

Artistic impression

by ArabianBusiness.com staff writer on Tuesday, 08 January 2008



Having a second surgical room cuts down a clinic's changover time.

Clinic design is becoming an increasingly important consideration for dentists worldwide. Many dentists are opting to redesign their surgeries to take into account infection control protocols, or just to sharpen a competitive edge in the progressively crowded dental environment.

Do you really want that old bookshelf or old desk to be dictating the tone of your refit?

However, rather than investing in the most lavish waiting rooms with expensive artwork on the walls, the best way to give the patient as pleasant an experience as possible is through promoting efficiency in the practice, argues ex-dentist turned architect Dr Richard Mitzman. He has designed several dental practices in the UK and makes it a point to give every principal dentist in a clinic 'twin surgeries'; two surgeries that look identical.

Identical Twins

"The whole idea for that is when you finish one patient, it might look like a battlefield, but you just say goodbye, go to the next room, and everything is already laid out and there's no changeover time," he says.

In the meantime, a nurse can clean the first surgery up properly, minimising stress and saving time. By just saving these five minutes, a dentist who sees 12 patients a day can save one hour a day, which totals up to six working weeks a year, says Mitzman.

"You could be on the beach in Dubai, or playing golf, or in the snow dome or with your family. The one thing you don't want to do is watch your surgery being cleaned," he says.

The construction of a second surgery room is a one-off investment, and a dentist pays very little by way of additional overheads for maintaining it. As a result, any recovered time means a dentist is able to see more patients per day, producing a 33 to 50% increase in income, according to Mitzman, and this revenue translates into bottom-line profit.

For those unable to incorporate a twin surgery, an additional nurse also helps increase efficiency. Recruiting a junior nurse that can be trained on the job, more than justifies her price tag, and can result in 15% more income, estimates Mitzman.



Dentists should get rid of any unnecessary equipment.

Regulating Traffic

A crucial factor to consider is the movement of people through the clinic. It is important to ensure there is as little congestion in the practice as

possible, which can be done by providing 'dual circulation'. Dentists should try to incorporate separate walkways in their clinics to allow staff to move through sterilisation areas and between surgery rooms, whilst ensuring patients move around the outside of the operatory space.

Every area within the clinic should have two or three openings to it, to minimise bottlenecks and not have people waiting to get in through a doorway, giving the whole practice a sense of calm. This eases anxiety in the patient and keeps them coming back to your practice in future.

Dual circulation is also important for safety as it means people aren't tripping over each other or running around, as there are shorter distances to travel, and nurses are not moving contaminated instruments through places where patients are.

However, as well as improving functionality, dentists should still express creative flair in the design of their clinic, to ensure that patients feel comfortable throughout their visit to the dentist. "This includes not only the colour scheme, but also knowing where to go as soon as you enter and not feeling like you are walking through a rabbit warren within the clinic," says Natasha Connor, director at Ego Squared interior design, who also runs dental clinic design website surgeryinteriordesign.com.

Making a Tidy Profit

Revamping the image of your clinic need not be such a costly task. Dentists hoping to keep existing furniture to save the pennies are often not opting for the most cost-effective solution. It takes extra time and energy to ensure existing furniture fits, as it has to fit physically into the new space and belong in the overall aesthetic.



Reducing workspaces can reduce the risk of infection.

This means your designer ends up having to focus a considerable amount of cost and time trying to ensure that the old piece of furniture doesn't look out of place. "Do you really want that old bookshelf or desk to be dictating the tone of your refit?" asks Connor. If you want a fresh modern feel to your clinic it may be best to lose the old gear, he adds.

Another important aspect to consider is that the surgery can be cleaned quickly and efficiently, and a simple and economical way to achieve this is ensuring there is minimum clutter. Having fewer work surfaces means there is less that has to be cleaned between patients. Having glass surfaces means the glass needs to be visibly sterile and ensures standards of infection control are not compromised, and by not having any furniture or equipment either side of the dental chair means that even the smallest surgeries can feel spacious.

"The most important thing is to de-clutter you clinic. Just go around and throw everything that is not necessary out and do it again and again," advises Mitzman.

Not only can dentists cut costs and improve efficiency by considering clinic design, they can also boost revenues. Dentists can earn extra income by selling dental products in their practice, especially if its done right. If the 'selling' is promoted too heavily, it may make the patient feel they're being targeted, but its something for them to look at while they're waiting and reminds them of what they need to get, so it need not be too minimal.

Just putting a display case in the waiting room looks like an afterthought. "Having something that fits into the whole plan gives a more professional impression," says Connor.

Brains Before Beauty

Designing your clinic can be one of the most therapeutic and fulfilling tasks in the process of establishing your own practice, but its vital that dentists consider functionality first, and build the aesthetics around it. By doing so, a dentist with the right idea can stand to profit significantly.