiencies of technological advancement are astronomic in proportions

Often we find members of the reception team reluctant to check email addresses, thinking that they are complex to enter, patients of a 'certain age' may not have access to email or simply they do not see this as part of their job.

Once you explain the cost savings behind email appointment reminders, the positive response to automatic birthday greetings and time savings behind re-booking appointments via email, staff are usually won over.

The future is efficient

The best DPMS solutions have continued to push the boundaries of technology and user interface design ever since the first DPMS was published. Moving forward, they will continue to push this envelope. From clinical charting through to 3D intraoral scanning, virtualised assistants to help with clinical note taking and instant study models, the future efficiencies of technological advancement are astronomic in proportions.

The immediate future will be the bridging of devices, services and hardware between applications. Imagine a practice management software that not only knows your patient's favourite music, but will automatically start it playing when they settle into the chair. Or a DPMS linked with your intraoral scanner that updates the patient's dentition in seconds, rather than calling out Palmer references to your nurse. Or a DPMS that detects the use of stock and automatically places the orders with your favourite, or cheapest supplier.

Good software gives you time, supports your compliance, and most of all works for you. If you find yourself having to work around your software, then speak to your supplier, or consider migrating to something that will give you the experience you deserve. **D**