

Improve Medical Group Performance



Interested in quickly improving the clinical and financial performance of your medical group or practice? It starts by building a more engaging, patient-focused culture in your organization.

That's the key takeaway of a recently released [report](#) from the Medical Group Management Association (MGMA), which found that fostering a patient-centric culture was the most common business strategy among the nation's top-performing medical groups and practices. The study was based on an analysis of more than 3,000 medical groups identified as high-performing in at least one of four categories: operations, productivity, profitability and value.

As this and similar studies have shown, when clinical practices proactively take steps to improve their operations, processes and patient interactions, patients are more efficiently served. This increases patient and staff satisfaction, heightens patient compliance and retention rates, and leads to improved patient outcomes. Truly, a win-win for all.

Charting Your Clinical Success

So why aren't more medical groups taking steps to become increasingly patient-centric? Habit and overconfidence are two big reasons. Despite the fact that every other consumer-facing industry – from automotive and appliance manufacturers to retail and hospitality – has for years measured its success based on customer satisfaction, the health care industry has been slow to do likewise. Why? Because that's the way things have been done for years in

health care, and because there's not been a compelling reason to change until now.

With pay-for-performance contracts now significantly affecting provider reimbursements, it makes sense for clinics and medical groups to make patients the focal point of care delivery and revenue cycle strategies. It doesn't typically take a huge transformation to make a patient-centric culture a reality. Incremental gains are possible, as long as staff members are committed to improvements.

Incremental improvement was precisely the approach taken by the specialty clinic of a major health care system which had been experiencing multiple administrative performance issues. Patient calls to the clinic were going unanswered or dropped. Appointment scheduling was difficult and time-consuming. Clinicians were spending more time hearing about patient experience issues than addressing clinical needs. Changes needed to be made before patients began bolting for competitors. The steps this clinic took to improve its performance can be readily duplicated by any other medical group seeking similar gains.

Seven Steps to Better Patient Service

Based on the specialty clinic's operational improvement efforts over several months, consider the following seven steps for your organization:

1. **Hire an external consultant with clinical operations experience** – Rather than taking your staff members or clinicians away from their areas of expertise, recognize the long-term value of bringing in an external resource, experienced in clinical operations, to objectively assess, recommend and help implement your needed clinical improvements.
2. **Assess “current state” versus “desired state” operations** – Get input from clinic managers, staff members and physicians to gain perspectives on what is working well operationally versus what is not. Supplement these interviews by observing the workflows of multiple clinical and non-clinical staff members and reviewing patient visit documentation.
3. **Determine patients' specific needs** – Don't make assumptions about what patients want or need. Ask them. Find out about the backgrounds of your typical patients, including their likes and dislikes, and determine how to best meet their needs.
4. **Be open to creative solutions** – Your external consultant will likely propose several solutions to improve your operations. Be open to new or novel ways of creatively addressing systemic issues. For example, the specialty clinic considered outsourcing its patient access services to a professional call center better-equipped to efficiently handle such work.
5. **Build a culture of “owning” patient experience** – Part of the reason patient experience issues arise is because health care employees often insufficiently take personal responsibility for ensuring a positive patient experience. Rather than perpetuating an “it's not my job” workplace mindset, instill in staff members

a need to “own” each patient who comes in. For example, instead of pointing patients down the hall to an exam room, walk and visit with them until they reach their destination. Instead of assuming patients fully understand their self-care instructions, discuss the instructions with them to ensure understanding.

6. **Design an improvement implementation roadmap** – To ensure a timely, efficient rollout of any changes needed for operational improvements, design an implementation roadmap specifying the high-level activities required to achieve your desired improvements. Specify who will be doing what by when so that all involved have a better idea of timing and responsibilities. Strive to minimize or eliminate patient visit disruptions.
7. **Create a metrics dashboard** – Based on industry best practices as well as your own goals, create a specific dashboard of metrics to monitor and track operational performance. These might include measures of patient volume, productivity or quality assurance. Regularly review the metrics dashboard. Recognize and reward groups and/or individuals whose work is improving operations. Conversely, address issues with groups and/or individuals whose work insufficiently meets performance standards.

In Conclusion

As can be seen in the suggested steps above, creating a more patient-focused workplace does not mean having a “patient-is-always-right” culture. You wouldn’t automatically start handing out antibiotics at the door to any patient who requests them. It does mean, however, putting patients at the center of your workplace culture, getting staff member on board with any needed operational improvements to improve patient care, and working to ensure the type of patient experience that you would want for yourself or a loved one.