The following tips are based on feedback from a range of different practices involved in the pilot phase of dental contract reform programme.

The aim is to help you manage your book efficiently, and provide a patient-focused service whilst maintaining patient access.

Not all the tips are likely to be applicable to your practice: you will need to consider which ones are relevant to the type of population you serve.
The tips are divided into three groups. You can pick and mix to suit your practice and your patient population.

**Structure**
- Zoning
- Make time for urgent care
- Realistic appointment times

**Managing patient flow**
- School holidays
- All day opening
- Early mornings & evenings
- Triage

**Practice administration**
- Use email, mobile phones & social media
- Booking next appointments
- Keep a standby list
- Seek patient feedback
Structure Tip No 1: Zoning

Have a strategy for managing your book:
- Urgent slots
- Oral health assessments (OHAs)
- Treatment
- Interim care
- Oral health reviews (OHRs)

Efficiency can be maximised by splitting up each day into different zones setting aside time for:
- A day full of OHAs can limit access for patients requiring treatment
- A full day of RCTs can cause problems if there is insufficient supply of the right type of materials or equipment
Structure Tip No 2: Make time for urgent care

Always include urgent slots each day

- Allow time for urgent care every day to ensure patient satisfaction and provide good access
- Keeping urgent slots to the end of the morning session allows clinicians catch up time if no patients turn up

Evidence indicates that the requirement for urgent care remains fairly constant

- Map the pattern in your practice over, say, 6 weeks, to work out the number of slots you need each day and when to have them

Patients in pain who cannot get a same day appointment may go elsewhere to get treatment

- Whilst these patients will not be deducted from the practice’s capitated list if they seek care from another NHS dental practice, they would prefer to be treated by the practice they normally attend. This encourages patient loyalty
Structure Tip No 3: Set realistic appointment times

Agree as a practice team what is a realistic time to allow for each type of appointment:

- The reception team can then structure the appointment book taking account of all the clinicians working across a particular day.

Don’t mix up appointments for oral health assessments (OHAs) and oral health reviews (OHRs):

- Appointments for OHRs should require less time.
Managing Patient Flow Tip No 1: School holidays

Make use of school holidays!
- Targeting family or children’s appointments during school holidays helps to reduce patients failing to attend (FTAs)
- If a dentist is on holiday and there is a spare surgery…. run OHE clinics staffed by suitably qualified EDDNs

Where possible book family appointments
- Send a reminder the day beforehand
- If it’s a very long appointment slot, you might wish to consider a quick telephone call to check the family will be attending
- Ask the patients to arrive 10/15 minutes early to complete the medical and social History forms. Alternatively share the forms with the patient before the appointment
Managing Patient Flow Tip No 2: Open all day

If possible, avoid closing at lunch times, by staggering performers’ and staff lunch breaks

- This relieves pressure at reception at the start and end of “traditional” lunchtimes
- As a minimum ensure that phones are manned over the lunch period

This tip may not be suitable for smaller practices

- Create a separate staff room where staff can eat their lunch
Managing patient flow Tip No 3: Early morning and evening appointments

Opening before 9.00 am and closing after 6.00pm once or twice a week will help to capture commuters

• For example, consider a start early/finish early day (7am – 3pm) once a week... or the reverse
• Even some staff will love it!

Offering this type of flexibility is good customer service....

• ...but consider what would best suit your practice population
• ... it may also help boost your capitation
Managing Patient Flow Tip No 4: Use triage

Develop a triage system that the reception team can use to efficiently manage patients requiring an urgent appointment.

A triage system is simply a set of patient centred questions to determine:

- The severity of the problem
- When the patient should be seen
- The most appropriate pain management advice
- The most appropriate clinician to see the patient
Practice Administration Tip No 1: Use email/mobile phones and social media

Most patients now use mobile phones, email and social media websites such as Facebook

- Collect and use patients’ email addresses and mobile phone numbers - some dental software systems enable this information to be mandatory for reception to collect
- Find out if the patient uses social media websites as this may be their preferred means of communication

Social media websites can be a useful way of communicating messages to your patients, for example:

- Appointment reminders
- New practice services
- New members of staff
- Changes to the practice
- Seeking patient feedback
Practice Administration Tip No 2: Booking next appointments

- Always do this for treatment/stabilisation appointments
- To avoid appointment book congestion, you may wish to send a recall asking patients to get in touch regarding appointments for interim care or OHR
- It’s quicker, easier and more successful at retaining patients - best of all, it’s cheaper!

Book the next appointment as the patient leaves the practice

- ......more than once and by different methods
- Evidence shows that patients respond better to reminders than recalls

Then send reminders....
Practice Administration Tip No 3: Keep a standby list

- Cancelled appointments are inevitable – so plan for them!
- You may also find it useful to record the pattern of FTAs over a month or so you know what to expect
- Keep note of patients who are able to attend at short notice and fill cancelled appointments
- Maintain a standby list to help minimise wasted appointment time (most software systems can do this)
Practice Administration Tip No 4: Seek patient feedback

Ask patients what they think about your appointments system
- Conduct a mini-survey
- Use a comments/suggestion box
- Consult your patients - consider using Survey Monkey (free online)

Provide feedback
- Advise what changes are being made as a result of patient comments