



Midmark White Paper: Is Your Practice Being Stressed by Technology?

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Introduction

In a world where technology advances daily, what solution is purchased and when can make a considerable difference in the daily workflow of a dental practice. The same technology intended to support daily work activities can also be a trigger for team stress.

As dental practices struggle to retain assistants and hygienists during the Great Resignation, doctors and management teams may need to consider the impact of additional work stresses. Stress can occur due to the least likely reasons, such as with the introduction of a new technology or piece of equipment intended to be helpful.

According to a recent survey by the American Institute of Stress published in Today's RDH, 77% of Americans surveyed reported physical symptoms due to daily stress.¹ It may surprise you to learn this survey occurred in 2017, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Since then, the US population has experienced an increase in stress, anxiety and depression from 11% to 42%,² and COVID-19 has only increased stress for dental practice teams.³



Prevalence of stress, anxiety, and depression in the US population, **up from 11%** due to COVID-19 pandemic.²

The Expansion of Dental Technology



Dentistry has experienced an explosion in technology and equipment advances in the last 20 years. Cone beam computerized tomography (CBCT) imaging has now become a standard in the industry. Lasers, CAD/CAM dentistry, digital radiology software and newcomers like artificial intelligence and robotics continue to drive that expansion.

The perceived advantage of these cutting-edge solutions is the ability to streamline a practice workflow and provide a faster, easier experience for the team that uses them. For a dental practice, these solutions could help expand treatment options, provide treatment at a quicker pace and improve the bottom line. But are these results possible if our teams are overwhelmed?

As dental technology continues to expand, we must ask ourselves, are our dental teams keeping up? Is there adequate training to alleviate the stress a new system can bring?

While antiquated technology may ease the burden of learning something new, it can hinder patient care and treatment planning—and therefore, the bottom line.



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An Unexpected Burden

Consider this example from a general dentist in Ohio running a multi-doctor practice at the forefront of technology with over 40 employees. They utilize CBCT, lasers, CAD/CAM dentistry and digital radiographs, along with computerized management systems. Educating the team on the various systems is a high priority for this practice, but the office discovered firsthand how increased technology can overwhelm team members.

“It can be challenging to keep everyone engaged in technology, especially with clinical procedures. Some of the team does not use the systems daily,” the senior doctor shared.

“We had one veteran hygienist who had been with us for 30 years. She was an excellent clinician. However, the stress of learning all the new systems became too much for her, even with hours spent on training. She decided to quit the industry due to this.”

Other clinicians in other practices have commented on similar struggles with new technology. One dental clinician stated, **“I always want to implement new technologies to help streamline the day but struggle with getting all team members up to speed despite training.”**⁴ Another clinician acknowledged the importance of technology but shared, “Technology is an integral but difficult aspect of our practice.”⁴

Stories like these may seem like isolated issues to office leadership since most successful practices prioritize training team members to stay current with equipment and technology. Although dental teammates may want streamlined and easy-to-use technology, leadership may not recognize the strain modern technology can put on their team, especially when the technology does not deliver as expected. Too much stress can lead to resignations. And many practices would find it difficult to replace valued teammates in the current dental employment climate.



“I always want to implement new technologies to help streamline the day but struggle with getting all team members up to speed despite training.”⁴

“Technology is an integral but difficult aspect of our practice.”⁴

“Older equipment and current software [are] not completely user friendly.”⁴

“[The] main issue I have is that more of our day is spent facing the software instead of people.”⁴

Technology's Impact on Stress: A Survey

What is the strain on the practice as technology becomes obsolete and new systems are introduced? To better understand the impact of technology and workflow changes on dental team stress levels, we surveyed 200 dental clinicians (dentists, registered dental assistants and registered dental hygienists).

Results from the survey questions were quite eye opening. Of all dental professionals surveyed, 25% responded that they are more stressed this year than last year, even with COVID-19 cases declining.





39% of dentists and 27% of the clinical team answered YES when asked, "In your daily workflow, do you have equipment or software that makes your day more stressful?"

24% of dentists answered YES when asked, "Are there issues retaining clinical teammates due to lack of training?"

53% of dentists answered that "low stress" was a measurement of success (second only to "number of new patients" at 68%) when asked, "How does your facility currently measure operational success?"

Possibly the most concerning answer was to the question, "Are there times that you do not offer a patient a specific treatment plan or procedure due to lack of technology or training?" A total of 38% of dentists answered YES.

With survey results like these, it would be difficult to argue against the clear need to simplify the dental workday. Lack of staffing, laborious software, exasperating clinical technology and inexpedient workflows were all commonly commented upon across respondent practices.



Solutions for Your Team

Consider discussing as a team what is the right amount of technology for the practice to improve profitability and enhance patient care, and find solutions that match the practice's needs. Sometimes selecting dental software or equipment with all the bells and whistles can make it a chore to use instead of accomplishing the intended goal, which can leave teammates additionally stressed while trying to care for patients.

While stress will always be part of our dental lives, consider the purchase of easy-to-use solutions. The Midmark® Extraoral Imaging System (EOIS) 3D X-ray imaging unit, for example, features simplified software and onboard video tutorials for quick training of team members and hygienists and assistants who are guests. A training resource right at the point of patient care can help alleviate the stress of confidently operating the equipment in a safe manner.

Invest in quality onsite clinical training with a live patient component versus an all-virtual training. Live patient training can benefit most learners, and refreshing skills throughout the year, such as at team meetings, can keep everyone on top of their game.

Purchase from quality US manufacturers that provide reliable customer service and are available when you need them. No one wants to wait on the phone during patient care hours or receive a call back the next day when encountering an issue during a dental procedure.

We also suggest finding time to enjoy each day. A simple 5-minute stretch or kind word given can go a long way to alleviate stress.



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Lisa began her career in the dental industry 31 years ago as a certified and registered dental assistant. Along her career path, Lisa has worked as a clinical director for a multiple-doctor private practice, a clinical instructor of dental assisting, an educational trainer for multiple intraoral scanner systems, territory manager for dental implant sales and digital dentistry workflows and now enjoys working with Midmark Corporation as a member of the clinical affairs team.

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Dr. Sharp is the owner of a group practice in Minster, Ohio, and has been in practice 25 years. He adopted several digital technologies early in his career and enjoys teaching fellow dentists the benefits of utilizing these modalities. He has been a beta tester for multiple dental materials and products and a key opinion leader. Dr. Sharp is a CEREC clinical trainer and visiting faculty at CDOCS along with being a dental consultant for Midmark.

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Sources:

1 <https://www.todaysrdh.com/the-science-behind-stress-and-how-dental-professionals-can-cope/>

2 <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-021-00175-z>

3 <https://www.ada.org/publications/dental-practice-success/strategies-for-dealing-with-stress-during-the-pandemic>

4 Survey results from Direction Research for Midmark Corporation, 2022

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