

Difficult times call for increasing physician efficiency and productivity

In difficult economic times, increasing top-line revenue is a very important strategy. However, investing in risky new ventures, offices or equipment typically is not. How can you increase revenue quickly in a physician practice without investing heavily in time or fixed costs? By increasing physician efficiency and productivity. But how exactly do you do that? Well, you can start by reviewing your patient schedule and asking a few questions. Does the physician run on time? Are all the slots filled with the appropriate patient type? Are the support personnel scheduled appropriately to match the physician schedule? Let's take a closer look.

5 smart moves

To get started, review all opportunities to increase revenue without increasing a physician's hours or changing his or her clinical practice style. Here are five smart moves to consider:

1. Schedule the patient 10 to 15 minutes before the provider schedule time.

Scheduling this pre-schedule time will allow the patient to be registered and roomed with the nurse before the provider start time. The provider will, in turn, start the session on time and keep on track for the remainder of the day, allowing patients to be scheduled more appropriately with minimal wait times.

This may seem obvious; however, in a practice that runs a compact schedule, any patient delay for paperwork, running late or other issues can cause a large impact on the physician schedule and patient turnover. If your provider has a habit of starting the session late because of poor personal scheduling habits, determine the actual physician start time per session and schedule your patients accordingly 15 minutes before the actual start.

2. Know your provider's cancellation rate. Measure your cancellation rate by physician and set a specific goal to reduce the cancellations based on the reason for the cancellations. Then publish the cancellation rate and the goal for staff so that they can assist in decreasing the rate.

Knowing the average daily cancellation rate will better allow double booking and wave scheduling to accommodate any gaps in the schedule because of cancellations, no-shows and last-minute rescheduled appointments. You could also try implementing a "no show" policy to reduce no-show appointments, thus diminishing scheduling gaps.

3. Track provider/practice patterns. Some providers want to schedule heavily at the beginning of the session, while others like to schedule heavily in the middle, while yet others like to have a consistent flow of patients. When was the last time you reviewed the physician schedule with the providers?

Sit down with your providers now and quarterly to review the current schedule and have them map out what they want their days to be like. Include your front desk staff to provide input on what is actually occurring vs. what the providers may think is happening.

4. Increase practice capacity at lower costs. Look at the type of patient visits that you're spending time on. Ask yourself whether some of these visits could be handled by a nurse practitioner or provider assistant, which could free up some of the physician's time for the more acute cases.

Also consider coding your visits as green (most productive, clinically challenging, and financially positive) and red (add little to no value to the practice, don't fit with your practice style or mission). Review your green and red slots to see whether anything could be changed to increase your capacity while lowering costs and letting you practice in the style you would like.

5. Maximize room utilization. Review how you use your exam rooms to improve patient access. What worked in the past may not fit your new schedule template. Use the space available to its maximum potential, because increasing room use decreases the cost per square foot of the office. Redesigning patient flow and using any dead space for more efficient patient flow are ways to maximize workspace.

Available time

Most practices have available time in providers' schedules that could be used more efficiently. Working closely with the individual providers allows the staff to better understand scheduling habits and desires while allowing providers to work at a pace in which they're comfortable. And, ultimately, working more efficiently will increase productivity and boost the bottom line.