Time—It’s Elusive on the One Hand, Yet Oppressive on the Other. Too often dentists and their teams are stealing minutes here, working on borrowed time there, and constantly feeling that when it comes to the sands in the hourglass, there are never enough.

Tensions are high, tempers are short, and in spite of the persistent sense of busyness, production continues to lag, and practices seeking to profit continue to struggle.

Certainly, one of the most critical systems in the dental practice is the schedule. It will either burn you out or fire you up. Save you or slave you. Yet for many practices, the schedule is merely a hodge-podge of space and time haphazardly strong to fit the hours of the day. And the extent of any training provided to the scheduling coordinators is typically exactly what ‘busy’ means. If you are going to block the schedule, base it on actual historical production data, not on your production dreams. For example, calculate the number of crown and bridge appointments occupied during the last six months, divide by the number of working days. Now you know how many crown and bridge appointments can realistically reserve in the schedule based on the number of units actually performed. It’s essentially paying attention to the supply and demand of procedures in your practice.

The same holds true for hygiene. Practices often struggle to estimate the supply for hygienic days is on track with patient demand. Many dental teams are convinced that they must schedule hygiene six months in advance. Consequently, the demand for hygiene appears to be enormous as days, weeks, and months are booked well in advance. So it can become quite puzzling, given this huge demand, why the hygienist is often looking at an empty chair. Why the cancellations? Why the appointment failures? Why the empty treatment room?

Practices need to look at real data to ensure that oral hygiene demand and supply are keeping pace. Follow this formula:

1. Count the number of active patients, namely, those seen in the last six months for oral health evaluations.
2. Multiply that figure by two, since most patients come in twice a year for oral hygiene appointments.
3. Add the number of new patients.
4. Now take that number and compare it to the hygienist’s potential patient load. If the hygienist works four days a week, sees 10 patients per day, and works 48 weeks a year there are 1,920 hygiene appointments available.
5. Subtract that total from 2,600. You are losing nearly 700 appointments per year, or in La Jolla, CA. To receive Sally McKenzie’s Weekly e-Management newsletter, which provides advanced management systems to dentistry since 1980 and offers a full line of management consultant to the Council on Dental Practice of the ADA. She is CEO of The McKenzie Company, Inc., which provides successful practice management systems to dentistry since 1980 and offers a full line of educational management products at www.TMCmanagement.com. She is the Founder of The Center for Dental Career Development, and presents targeted management tips, call Sally McKenzie at +1 877-725-1151 or e-mail sallymck@mckenzigm.com.