



GENERAL ACUPUNCTURE

Six Time-Thieves to Slay

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The old saying "time is money" also applies to the business of acupuncture. As much as you continue to offer top-notch work it's important to take a step back now and again to assess your time management. These six time-thieves can eat up a tremendous portion of your time, but if remedied you can make your practice substantially more lucrative.

Scheduling: Your Off-Time

If you are starting out you may want to be more flexible with your time as you're hungry for experience and amassing a clientele. However, your goal is to get to the point where you are in control of your time and you are only working when you want to work. This will allow you time to properly recharge, spend more time with family and friends, and run your weekly errands.

When you're first getting started, offer a wide range of available time slots to cater to new patients' schedules. As you build a client base, you can start to regain control of your schedule. Perhaps this means not offering appointments outside of 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. (or whatever your preferred working hours are).

The In-Between Time

A four-hour day can turn into an eight-hour day if your scheduling is too spread out. Figure out how much time you need between patients to process a payment, write your notes, and clean up your treatment room. If that's 15-minutes, your goal is to not have more than 15-minutes of down time between patients (aside from your scheduled breaks, like for lunch). By reducing down time, you'll be able to earn more money in less time.

To accomplish this, work with your patients to find a mutually beneficial time. So if you have an

appointment from 9 a.m. to 10 a.m. and you need 15-minutes of clean-up time (bringing you to 10:15 a.m.), then if you get a call asking for an 11 a.m. appointment, ask the patient if they can do 10:15 a.m. or as close to it as you can get. If you are working for someone else and they are handling your schedule, make sure you have a conversation about scheduling expectations and optimization.

Your Travel Time



For mobile acupuncturists, travel is not only a matter of time, but also cost, with gas, tolls, parking, and car maintenance to consider. Don't let the time thief of extra travel rob you of essential windows that can be used for more productive work, study, play or rest. If it's too difficult to travel to a patient, it's not worth the wasted time.

To control your amount of travel, start by choosing your service area. If a patient from outside of this zone requests an appointment, you should apply a surcharge to the appointment. This charge would be your hourly rate plus your costs. So if you have to travel 30 minutes outside of your service area then your surcharge is for 60 minutes of travel (you have to come back home too), plus gas, tolls, and parking. If the patient does not agree to the surcharge, that's okay. Your time is valuable and you don't want to set up a relationship with a new patient that is wasting an hour of your time for each appointment. At that point you may barely be breaking even. As an alternative, you can suggest the patient travels to you.

New Patients & Intake

Does this scenario sound familiar to you: a new patient arrives for their 10 a.m. appointment right at 10 a.m., forgetting that completing an intake form will take 10 minutes. You're left with the choice of

cutting their treatment short or delaying your next client—it's a lose-lose situation.

Prevent this time thief by clearly stating to new patients that they should arrive 10 minutes before their scheduled time. Better yet, let them arrive at their scheduled time, but account for the time needed by giving yourself an extra 10 minutes at the end of the appointment. Or even better yet, look into using practice management software that will send the intake form to the patient to fill out ahead of time.

Reduce the Paperwork

They say the only two guarantees in life are death and taxes, but an acupuncturist knows that paperwork should be added to the list. On top of your intake forms, you have SOAP notes and invoices/receipts to manage, and there are still acupuncturists who are doing this paperwork by hand. Not only does it take more time to write notes by hand, time that has to go into storing and retrieving paperwork can slowly add up to hours every week.

The simple solution to this time-thief is to invest in software that manages the paperwork for you. You'll be able to complete notes faster and retrieve past notes at the click of a button rather than going through a filing cabinet. You'll save physical space, and you'll forgo the stress that usually comes around tax time.

Cut the Chit-Chat

Some patients may use you as a *sounding board* to their problems, ideas, etc. This is perfectly acceptable if this is their means of relaxing during their treatment. But once the treatment is over and you have another client to care to, keep the chatting to a minimum so you stay on schedule.

The easy solution is to have a "go to" line for ending the conversation. It could be as simple as "I've enjoyed chatting with you. I can't keep my next patient waiting, but I would love to continue during our next session". Then, make a note in the patient's file about what you were talking about, and actually bring it up during the next session. They'll be impressed with your level of customer service. These six time-thieves are a small example of simple ways you can trim the fat and optimize your day to get the most out of your time.

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