



YOUR PRACTICE / BUSINESS

Behind the Wheel of Your Practice: 6 Tips to Maintain Forward Progress

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How fun is it to be in practice when everything is running smoothly? Patient visits are consistent and growing, over-the-counter collections are doing great, third-party payers are reimbursing without issue and your team is efficiently moving full speed ahead. You are driving forward with your practice, feeling empowered and completely enjoying the journey. The skies are clear, roads are open and the scenery before you is amazing!

However, it's those things with your practice which *aren't* going so smoothly and efficiently that are disempowering and that can cause you to lose confidence and control. Sometimes this occurs over time; other times, it seems to happen all at once.



Now, you find that you may be driving in or near a storm - the roads are daunting and you may not be able to see through the fog before you. In these instances, providers find themselves still in the driver's seat of their practice, but possibly careening off the road. You can't hit the brakes, you can't seem to regain control, you shouldn't close your eyes to what's before you and you can't jump out. Your only option are to buckle up, hold on and make decisions that will help you to regain composure and control.

Fortunately, in practice, you have more than a few split seconds to make decisions. I speak with providers all the time who comment on how "the wheels are falling off," "we've somehow moved off the path we were on" and other things of that same nature. Like all roads you take, there are eventually going to be turns, bumps along the way and hills to climb. You are bound to encounter detours, construction or other obstacles that may slow your forward progress. So, what are some keys that can help practices to productively maintain forward progress? Here are six of the most important:

1. Be Aware of Your Surroundings

The only thing that is constant is change. While it is so easy to focus only on what's in front of you, by neglecting to acknowledge change that may be happening around you, you miss the opportunity to more efficiently identify things that may impact your practices, such as changes in state guidelines or payer policy guidelines, training needs of new team members, etc.

Being cognizant of what's taking place around you will help you to prepare, adapt and transition as may be necessary to minimize disruption to your practice.

2. Watch for Warning Lights

What gets monitored gets managed and maintained. Regularly review important reports, such as collections, aging accounts receivable, detailed weekly / monthly statistics, etc. These reports serve

as outstanding diagnostic tools for your practice.

This "dashboard," if you will, when utilized and monitored properly, identifies change, progress, weaknesses and strengths. This will help you to find and fix practice obstacles sooner rather than later, identify areas for necessary training and much more.

3. Check Under the Hood

Inefficiencies in one area will create a domino effect of inefficiencies in others. Without addressing the system and making repairs, you may eventually find you're no longer able to move forward; or that perhaps there's smoke billowing out from under the hood. What gets focused on can get fixed.

Without looking at the many moving parts to your practice and practice revenue cycle system, you are certain to be losing time, money and maybe even confidence in your team or practice as a whole as a result of unattended issues.

4. Don't Forget to Fuel Up

As with any machine, your practice must be refueled or recharged from time to time to keep it moving. In practice, this translates to team meetings, role-based training and attending seminars and webinars, along with other opportunities that educate and refresh your teammates.

I find this to be very important for both new and seasoned team members. Often when you *assume* you already have everything you need, simple oversights, mistakes or industry changes occur that may go for periods of time without being discovered or fully understood.

5. Know Where You're Expecting to "Arrive"

As the saying goes, "If you don't know where you're going, any road will get you there."

Establishing measurable targets to work toward will help to direct your path and build confidence and motivation in your practice. Like the GPS that directs your path on the roadways, well-defined plans and goals will serve as necessary direction and accountability. Of course, identifying a measurable destination will also allow you to more easily re-route if needed, while minimizing the impact to your practice and team.

6. Remember: Progress Is Progress

While speed is often the preferred method to travel anywhere, as with anything, too much speed comes with significant risk. Instead, you'll likely find that steady and manageable progress is far more efficient and thorough - and much less stressful. Additionally, the long-term benefits are generally much greater.

Many health care providers don't initially realize all the additional moving parts to their business. As a result, the road can be bumpy and filled with lessons of trial and error. Of course, this can be costly to your practice in terms of time, money and other vulnerabilities.

So, while you're the one behind the wheel of your practice, you may find that even a great driver needs assistance with navigation in order to be as efficient and profitable as possible. You should be enjoying the journey!

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