



Cross-Train for Dental Success

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Cross-training is a way of life for the modern athlete, and no one in Chicago's professional sports scene more illustrates that than Jake Arrieta, pitcher for the World Champion Chicago Cubs. His training regimen received quite a bit of press over the past baseball season for being so multidimensional. Yoga, Pilates, Olympics-style weight training, visualization and sports psychology were all incorporated by Arrieta to help him reach his highest potential.

Are you unfamiliar with the term "cross-training"? Runnersworld.com defines the term nicely: "In reference to running, cross-training is when a runner trains by doing another kind of fitness workout such as cycling, swimming, a fitness class or strength training, to supplement their running. It builds strength and flexibility in muscles that running doesn't utilize."

How does cross-training in sports apply to the field of dentistry? In my opinion, the best all-around dental offices are the ones that consistently provide excellent patient care and do so daily with ease.

While there are numerous aspects that must come together to create an office of this caliber, in my opinion, one of these aspects is invariably cross-training of the dental team. Cross-trained offices thrive in the same way Jake Arrieta does: They build strength and flexibility in individual dental departments by doing another kind of work. These offices exhibit increased fluidity and typically operate at a lower level of daily stress regardless of what obstacles present on a day-to-day basis. Additionally, employees of cross-trained offices always seem to work better together. Being knowledgeable about a coworker's job fosters increased understanding, empathy and appreciation for the daily tasks among the dental team (comprised of dentists and dental assistants), the hygiene team and the administrative team. Cross-training your dental practice will inevitably help yield stellar patient care and patient office experiences.

The beauty of cross-training a dental office is that there's no wrong way to do it. While certainly impossible to completely achieve, the cross-training goal should be that everyone knows how to do everyone's job. In actuality, simply having all staff members possess a basic understanding of all of the jobs is a monumental undertaking (and achievement). It might be challenging, but it's worth it. Think of how much more effective your administrative team would be if they possessed firsthand knowledge of common dental procedures. Similarly, think about how much more effective the dental team would be if team members could execute common administrative tasks such as making appointments and answering incoming phone calls. Add the dental hygiene team into the equation,

and the positive benefits are even greater.

The following are just a few ideas to get you started down the cross-training path:

1. Cross-train within a specific position (i.e., ensure that all dental assistants are fluent in all procedures for day-to-day operations, and that your team is not just comprised of a highly trained and experienced lead assistant with lesser trained and experienced coworkers).

2. Rotate in members of both the dental hygiene team and the administrative team to witness a variety of dental procedures firsthand.

a. Educate staff members (and the patient) during the procedure about as much as possible to create standardized informational scripts, and so that they will be able to more completely and effectively discuss the procedure on their own.

3. Rotate in members of both the dental hygiene team, as well as the dental team (yes ... dentists, too!) to learn and review basic administrative skills and tasks.

a. Review predetermined scripts to ensure phone calls are answered within two rings even when the office is overwhelmed.
b. Schedule a patient's next appointment.
c. Take payment.
d. Find charts and properly print/email X-rays and photos.

4. All staff members from all teams should be knowledgeable about how rooms are stocked and where extra supplies are kept.

a. Staff members should be knowledgeable about the names of dental equipment and their locations (i.e., a hygienist is asked to get a highspeed handpiece, burs and articulating paper for a chairside occlusal adjustment of a filling on a patient in a hygiene room).

5. Do you have an overflow dental chair? What about an "overflow dental assistant" from the hygiene or administrative teams who can help when all dental assistants are busy? Cross-train the overflow dental assistant to not only be able to help out, but also to thrive when called upon. Keep their skills sharp by periodically asking them to assist.

Learn from Arrieta's success and cross-train your dental practice. It will certainly take time, determination and a lot of effort, but in the end, the office and your patients will undoubtedly benefit from it!

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