

Keep Your Medical Practice Running Amid a Pandemic!



Shifts in patient volumes, elective procedure cancellations, supply shortages, staffing concerns and much more all require healthcare administrators to adapt. The best administrators guide their practices to evolve to new workflows to remain successful, rather than succumbing to competing pressures practices face during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The following areas are essential in helping medical practices not only evolve, but excel throughout the course of the COVID-19 pandemic:

1. Planning, decision-making and crisis management

The ability to act quickly and decisively and make plans that have both short- and long-term financial implications can make a huge difference in medical practice operations. Adapting and pivoting to the daily changes at both a federal and state level is essential to help a practice to continue operations while offering patient care and protecting providers and staff.

2. Managing volumes and revenue

An April 7 *Stat* poll found that 97% of practices reported a drop in patient volume amid COVID-19, and more than 70% of the practices reported said volumes declined by 50% or more.

The long-term viability of a practice is dependent on the ability to continue to see patients throughout the crisis in addition to any federal/state assistance that may be offered. Continuity of care for patients also is crucial, as maintaining access to care helps to prevent issues with medical malpractice relating to patient abandonment.

Telehealth services have proven to be popular options to see patients as quickly as possible during the pandemic. Many practices have reported shifting some or all patient visits to telehealth. Practices with multiple locations seeing patients suspected of having COVID-19 have redirected those patients to a dedicated location to handle those cases to limit the risk of exposure.

3. A/R and collections

Keeping the billing office running during this time is challenging yet crucial for maintaining a tight revenue cycle. Keeping up with documentation and coding updates during this time is also important as the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) has released guidance on billing and reimbursement for treating COVID-19. The American Medical Association (AMA) has also added unique codes for reporting novel coronavirus testing.

Stress to your staff the goal of getting as close to collecting 100% of the practice's outstanding A/R as possible to boost cash during a period of reduced patient volumes. Success also can be measured through many metrics: total denials received, total appealed, cases not appealed and why, total cases overturned and associated financial impact, second-level denials and failed appeals. Document the data associated in a denials management program.

4. Expenses and financial obligations

Carefully analyze all fixed and variable expenses to keep only the bare minimum of expenses being paid out. Even with fixed expenses such as a building lease payment, it may be possible to work with the building owner to obtain some leniency for when payments will be due.

For variable expenses there are expenses that can be cancelled or put on hold, such as waiting room cable/satellite TV service or paper shredding services that could be replaced with a small shredder owned by the practice. Even for utilities or other mandatory expenses, consider contacting the providers to see how they are willing to assist you financially; they may be offering services (e.g., higher speed internet) at significantly reduced prices for the foreseeable future. Determine any possible rate changes for employee health/dental insurance benefits to adjust for any potential increase. All these efforts will dramatically increase how long a practice can operate with a reduced revenue stream.

5. Optimizing PPE use

Personal protective equipment (PPE) is used every day. With recent shortages and supply-chain interruptions, it is important to follow guidelines on how best to handle PPE and identify alternative ways to provide care safely for both providers and patients.

Track how quickly you are using supplies. The CDC's ["burn rate" calculator](#) will help determine your average consumption rate for each type of PPE and allow you to estimate how long remaining supplies will last.

6. Staffing and HR

Your staff is the most important part of your organization, and it is very important to communicate often and openly during this busy and scary time. Think creatively as to how and where providers and staff may be used to minimize layoffs, furloughs and terminations, and work with legal counsel, as necessary, to review the rules in your state regarding workforce reductions.

Practice leaders should understand the employment provisions in the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA), including the Department of Labor's April 6 temporary regulations for implementing emergency FMLA and sick leave under the law.

Remember that there will be a time when operations return to normal, and you will need to be prepared to staff appropriately.

7. Business insurance coverage

It is important to understand what is and what is not covered by your business insurance during a pandemic. You will need to consult legal counsel on your options under your existing policy and what happens when there are government orders that may restrict or govern your business operations.

Just as with a natural disaster, a public health emergency is potentially time to evaluate the interruption of business coverage within your practice's existing insurance policies.

8. Practice workflows and consolidation of workloads

During any period of tight cash flow, it is critical to maximize efficiency in every aspect of practice operations. Cross-training and consolidating workloads will enhance a practice's ability to be nimble and respond to the constantly changing environment. For many staff this can be maximizing the duties they perform from home if teleworking, or being flexible to respond to needed tasks in the practice facility. Utilizing Lean management techniques to reduce waste and creating new documented workflow diagrams can improve efficiencies and revenue while keeping hours worked to a minimum.

Contact Tower today for more information regarding business support for your practice. Please contact Tower Physicians Solutions at 630-243-5731 or email us at <mailto:info@TowerPS.com> Learn more at: <https://towerps.com>

