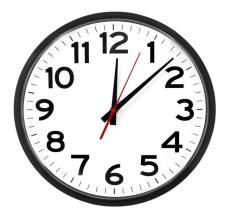# Time Management Strategies

Why is time management important?

For the patient:
- Respects any commitments they may have following the appointment
- Reduces information overload for the patient
- Ensures that your next appointment starts on time

For your colleagues:
- Respects your colleague's time, if they are seeing the patient after you

For you:
- Avoids burnout associated with missing breaks or working late
- Prevents working unpaid overtime when staying late

For your significant others:
- Improves work/life balance by ensuring time with spouses/children/significant others is not sacrificed when working unpaid overtime

Strategies for staying on time

1. Clarity regarding how much time you have

- Plan for the appointment to take about 10 to15 minutes less than the duration it's booked for. For example, plan to spend 45 minutes with the patient if the appointment is booked for 60 minutes. This will provide you with enough time to complete your charting and to prepare for the next appointment.
- Have a readily viewable clock, to stay aware of how much time is available. Consider a clock on the wall behind the patient, or a computer set-up where you can easily see the time.

2. Set and manage the agenda

2.1 Consider your agenda script at the start of the appointment. Here's an example that you can adapt to suit your speech preferences:

"*Hi I'm Dave, one of the dietitians. We'll be together for about 45 minutes today, if that suits you... (client comments)*
Today is a "get to know you" session. I'll ask a number of questions about your health and diabetes to find out how we can help you. I also want to learn what you want to talk about. Then we'll make a plan for how we'll address everything - for example,
• *You can have more appointments, either in person or by phone*
• *We might have handouts that I'll give you*
• *Or I might suggest online or in-person classes.*
How does that sound?...(client comments)
What would you like to put on the agenda to discuss?"

2.2 The Agenda Setting script should include:
• Your name and position
• Length of appointment (remember to advise that the time for the appointment is shorter than the time it's booked for, to all allow for charting)
• General purpose of appointment
• Your agenda items
• Patient agenda items
• Plans on how to address topics if time runs out
• Permission, e.g. "*How do you feel about that*?"

2.3 Agenda Considerations:
• The agenda is both verbal and written
    • The written version allows for items to be checked off as they're covered, allows related topics to be grouped together, and ensures that agenda items are covered.
• Write down all topics and questions before starting to address them
    • Patients often mention their most pressing question last. Getting a complete list ensures that the most important questions are answered
• The agenda might need re-prioritization and re-negotiation as you go. If time is running short, it's OK to defer or refer topics if necessary.

3. Keep priorities in mind

There can be a temptation to want to answer every question as it arises. It's OK to defer or refer topics, if necessary. Remember that prioritizing topics on the agenda is a shared responsibility, so be sure to negotiate.

When negotiating agenda items, you may consider saying something like "*That is an important topic, and we do need to discuss it at some point. I'm going to write that down, so that I don't forget to cover it. Is it OK with you if I give you a handout about that, and we can talk about it later today or at our next appointment? Right now, though, I want to make sure that I tell you about ___ (e.g. low blood sugars, how to recognize them, and how to treat them).*"

4. Re-prioritize if necessary and handle detours respectfully

Topics that were not on your original agenda might arise. If that happens, take a few seconds to re-prioritize and decide which direction to take:

1. **Do it** – if the topic is important to cover now, or if the patient would like to defer other topics to cover this one. Be deliberate and transparent in your intention to defer other topics. You might say, "*I'm glad that you told me about ___ (e.g. your planned camping trip next week). My thought is that we should discuss this more fully now, and we can talk about ___ (e.g. the type 1 diabetes tax deduction) later. The information is in your red folder for you to read about, and you can jot down any questions you have for us to discuss next time.*"

2. **Defer it** – if there are more pressing topics to cover in the visit, you might suggest that the new topic be deferred to the next appointment. Remember that the prioritizing topics on the agenda is a shared responsibility, so be sure to negotiate. You might say, "*We do need to talk about ___ (e.g. your trip to Mexico in March), but there are still a few items on our agenda that I feel are more pressing. Is it OK with you if we talk about them first, and then if time runs out, we can make a plan to cover that topic later?*"

3. **Refer it** – if the topic is not urgent and can be addressed in another way, for example, by a colleague, referencing a website, or with a class or handout. For example, you might say "*We have a very good handout describing ___ (e.g. the portion sizes of carbohydrate choices (provide handout)). I'd like you to read it over and bring it with you to your appointment with the dietitian next week. Please keep and bring a food record also. Write down any questions that come up.*"

5. Keep an eye on the time

5.1 Transitional phrases help you and the patient in keeping track of where you are in the appointment. The include phrases like:
- Related to the topic of _____ (e.g. low blood sugar), I'd like to review _____ (e.g our driving guidelines).
- Do you have any further questions about that? <No> Let's switch gears, then and talk about ____.
- Let's take a look at the agenda topics we recorded at the beginning, and see what else we should address today. Shall we discuss _____?

5.2 Consider referencing the time remaining in transitional phrases. For example, you might say:
"I see that we have ____ minutes left. There are still these 4 topics that you had mentioned wanting to discuss today. We have time to talk about (1) of the agenda items. For the others, I can provide resources for you to review, and we can revisit the topics at our next visit. Which topic would you like to discuss today….."