

New Year's Resolutions for Physicians



Like many, you might start your January with a few New Year's resolutions in mind, whether you're looking to get healthier, travel more or learn a new skill. But don't leave your medical practice off your list! Even if your practice is thriving, there's always room for improvement. Not quite sure where to start? Think about adding these ideas to your list of resolutions.

Improve medical practice operational efficiency

What are the tasks that require the most staff time, and can you use technology to reduce the burden? For example, do patients and other providers frequently call the practice asking for the fax number and address? If so, include this information on your website and in your initial voicemail prompt. Do new patients often forget to come in early to fill out paperwork? If so, send paper forms in the mail before the visit, or go paperless using technology that prompts patients to provide information electronically.

Reduce claims rejections

A 5%-10% denial rate is industry average; however, keeping the denial rate below 5% is more advantageous because it promotes smooth cash flow. Do you know your overall denial rate? What about your denial rates by payer? Pay attention to the remark code for every denial, and look for trends. Even one small change (e.g., verifying insurance before rendering services) can reduce denials significantly.

Be proactive in your patient satisfaction efforts.

Are you measuring patient satisfaction in your practice? If not, why? It's the most concrete way to find out what patients want and whether you're meeting their needs. And it's far more cost-effective to please the patients you already have than to try to attract new ones.

Some ways to gauge patient satisfaction include:

- Monitoring your online reviews. No, anonymous ratings aren't the most accurate picture of your practice, but you should at least know what patients are saying about you online and see if any themes emerge.
- Asking patients verbally. Instead of asking yes/no questions, get more specific, such as, "How was the appointment-scheduling process for you?"
- Conducting a brief patient satisfaction survey. This could be as simple as a short, automatically generated form emailed to patients after their appointments.
- Asking new patients how they found you. If they were referred by another patient, that's a good indication your current patient is happy with your practice. Seek that person out and thank them.

Go paperless

Even with EHR in place, many physicians are still flooded with paper, including cover letters, intake forms, referrals, outside imaging, lab slips, and more. Look for ways to decrease your paper footprint, including the use of email to send patient registration forms.

Make EHR work for you

Many physicians complain that EHR makes their practice of medicine more challenging by serving up tons of information and burying the most relevant patient details. Additionally, doctors complain that EHR detracts from the patient dynamic by decreasing facetime. Improving the EHR experience could involve programming customized templates, forms and plug-ins, with an eye toward efficiency. Another solution involves experimenting with different types of EHR systems to figure out which one works best for your practice.

Practice preventive medicine

Even if you're a specialist, you can still engage your patients in preventive health counseling. Remember to view the patient in holistic terms. A few words of advice on diet, nutrition, and exercise can do a world of good when coming from a compassionate authority figure. You may also consider engaging the community in preventive health counseling through attending events such as health fairs.

Many New Year's resolutions don't "stick," but if you commit to making a few specific, measurable changes in your practice, you're sure to see a difference this year. Learn more at: www.towerps.com

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