

## Overtime

Medical Overtime is Really a Sign of Stress and It's Not Ok.

The balance between patient volume and the appropriate staffing levels is something that all medical offices need to find – and find quickly – before it costs far too much.

Medical overtime creates a compounding effect in the medical dental field. Employees are expected to rise to the challenge and there are times when working additional hours is required. This becomes a bonus for the employee who wants the extra hours and needs the extra paycheck. But if the situation occurs often, it is costing your practice much more than a few overtime hours. The cost of consistent medical overtime is diminished stability, consistency, and professionalism in your practice. And the real cost will be patient and staff allegiance.

Philosophically we want to do a proper allocation of staff and often spend a lot of time trying to get this right. It is not easy to find the correct balance. At ePractice Manager, we call it an art – and it is an art that needs fine tuning and attention. But solving the 'Overtime Problem' also magically makes other challenging situations disappear and it is a great place to start if your practice needs to be more efficient.

There is no question that it is imperative to appropriately plan for the highest and best use of the practices' limited resources. Investigating how the staff uses their time – and your time as the doctor – is a great starting point in finding opportunities to leverage your resources and reduce the costly effects of overtime.

When schedules are scrutinized closely it is easy to spot efficiencies that reduces the reliance on overtime work. The doctor's schedule for the day holds hidden pockets of valuable time – as little as ten minutes can be used for a scheduled patient appointment when planned appropriately. Following the patient process from start to finish in your practice provides an opportunity to gain an understanding of duplicative work which could be eliminated. Cross-training seems like a great solution and it is a very good idea for emergencies, but it should not be the solution to staffing issues. The best solution is always ensuring the right people are in the right roles and have role clarity.

Eliminating the need for overtime situations also lessens the Human Capital workload. Employment law is baffling because the rules change often regarding work week definitions and employment classes and statuses. These constantly changing rules make it challenging to stay current on requirements when paying overtime. Since overtime is a signal of other deficiencies in the practice, the toll it takes on the entire team is not limited to just extra hours. The lack of planning can make excellent contributors look like they are not flexible or do not care when they are actually strong team players who simply cannot accommodate the

overtime due to other life commitments. As the situation gets more dire, good employees realize the practice will fail and leave for better opportunities. Though we feel we can hide the chaos, patients can always sense when a practice is disorganized. This causes patients to lose trust in the guidance provided by your practice and they will leave for another provider. The cost of overtime truly compounds over time. It is hard to embrace overtime in a practice as an admission of failure, but it is a key indicator of a disorganized practice and future problems to come. If there is a general sense that overtime is ok in your practice - eliminate that mentality today. As leaders, we must also stop praising or faulting employees for their reaction to overtime – this can only worsen a bad situation. Instead, encourage your team to identify areas of inefficiency and create proposed solutions for the practice to evaluate. Congratulate and reward the team when goals are accomplished in the allotted timeframes. Success will come but it will require the alignment of your entire team and a keen focus on consistency and efficiency.

Here at ePractice Manager we provide a complete curriculum of engaging online training classes, along with individual coaching and consulting for dental practices throughout North America. Contact us today to learn more, we are here to help.