ASSISTANT: ANTICIPATING THE DOCTOR’S NEEDS
SAMPLE SCENARIOS

Remember – each office is different! Our documents are intended as suggestions and guidelines only and can be used as a starting point for conversation and your own system development.

**Patient set up**

Before the doctor walks into the room you must ensure that you get the patient set up. This may be a little different for each office, but essentially make sure the patient is ready for the procedure and when the doctor comes in you can get started. This includes but is not limited to, making sure they have gone to the bathroom if necessary, having them hang/set their bags or remove their hats, getting them a blanket, if they have back/neck issues offering them a back pillow etc., getting the patients bib and glasses on, making sure they have selected a movie/show, getting them set up with any other form of entertainment you may utilize.

**Pull Up the Corresponding Information**

You should always have any corresponding X-Rays pulled up on the computer as well as the patient chart. Sometimes you will want to leave the notes for the patient up if you will need them, as well as their patient information. You should have every piece of information you will need during this procedure visible on the computer, this way if the doctor asks you something, or they need to quickly look something over, you are already prepared and can do so quickly.

**Patient Friendly Conversation**

Make sure that whatever you and the doctor are discussing through the procedure is appropriate for a work setting. Even if the patient has headphones on, or is an adult, it doesn’t change the fact that you are at work and need to be a professional. The general rule is that if you wouldn’t say it to your grandma, then most likely, don’t say it at work. If the doctor asks you “what did you do this weekend?” in a procedure, and maybe you went out and had too much to drink, make sure that you understand that you should only answer with the appropriate version of your weekend, or possibly a prior weekend.

**Questioning the Treatment Plan**

It is important to understand that the doctor is trained to treatment plan and decide the best course of action, and that our job is to assist them, and have their back. Questioning the procedure in front of the patient will cause the patient to lose confidence in the doctor as well as believe that the office is trying to upsell them, or become confused. However, if you do have questions about why a procedure was done, or you feel strongly that something should have been done differently, it is encouraged that you meet with your doctor when they are not busy and discuss your questions and concerns to become more knowledgeable and on the same page as the doctor for the next time. Contradictory to that, if the doctor says something that you know is wrong based off of the accepted treatment plan, (wrong tooth number, wrong procedure etc.) it is important to get your doctors attention in a subtle way and show them, on the treatment plan or compute what your concern is.
Polite Expressions

Rolling eyes, sighing, slouching and attitudes are not acceptable in the office. We are all human and we do become irritated and frustrated, however, it is important that we understand this is our job and it is important we do it properly in order to give the patient the best care possible. When the doctor asks for something, or you need to get up multiple times, or become frustrated for whatever reason it is important to wait for an appropriate time to let it out, and in front of the patient is definitely not one of those times.

Watch the Patient

Monitoring the patient is a very important part of your job. This includes always watching how much water/saliva is in their mouth, watching the tongue/cheek, making sure they are not showing signs of discomfort or anxiety and always make sure that you are in control of your air water syringe and suctions throughout the appointment. Your attention is necessary as you are the voice for the patient.

Keeping the Patient Entertained

When the doctor leaves the room, it becomes your responsibility to make sure the patient is entertained. Whether that means chatting with them, making sure they are still enjoying their show or grabbing them a magazine. Let them know about how long the break will last so they can feel like they are being kept in the loop. Remember, leaving patient alone with their thoughts can cause anxiety or fear.

Pre-filling the Operatories Water Bottles

The operatories water bottles need to be filled each morning/night. Watch when they are starting to become low. Running out of water mid-procedure is very inconvenient and it takes time from your appointment to refill it. It also is a safety hazard, as the water is used to cool down the tooth, and without it the tooth can overheat and damage it.
It is important to understand when to use laymen’s terms and when to use dental terminology. While explaining anything to the patient it is important to use terms they can understand. However, during something like shade matching it is important to use shade numbers and colors, instead of using words like “yellow” or “dark.”

You must be able to keep up with the steps, but also be prepared before the procedure begins. This means you must remember all the steps and set up for them. If you forget a step and go to correct yourself by grabbing and prepping it mid-procedure you are using up precious time that can cause the materials to set up wrong or get wet, essentially ruining the step in the procedure and then you must go back and redo that step.

This is vital for assistants to learn because it allows them to keep up with the doctor and always be able to predict what comes next. Knowing this will allow you to always be ready with the next instrument, be prepared to grab the composite gun or know how long you have to prepare the bond brush. If you have trouble remembering, always prepare your tray and instruments so that you can have exactly what you will need laying out, also make yourself a small note to glance at if you tend forget the sequence.

Being quick and ready to transfer instruments in a timely manner. If you are not quick enough the doctor will end up dropping the instruments on his tray and possibly make the rest of the procedure more confusing and difficult for the both of you to locate and distribute instruments efficiently. Always be aware of where you are in the procedure, and always make sure you have an empty hand/finger ready to pass an instrument.

Timing is everything. When the patient is prepped for the appointment and the doctor is ready to go it’s important to make sure you do not try to start a conversation because this can lead to an appointment running late and a frustrated doctor. Engaging with the patient is a good thing, however knowing when the best time is also just as important.