

Time Management Tips for Healthcare Pros

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by MIPS

Effective time management has the potential to increase productivity, limit burnout and improve both professional and personal satisfaction. Strategies for improving time management from medical and non-medical literature may improve physician time management habits.



No doubt you'll have spent some time in a doctor's or dentist's waiting room as well as appreciated the practitioner who saw you at the agreed appointment time. While private practice consultations may be a still a long way away if you are an intern or junior practitioner, good time management starts in your early years. Bad habits form early, as do good ones.

Why should practitioners care?

Poor time management means patients are kept waiting, you get stressed, your work becomes less enjoyable, stress can build, you lose your sense of humour and you lose valuable time for family, exercise and sleep.

Effective time management can:

- increase productivity
- help deliver better patient care to more patients
- give you more time to listen properly to colleagues
- accelerate your career advancement
- limit your stress and avoid potential burnout
- enhance personal satisfaction.

In a literature review completed by the Boston University Medical Center in 2014, the examination of 5,624 studies looking at doctors, burnout, career development and time management found 212 which stressed the importance of time management but

only 12 with actual time management techniques for doctors. Applying techniques can make you more effective. Some of us are naturals or at least appear so. However, it's all about a balance and sacrifice. Using a time management technique can provide great assistance and have a panacea effect on your healthcare practice.

Using a decision matrix

Through the internet and large number of time management publications, different time management models are re-stated in many ways. The Eisenhower Box is also called a method, matrix or decision grid. Stephen Covey includes a similar matrix in his popular book, *The 7 habits of highly effective people*. These have broad application and are suitable for all healthcare practitioners.

Consider dividing your tasks into these four categories such as urgent and important or less urgent and less important.

	Urgent	Less urgent
Important		
Less important		

Practitioners can use this type of grid system every day for daily tasks, be it in your mind or on a notepad.

	Urgent	Less urgent
Important		
Less important		

And for long-term goals when you break things down into smaller elements.

	Urgent	Less urgent
Important		
Less important		

Prioritise by importance and urgency

During your day colleagues will make requests of you in among the time you also spend with patients. From their perspective, their requests for your time are equally as important as everything else on your list, within reason. However, you'll have to decide what's more or less important and what's urgent and what's not. That said, when a superior asks you to do something, you'll be forced to push other things aside to make it a priority – that's a challenge you'll have to endure in your career.

Pushing back and saying no

If you are a junior practitioner it means you'll have to manage up and down. Normally, the most junior employees would only manage up but doctors and dentists by way of their knowledge and ability provide direction to fellow staff from day one in addition to taking direction. Saying no or suggesting an alternate approach to a consultant, senior doctor or nurse may seem daunting but can be better for you and patients (probably best not to do this in your first few weeks). However, colleagues will respect you if you push back in a constructive and polite way.

Priority by category

If you are more suited to placing each of your tasks within a category other than their urgency/importance, then you may benefit from an approach with set categories. This is from the perspective of a hospital doctor and would vary between healthcare practitioners.

Category prioritisation		

Adding the 80/20 rule

This is a great technique, also known as Pareto analysis, you can add this in addition to using a grid/matrix. The 80-20-rule assumes that 80% of the productivity can be achieved by doing 20% of the tasks. In other words:

- 20% of your tasks should take up 80% of your time
- The other 80% of your tasks can be done in the remaining time

In day to day terms, if you have 10 tasks, then focussing on 2 of the 10 tasks will give you more productivity. This helps to identify what's important and frees your mind so you don't feel guilty spending more time on things once you've identified these as urgent and important (note how this can relate back to other techniques).

		What you do		Your results
The 80/20 rule (also known as Pareto analysis)			→	
				→

Advice for junior practitioners...

If there was one piece of advice you wish you'd be given as an intern to manage your time, what would it have been?

"Trust others to do their job – I wasted so much time under explaining then checking back to see if nurses and other doctors had followed up in my absence."

"You get more done if you can get others to do the tasks that they're meant to do. And they're capable of doing them. It's hard in your early years because you want the practice but you've got to compromise and not try to do everything yourself."

"Be a little selfish with your time. I don't mean be cruel or inconsiderate – it's not like you should miss your Mum's birthday but it's OK to put time into your career. Internship is a pivotal stage and not going to some family and social events you probably aren't that interested in anyway can be a good thing. At least during your intern and junior years."

Conclusion

Apply a technique. This can be a decision matrix, the 80/20 rule or both. Find what works for you and capture enough time to be

effective while keeping your sanity and sense of humour.

References

Craig E Gordon, Steven C Borkan , Recapturing time: a practical approach to time management for physicians, http://www.bumc.bu.edu/facdev-medicine/files/2013/07/Borkan_Gordon_Time-Management-Postgrad-Med-J_2014.pdf

Should members have any queries related to these issues they are advised to contact MIPS for advice on 1800 061 113.
