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WASTE MANAGEMENT— Your Untapped Profit Center

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Topics Discussed:

- Waste management vs. trash
- Proper waste management can yield significant savings
- Federal guidelines for medical waste disposal

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There is an old adage that says "it's not about what you make but rather about what you keep". While this has always referred to the payment of taxes I feel it can be equally applied to the practice of dentistry where the generalist is often burdened with overhead expenses of 60 to 70%.

Recently I spoke at a trade show and when not lecturing I spent time at the booth we had sponsored. Our company is the only full-service waste management vendor in the U.S. whose sole market is the dental profession. Accordingly, our booth displayed the waste management products and services we provide.

As a degreed epidemiologist, as well

ther glamorous, sexy or cutting edge. When I informally polled some of the attendees to gauge attitudes some told me they were looking for the latest technology or service available to increase their business. Others shared that they "already had waste management services" or that "it is just trash". Perception truly is everything!

It was amazing that how after a few minutes of light conversation their attitudes changed. Proper waste management can actually help your practice grow, attract new patients and improve your bottom line. In business I don't know of anything more glamorous or sexy than that!

Proper waste management can yield

"It's not about what you make, but what you keep"

as a dentist, I am trained to observe patterns. One observation I made was that our booth had very few visitors when compared to those displaying products or concepts such as the newest implant, laser or cosmetic procedure whose adoption would surely increase the demand for services provided by the practitioner who was willing to lay down thousands of dollars to acquire these "cutting edge" items. Busy also were the other booths promising these same practitioners that if they would only buy marketing packages they could be set up on Facebook, Twitter or other networking sites and their businesses would grow.

I realized that our traffic was slower than others as we were perceived as nei-

significant savings both direct and indirect. These savings can then be used to buy the new technologies, purchase advertising or take the continuing education courses you want to take which allow you to grow your practice.

Medical "red bag" waste management can be a significant expense for most dental practices. I regularly visit offices where staff members place non-regulated items in with medical waste, thereby driving up operating costs. I also see offices who generate very little waste, receiving and paying for quarterly waste pick-ups of nearly empty containers. If you don't periodically review your waste handling and the associated costs you are probably grossly overspending in this area.

“Only place into a red bag items which are saturated.”

Infectious wastes include items “saturated” with blood or other potentially infectious material (OPIM). OPIM includes saliva. Contaminated items may include gauze, cotton rolls, patient bibs, etc. Items are considered “saturated” if they drip blood or OPIM, or if blood or OPIM drips when they are compressed, or if dried or caked blood or OPIM flakes off of them. Items which are only stained with blood or moist with saliva and not saturated, soaked or caked can be discarded with regular trash. Only place into a “red bag” items which are “saturated”. This will prevent you from filling these containers with materials which do not require special handling and will save you money.

carpules, orthodontic wires, metal matrix bands, etc. Sharps must be stored in puncture resistant and properly labeled containers.

Under federal guidelines all of the above medical wastes must leave your office within 7 days of the container becoming full. Check with your own state, however, as many have accumulation time limits which are shorter than the federal guidelines.

The most effective and cost-efficient waste management services are provided by companies who limit their model solely to the dental profession. By understanding the unique needs of your office, affordable, monitored, mail-back services

“Periodic review of waste handling reduces overspending”

Some states define “pathologic waste” as a unique subset of infectious waste. This would include bodily tissue from biopsy, periodontal surgery, etc. which is discarded and not sent for pathologic examination. These wastes should be placed into the “red bag” along with the other infectious waste. Extracted teeth should similarly be deposited here unless they contain amalgam restorations.

The final medical waste category are sharps. These include: scalpels, needles, disposable syringes, empty anesthetic

tailored to the amount of waste you generate can be provided. This “right-sized” approach can yield significant savings for your practice. Moreover, by tracking your waste streams, notifying you of when it's time to recycle and assisting in the completion of government documentation, a good waste management company can make compliance easy for both you and your staff. Savings of both money and time—and you thought waste management was just about trash!

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