IS YOUR STERI-CENTER UP TO SCICAN’S SPECS?
In part three of a four-part series, we define “efficient” as the third part of SciCan’s SPECs. Safety, Predictable, Efficient, Compliant.

We discussed Safety in our first article, we discussed Predictable in our second article and we will discuss “compliant” in the last article in the series.

What if implementing a few, simple steps in the steri-center could save the practice money and make the team happy? Are there areas the added revenue would benefit? Is less-stress important to the practice? Is simplifying processes a goal for the office?

At a recent conference for small businesses a presenter asked, “How many of you have placed an order with Amazon?” A slight chuckle filled the room, the joke being that the omnipresence of Amazon makes the question almost absurd. Between two-day, one-day and now two-hour delivery options, Amazon has changed the face of retail through innovative technology and enhanced supply chain management.

They recognized early on that efficiency in the workflow was going to be the key to their success, regardless of what they were supplying (as you may recall, Amazon began as an online bookstore). This efficiency has helped skyrocket Amazon’s annual revenue. In fact, Amazon reached $100 billion in revenue quicker than any other business.

Like most healthcare facilities, ThedaCare Wisconsin was under pressure to do more with less. So they utilized a common business tool to intelligently streamline and reduce wasted product and time. The improvements in quality, safety, patient satisfaction, and costs were impressive. As a result, they eliminated extra time by 50%, reduced treatment time by 69% and brought up patient satisfaction scores to 90%. They also increased productivity saving the organization $27 million.
How did Amazon and ThedaCare do this? By improving efficiency without sacrificing quality and safety. These are the basic tenants of popular process improvement methods like Lean and Kaizen. Both methodologies focus on reducing waste and resources (think energy, labor, steps, etc.) and streamlining processes. This approach can also assist the dental practice in one of the busiest areas: sterilization.

Let’s think the steps through: Instruments are collected then transported to the sterilization area, possibly pre-soaked and rinsed, cleaned, rinsed again, dried, packaged, sterilized, and stored to ensure sterility. The procedure is time consuming and labor intensive. If the instrument reprocessing system is poorly thought-out, extra steps are needed. This in turn leads to instrument shortages, running behind schedule, and added stress. Ask the team who among them would like to solely reprocess instruments for the rest of their career and expect to hear crickets in response. It is not a popular task.

If, however, the instrument processing system is designed properly, time spent performing this arduous task can be greatly reduced, allowing the team to focus on more productive jobs like treatment room turnover, stay on schedule, and even perhaps see more patients in the day, something they’d prefer over cleaning instruments.
Let’s revisit Amazon and look at one of the ways it saves money through efficiency. In the tween years of the century, Amazon purchased a warehouse robotic company completely automating the picking and packing of inventory. Not only did this speed up this aspect of the business, it created swaths of time then used to focus on other activities. An estimate of savings puts this at about $22 million per year for each fulfillment center. Amazon has almost 200 fulfillment centers. Their turnaround time was reduced from over an hour to just 15 minutes.

As we know, the sterilization area serves as the heart of the practice. Dirty instruments flow in and sterilized instruments flow out. Having the proper equipment in place ensures the steri-center continues to operate smoothly. Automated systems help to maintain a healthy heartbeat. Staff is less overwhelmed, more work is performed in the same amount of time, liability is reduced, and patients continue to receive quality care. Each step of instrument reprocessing would benefit from efficient practices:

Receiving, Cleaning and Decontamination: Cassettes keep instruments together reducing the likelihood of misplaced items during the cleaning process. Exposures are further prevented because all the sharps are housed in place, rather than piled on a tray. No sifting through contaminated sharps! Cassettes also help to prevent dulling of instrument tips as they are cleaned while remaining in the cassette.

Once upon a time instruments were scrubbed by hand. Then, the ultrasonic cleaner came about and promised to do the same quicker and safer. Now FDA approved washers clean, rinse and dry instruments. The large capacity allows for reprocessing multiple cassettes at once. Not only does this type of automation save time, it also prevents incidents simply by minimizing the amount of opportunities an employee is exposed to contaminated...
sharps. Automated systems can streamline workflow and reduce employee injuries.

Preparation and Packaging: Newer technology also contributes to a more efficient practice. Chemical indicators on the inside and outside of the pouch change colors and communicate instruments have successfully cycled through the sterilizer.

The use of chemical integrators further reduces the likelihood of recalling instruments. Unlike chemical indicators which typically respond to one or more parameters for the sterilization cycle, integrators are designed to respond to all critical parameters for sterilization. This immediate read system, for cents per cycle, provides added peace of mind that instruments can be released for patient use. Hands-free handpiece cleaners are capable of cleaning and oiling multiple instruments further reducing turnaround time.

Sterilization: In-office water filtration systems prevent the need to buy, lug and store large jugs around the practice. Sterilizers with automatic fill and drain features reduce manual labor typically associated with running steam sterilizers. Newer sterilizers have reduced cycle times to help expedite clean instruments and some even have a remote notification process if there is an issue with the cycle. Even troubleshooting can be done without the wait of a technician.
Storage: Cassettes minimize time needed to find items for certain procedures. Labeling of cassette systems keep instruments organized and ready for use. Wrapped, labeled cassettes contribute to positive optics through professional presentation. The use of cassettes keeps instruments together preventing the need to pick or sort through items before and after the appointment. Cassettes also prevent premature damage and dulling of instruments.

Enhancing the steri-center contributes to productivity, and more importantly, it protects the team not only from exposures, but also from burnout. Early in 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) officially recognized work-related stress through a revision of the International Classification of Diseases. It can be found under ICD-11 “Problems associated with employment or unemployment”. More than just occasional stress, this is a chronic condition that has not been successfully managed.

A high-performing culture recognizes that there is always a better way to do something. Streamlining work processes in the steri-center with the right products and equipment can reduce pressure placed on staff, contribute to cost-savings and improve patient satisfaction. Most importantly, it protects the team who contribute to making the practice a success.

For more information on SciCan’s steri-center SPECs go to: https://www.scican.com/us/scicanspec/

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