Big Practices

Nothing stays the same. If you are not growing, you will not be earning. Even if you are a one practice, solo practitioner, you still need to grow. In this case, it does not mean you have to get a bigger office or even own several practices. It means that you constantly need to get better and better at what you do. You will need better and new equipment, provide better services, and introduce new modalities to the practice. Otherwise, you will simply be outdated.

For the multi-doctor, multi-practitioner practice, the purpose of growth is to serve more patients in your community and of course, increase the bottom line. However, here is the true key to the larger office. That is, to become bigger and better WITHOUT working harder. It is the only way. If you are stressing more and working harder, and staying at work later, then, really, what is the point? Our practice is there to feed our lifestyle and not to send us to an early grave.

What are the three top problems of a big practice?

1) Communication
2) Compliance
3) Coordination

Communication: The inability of one office to communicate with another office. The owner or owners have to implement duplication in order for a business with multiple offices or franchises to be successful. It is how Ray Kroc started McDonald's; the first franchise of it's kind. Everything must be done the same way. It is impossible to run a large business if one office is doing one thing, and the other office is doing another. If every practice is not on the same page, then it will be very difficult to manage the business.

Meetings are vital to proper communication between managers and staff and between staff members. Gotomeeting.com offers the ability to view all members that are attending a meeting, even in different locations. Basecamp.com can allow you to set up your meeting agenda and add vital documents and even training videos for all staff members to see and to add their comments. You can also Skype your staff into a meeting.

Then there is communication between the doctor and the medical assistants. How do you communicate what instruments, equipment, or supplies you need for each patient at the time of their visit? There are numerous systems out there, such as using a flag system or intercoms that use voice and/or chimes to communicate with the medical assistants. Whatever you do, do not give verbal orders. Everyone is busy and trying to multi-task, which in it self, is impossible. Verbal orders get misunderstood or forgotten. Every order needs to be a written order. Use a whiteboard or a post-it note that you stick to the chart holder, or forms. Like an xray requisition form, that tells the MA which views you want taken. You will decrease mistakes and increase efficiency this way.

A staff member requests time off. This needs to be done on a written form and informs the manager the requested days off and who will cover their position at that time.

Compliance: This is a big issue for big practices. How do you get everyone to follow the systems and protocols you set forth? The answer is very simple. Training, training and more training. In addition, there has to be a system of accountability.

Staff will need to know what is expected of them, and what is their individual purpose. Then they need to learn how to accomplish their duties. Every staff member will keep statistics for every purpose they have. For example, the front desk person is responsible for keeping the appointment book full with productive patients and to collect all monies due at the time of service. These functions are measured by three different statistics. They are, percentage of appointments kept, the total number of patient visits per week, and the amount of money collected over the desk. These statistics are put on a graph so one can see the trend. Accountability is achieved at the weekly staff meetings where the employee will discuss her graph and inform you why the graph went up or down or stayed the same. This will then help you relay to the staff member what are the one or two things she needs to focus on this week, in order to achieve her individual goals.

Again, never order someone to do something verbally. If it is a project, ask the employee when she thinks she can get it done by, and then put it in writing. The employee will have to report back to you on the progress of the project, but you know this might not happen. So, you need approach the staff member on the project's progress. This is a must. If the deadline comes and goes, and you do not say anything, then the staff member will think deadlines are not important to you.

Coordination: Have you ever gone into a store or a business and one hand does not know what the other hand is doing? If you take the best businesses and the best sports teams, what you will see is excellent coordination between team members. One person knows exactly what the other person is doing. Just like when a team trades a player, when you lose a staff member, it will take some time for the new member to be fully integrated into the system and learn her role.

The best way to handle coordination is through a complete organizational chart. See the example from Brandt Gibson, DPM below.

Every department has a leader. Each department may have a sub-department with different staff members appointed to different tasks. Every department leader and its members must learn what the other departments need from them. For example, the financial staff will need all patient demographic information entered into the computer accurately by the front desk staff member. Otherwise, payment will be delayed, and it is the job of the Financial Administrator to collect all monies in a timely fashion. The front desk needs to know any past balances that a patient might owe and this information needs to be entered by the financial team. It is the job of the front desk to collect all monies owed, even past balances, but her job will be made harder if she does not know why the patient owes the money or even how much they owe.

When a new staff member is hired, this new employee should be introduced to every team member, and that team member should explain to the new hire what he or she do. The new employee will be trained in each department to learn what is expected of him or her.

Your practice systems will change as you grow. You cannot be doing the same thing you did when you had one office, as when you have three or four offices. Find ways to improve the flow of the offices, and to increase communication, compliance, and coordination.