



LCP Dental Team Coaching (the new name for Julie Weir & Associates) is recognized as the premier consulting firm specializing in pediatric dentistry since 1996.

Strategic Scheduling for a Productive Pediatric Practice

Are you and your team in control of your schedule or does it control you? Do parents dictate when they want their children to be seen? Are you and your team exhausted at the end of your work day or constantly running behind? Have you been conditioned to just deal with the production highs and lows in your schedule?

Poor scheduling practices cause stress and frustration. Following an organized, systematic approach every time an appointment is scheduled helps you control the schedule each day instead of the schedule controlling you. Scheduling more efficiently allows you to reach your goals while maintaining a consistent flow. Review the scheduling recommendations below to identify areas in your schedule that could be modified. Where do you see areas for improvement in your own schedule?

1. Understand the goals of block scheduling:

- Meet defined production goal for each provider.
- Increase production through efficient use of time.
- Reduce stress for team members and patients.
- Keep the day interesting by having a good mix of procedures.
- Office runs on time.
- Reduce or eliminate no shows and cancellations.
- Eliminate doctor or team member scheduled in too many places at the same time.
- Place emergency patients on the schedule and still run on time.
- Provide quality time with the patient.

- Provide the correct amount of time for each procedure.
 - Allow flexibility for complications.
- ### 2. Identify the types and lengths of appointments:
- **Hard Op** – More productive and longer procedures. Schedule in the morning, in the doctor's first column.
 - **Easy Op** – Easier, less productive and shorter restorative procedures. Schedule in the doctor's second column either in the morning or afternoon. Place easy ops in between hard ops.
 - **Short Op** – Follow up or quick check. Schedule in the doctor's second column. Schedule during anesthesia time beside hard op/easy op.
 - **Urgent Op** – Patient who needs a procedure within a few days. Block 1-2 per week, or more if needed, in your schedule for 30-40 minutes in length.
 - **Emergency** – Patient who must be seen that day. Place emergency appointments 20 minutes before easy op appointments.
 - **Consult** – Consult in the conference room. Avoid scheduling next to hard ops.
 - **NP** – New patient appointment. Do not put next to hard op or sedation appointment.

3. Input the block schedule into your software to ensure proper daily flow:

- A well-planned block schedule will better serve each patient and allow the dental team to work more productively with less stress.
- First, define your production goals. A block schedule must be created with the goals in mind to ensure that goals can be reached with the designated appointments. Review your production goals every year to adjust them based on your practice needs and objectives.
- Use your practice management software to create designated blocks in your schedule for each appointment type listed above.
- Set up your practice management software to view the schedule in 10-minute increments.
- Most software scheduling systems will have their own provider symbols, codes, or colors; however, all team members need to be aware of your specific provider codes. The colors/codes allow the scheduler to be aware of provider availability.
- When a patient is motivated and ready to complete their treatment, it is important to have an available and open appointment ready for them to schedule immediately.

4. Keeping the schedule filled:

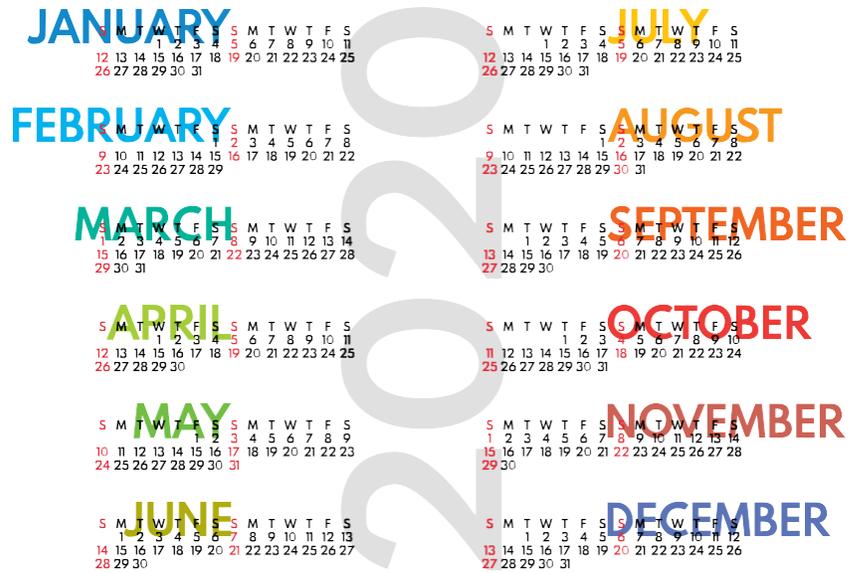
- Schedule your most loyal patients during the first appointment in the morning and the first appointment right after lunch. This will help to minimize last-minute changes to your schedule during times that do not give you much time to fill.
- Keep a priority list of patients who need treatment and are flexible who can come in on short notice. Most practice management systems have an indicator to identify “ASAP” or “quick call” patients. Keep track of correspondence made using this list. Once you have called three times, take them off the list.
- Use the unscheduled treatment report to call patients that have treatment diagnosed but not yet scheduled.
- Call parents regarding siblings of patients already on the schedule.

5. Stop broken appointments:

- Give the patient a reason to return. Emphasize how important it is not to change or fail their next appointment because of the benefit they will receive at their next visit.
- Educate the patient about the treatment they will receive today and have the clinical team express the reason to return for their next appointment. The reason to return should also be communicated at the front desk upon checkout and again when they are scheduling and confirming.
- Utilize the route slips every time to ensure that the correct treatment is being walked out and the next appointment is being scheduled correctly.
- Confirm appointments two to three days ahead of time and the day before. Utilize your patient communication software to confirm patients through email and text message.

- For especially long or sedation appointments, confirm verbally and directly with the parent. If this is not possible, leave a message with the parent and ask them to return your call to verbally confirm their child’s appointment.
 - For patients with a history of no-shows or failed appointments, leave a message for them to call before a certain date or time and let them know if you do not hear from them by then, their appointment will be removed from the schedule. This can only be done if the parents have signed an appointment agreement and have been verbally reminded every time an appointment is scheduled.
- 6. Be proactive with the schedule and discuss challenges and successes:**
- Productive scheduling only occurs when the block schedule is followed and adhered to. Be proactive with the schedule and remind your team that adhering to the block schedule will create a more productive and less stressful work day.
 - The entire team must be committed to the block schedule in order to make effective scheduling a success.

- When you schedule, always consider how many places you are asking the doctor to be at one time. Change any appointment time or date if it will help result in a more productive day and will not inconvenience the patient.
- During your morning meeting, identify any openings in your schedule so your team can help to fill those with same-day appointments.
- Review your schedule for the next three days as well to identify potential problems with the schedule, conflicts, or openings to be sure there is time to make those changes prior to the actual appointment day.
- Maintain consistent communication between the front office and the clinical team to inform of patient arrivals, schedule changes, etc.
- Come together at the end of the day for five minutes and discuss what made today’s schedule successful or stressful. What worked, what didn’t? What could be modified to create a better flow?



Remember, the best days are the ones that have been carefully planned out with consistent communication between the doctor, team, and the patients and parents. Keeping a productive, steady schedule mutually benefits your practice and your patients. When you spend more time with your patients and they avoid waiting, the value of the appointment increases. Managing the schedule and your time effectively reduces frustration, increases team morale, and boosts productivity in your practice. Take the first step and identify which areas in your schedule are bogging you down. Making changes to your scheduling practices can get you on your way towards working smarter, not harder.

“Productivity is never an accident. It is always the result of a commitment to excellence, intelligent planning, and focused effort.

Paul J. Meyer

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