What is the hottest thing in dentistry right now? Would it be digital X-rays? How about CEREC, lasers, Botox therapy or digital impression scanners? I’d argue it’s something much simpler: headset radios for staff communication.

More and more lecturing doctors and consultants are recommending headset radios to other doctors. A few years ago at Dr. Woody Oakes’ spring break weekend seminar, I walked in late to a meeting being presented by Dr. Chris Bowman. As soon as I sat down, he said that for the ultimate in efficiency, dentists need to start using walkie-talkie radios within the office. I knew exactly what he was talking about because I had been using them for years and was constantly recommending them to every office.

Dr. Howard Farran said the same thing in one of his recent articles while discussing efficiency in the dental office. More and more offices are incorporating these “old technology” devices to better operate their offices. There’s no more yelling down the halls asking for an assistant. No more hygienists walking around the office looking for the doctor. No more front desk personnel leaving the front desk to give the doctor a message.

Most dentists find them to be essential in operating a well-run, efficient office. I know, I know, I know — some doctors just don’t want to have to put on any extra gear when getting ready to go see their patients. But after a couple of weeks of this initial inconvenience, it becomes routine, and you can’t work without them!

There are some offices where the staff wears them, but the doctor does not. I believe that is a mistake because the doctor needs to hear what is going on throughout the office. There’s been more than one occasion when I have heard the front desk tell the hygienist through the radios that the patient doesn’t need an antibiotic when I know they do. Or, I might hear the assistants talking about setting up for a certain procedure when I prefer something else. Also, useless chatter and joke telling will not take place if they know the doctor is listening!

Some doctors don’t want to use radios because they think all day long they will be hearing all kinds of messages that will drive them crazy. Maybe so for the first couple of weeks until the novelty wears off and your office comes up with a few guidelines, such as keeping messages to under 15 words when possible: “I need a DA in room three.” “I need a hygiene check in room seven.” “Place topical on tooth #4 in room two.” “Doctor, your wife is on the phone, and she wants a divorce!” OK, maybe not that last one, but you get the idea!

We recently had a discussion on the KISCO Email Network group about morning huddles. Many doctors, including me, believe that those short meetings, regardless of how short they may be, can be eliminated with the use of these radios. That’s because throughout the day everyone can become informed about particular issues concerning patients who come in that day. One doctor who operates a large office shared figures with us and said he saves about $20,000 per year in salaries by eliminating his morning huddles.

But what about what the patients are thinking when we look like we work for the CIA wearing those earpieces? Actually, once patients know what they are used for, they are very impressed, and often comment that we always have the latest technology, even though walkie-talkie radios have been around for decades. But, these radios have come a long way. We use commercial brand radios that have privacy frequencies so neighborhood children or truckers driving by cannot listen in or interfere with our conversations.
And now with the option of the new “touch-free” technology we developed with our earpiece manufacturer, there is no risk of cross-contamination when using the radios. With this “near field” technology, you simply move your arm with the wristband within one inch of the speaker button, and you’re ready to talk without even touching the button. This has eliminated one of the main objections that some doctors have had for not incorporating this efficient system into their practice.

I say this is one of the hottest trends in dentistry because now when I present a seminar, it is not uncommon to see that half of the offices are using these efficient communication devices. Ten years ago, seldom would I ever come across an office using them. Today the following top clinicians and consultants all recommend radios at their various seminars: Dr. Woody Oakes, Dr. Mike Abernathy, Dr. Tom Orent, Cathy Jameson, Dr. John Jameson, Dr. Kent Smith, Dr. Chris Griffin and Dr. Mark Hyman. They all discuss how efficient an office can operate with the use of these units, and that’s why more and more offices are implementing this concept. So, isn’t it time for you to jump on this bandwagon and see for yourself?

Author’s Bio

Dr. Joe Steven graduated from Creighton Dental School in 1978 and has been in solo practice in Wichita, Kansas, up until June, 2007, at which time his daughter, Dr. Jasmin Rupp joined him. He is president of KISCO, a dental products marketing company, providing “new ideas for dentistry,” and is the editor of the KISCO Perspective Newsletter. Dr. Steven, along with Dr. Mark Troilo, presents the “Team Dynamics” seminar. Dr. Steven also presents four other seminars: “Efficient-dentistry,” “Efficient-prosthetics,” “Efficient-endo” and “Doctors Only.” Dr. Steven also provides the KISCO Select Consulting Program to dentists in the form of a monthly audio CD recording. Contact info: jsteven@kiscodeental.com; 800-325-8649; www.kiscodeental.com.

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