

Doctor's Digest PODCAST: Time Management "Timesaving Tips"

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If you're like almost every other doctor, saving a little time each day is a goal that is perpetually just outside your reach. But if you can take a few minutes out to put some simple time-savers into play, you may be surprised by the increase in your efficiency and the time you save. Here are ten suggestions from the experts:

One, develop personal templates for your routine correspondence; with the introductory and closing statements already written, you can save valuable minutes every time you write a message.

Two, organize your desk so that your staff can drop off and pick up paperwork easily. Set up in-and-out baskets, assign a designated spot for phone messages that need to be returned, and use a special basket for anything that can be done in less than two minutes.

Three, put a strict 10-minute time limit on meetings with pharmaceutical representatives. Get the information you need, then get back to your patients.

Four, pack a healthy lunch to bring to the office, but resist the urge to save more time by eating it at your desk; get out for some fresh air.

Five, stop multitasking except for combining the most mundane activities.

Six, make sure you start and end all meetings that you are responsible for, on time.

Seven, late each afternoon, review the next day's schedule. This is a good time to catch scheduling mistakes, such as double-booking new or otherwise time-consuming patients. With a little notice, patients can sometimes reschedule.

Eight, develop a series of preprinted FAQ sheets for answering questions about common diagnoses, treatment regimens, wound care, etc., to reduce the number of between-appointment phone calls from patients.

Nine, make sure all your exam rooms are set up as close to identically as possible, so that you and your assistants don't waste time opening drawers to find the supplies you need.

Finally, set up an exam room flag or light system in the hallway. This can significantly improve patient flow and save you from having to track down a staff member to give instructions. Flagging rooms—to indicate that a patient is ready to be prepped for a procedure or that a room is ready to clean—is an example of how visual indicators can save time. Installing a light system in an existing building can be costly, but easy-to-install, color-coded flag systems can be purchased for about \$50 per room. Richard Honaker, MD, is CEO and the busiest physician in his 12-doctor group near Dallas; he says their light-buzzer system is one of the main reasons he is able to average 40 office visits per day, working from 8 am to 4 pm. In his practice, he says a flag system or a light alone wouldn't work; it's the "beep, beep" at the nursing station that keeps everyone moving.

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