

How ORGANIZED Are Your INSTRUMENTS?

By Renee Knight, Editor

The benefits of using instrument cassettes in your practice.

Before Dr. Kaisha Brown opened her own practice a few months ago, she worked in an office that bagged all of their instruments in pouches. She experienced first-hand how inefficient, messy and even dangerous this can be, which is why she decided to incorporate instrument cassettes into her new practice instead.

“It’s definitely a time saver,” said Dr. Brown, who invested in cassettes from Hu-Friedy. “Now we know exactly where the instruments we want to use are, and we don’t have to get up in the middle of a procedure because we’re missing something.”

Instrument cassettes help keep you more organized, improve efficiencies, extend the life of your instruments and significantly reduce your risk of injury. And they’re fairly easy to implement, which is why you might want to consider incorporating them into your practice as well.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT CASSETTES

When selecting the cassettes you want to use in your practice, it’s important to remember they’re not one size fits all, said Chantel Willis, Associate Director, SBU, Instrument Management & Infection Prevention at Hu-Friedy. You need to find cassettes that fit your individual practice’s needs and that are compatible with your sterilization area, which is why it’s a good idea to talk with an expert who can help make sure you invest in the best system for your practice.

“Having someone from the cassette company who is well versed in instrument processing, infection control and instruments in general is going to be very helpful,” Willis said. “That person can help you make sure everything is set up properly.”

As a new dentist, it might be difficult to determine exactly how many cassettes your practice needs. That’s a challenge Dr. Brown faced, but she was able to sit down with her Hu-Friedy consultant and come up with an estimate of how many setups she might need per day.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8 >>

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Cassettes

continued from page 6

Some doctors, like Dr. Michael Sampson, opt for color coded cassettes to help keep them organized. The matching tubs and trays he invested in from Zirc make it easy to determine which instruments he needs for various procedures, he said.

“The main limitation in a dental practice is the organization,” said Dr. Sampson, who opened his third practice a few months ago. “Things do not go back where they started off. There’s no real way to guarantee the kits you set up to begin with will stay together throughout the use and sterilization process. Invariably, things go missing and the instrument you want to use for this procedure is no longer where it should be.”

Dr. Sampson invested in cassettes because he wanted a system that organized itself, he said, to the point where an untrained dental assistant could easily bring him what he needs for any procedure.

“We have color-coded ID bands that go around the instruments to help make sure the right instruments get back into the right cassettes,” Zirc Product Specialist Kay Hickey said. “We store the cassettes on flat trays with a locking cover. You can add other instruments to that tray so it’s ready to go for the next patient. Everything is completely organized and ready before you get started.”

THE BENEFITS

Switching from pouches to cassettes brings many benefits, Hickey said, with the biggest one being enhanced efficiency.

“It saves time in room turn over and the sterilization process,” Hickey said. “If you’re using pouches, the assistant or hygienist has to go through all the instruments after they come out of the ultrasonic cleaner and sort them by hand. This takes time and makes it more likely for an instrument to get in the wrong setup. With cassettes, the instruments are already laid out in order. There’s no need to sort the instruments and put them in pouches.”

Implementing cassettes into your practice will save you five to 10 minutes per procedure, Willis said. Instead of breaking down the instruments or spending time grouping them together before putting them in the ultrasonic bath, you simply load the cassette. There’s also no need for hand-scrubbing. The instruments are all together and labeled in the cassette, making them easy to store and find. In all, doctors save about an hour a day—time they can spend focusing on other, revenue-generating tasks.

And of course, another big benefit is enhanced safety, Willis said. Because you’re not handling the instruments, there’s much less risk of poking yourself.

“Just one sharps injury pays for the implementation of the cassettes,” Willis said. “You’re not handling the instruments at all when you use cassette-based systems. They’re contained from chairside to cleaning and sterilization to storage. You don’t have to scrub the instruments. They’re separated nicely in the cassette. You’re handling the cassette instead of the instruments.”

Using cassettes also prolongs instrument life, Hickey said. When you run loose instruments through the ultrasonic cleaner or store them in pouches, they tend to rub against each other. That causes the instruments to lose their sharpness and may lead to other damage, which means they won’t last as long as they could.

STAYING ORGANIZED

When Dr. Brown or Dr. Sampson need an instrument, they know exactly where to get it. There’s no searching through drawers or dealing with setups that weren’t bagged correctly. Everything is exactly where they need it.

“Before, as we were getting instruments out, my assistant and myself were throwing the ones we weren’t using off to the side and it looked messy,” Dr. Brown said. “With the cassettes, I have a nice setup that’s not overwhelming to patients when they walk in.”

Dr. Sampson also has used other systems in the past, and finds the cassettes keep him more organized and save him time. His assistants feel the same way, and now have less stress because they don’t have to worry about forgetting something.

“The time it saves is several fold. You save on the setup and during the procedures you always have what you need, so you never have to send the assistant off in search of something,” he said. “My father was a general surgeon and during surgeries, he’d have about a dozen instruments laid out for him to choose from. He clearly didn’t use all of them, but the instruments he needed were always in the surgical setup. And all those instruments traveled together to be sterilized and then were put back into the setup together. I tried to fashion my practice off that level of organization.” **tND**