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The Physician- Office Manager Relationship
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You have a special individualized relationship with each and every person in your life: your child, spouse, mother, father, best friend. It's obvious that each of these unique relationships must be nurtured in order for them to grow and prosper. There are countless books, magazines, blogs, websites and more dedicated solely to a parent's relationship with their child. There are just as many, if not more resources for the intimate relationship shard between you and your partner. While the world is constantly trying to teach us how to be better parents and spouses, one vital relationship is so often over looked, causing unneeded mayhem and anarchy in our lives- the relationship of the physician and office manager.

I understand you did not swear 'till death do we part' with this person, but the relationship you share with your office manager is vital for your success and sanity. Your office manager RUNS your practice. He or she is the administrator of all staff and oversees every area of the office. Your OM is the liaison between staff, patients, and physicians. If you have a healthy relationship with your manager, you are more likely to have healthy relationships with your team and patients because your OM can handle all the 'dirty work' and make you look like the amazing physician you are. This person removes you from the equation when patients complain about their bill, team members argue amongst each other, and personnel fight over hours. These are all things you don't need to spend your precious time on; your job is to comprehensively treat patients. Your office manager can handle the rest, saving you from the unneeded stress.

The office manager maintains the productivity, work flow, and function of the practice. Your manager is responsible for keeping everyone in the practice happy. Happy employees are productive employees. If the OM keeps your staff, patients, and YOU happy, you will have fewer headaches, more time with your family, and keep your sanity. Your manager handles all personnel problems, freeing up your time and allowing you to complete your tasks in a timely manner. With your office manager overseeing every aspect of your practice, you will be able to leave at 5 pm, with all notes and billing complete!

Obviously, a productive office is usually a profitable office. Your manager will be a big investment, but the return on investment you will receive is priceless. Not only will he or she motivate your entire team to give it their all, but he or she will allow you to see more patients and treat more comprehensively. We've all heard 'work smarter not harder'; your manager is an essential part of this concept.

Children and spouses don't come with handbooks or recipes and either do office managers. These are some tips I believe will create a healthy relationship between you and your manager:

1) **DON'T MANAGE your office manager.** Honestly it should be the other way around. This individual is running all aspects of your practice, and you are a huge one of those aspects. Work together and listen to your OM in order to increase productivity. Allow your office manager to manage, and this means allowing them to manage you too. My physician understands that when I politely remind her new patient phone calls need to be made, it's not me trying to boss around my boss, it's me trying to make the practice the best that it can be. As the owner she can appreciate that and we have a relationship where we can both suggest tasks and duties to each other for the good of our practice.
2) **TRUST your office manager.** Believe me, I know this is hard. But acknowledge that you can't do this all alone and you need a partner. Your manager is your partner. Rem Jackson, founder and CEO of Top Practices, LLC, explains that if you had to jump out of an airplane there are some employees that you would feel safer jumping out without a pack than jumping with a parachute THEY gave you. Then there's your office manager, the person that has ALWAYS had your back; that's the person you would go to first and you would jump out even if they gave you a watermelon because you trust them and know they are there for you. You have confidence that the watermelon will explode into parachute, jetpack, or something, because your manager has always come through for you. Give this person a chance to prove they can be trusted. This should be a two-way street though; your manager should trust you just as much as you trust him or her.
3) **UTILIZE your office manager.** This person is here to make your life easier- allow them to do so! Delegate. He or she will make sure everything gets accomplished up to your standards and in a timely manner. You are the physician, the $500 per hour employee, only do physician duties and delegate the rest. You shouldn't pay someone $500 per hour to take out the trash or scrub nail nippers. Also, your manager is the one other person who knows how you feel and can share the stress with you. You don't have to shoulder everything yourself. Your manager will be able to offer you feasible solutions to challenges, or just listen to you vent if needed (my physician and I are both women- we need time to vent once in a while).
4) **EMPOWER your office manager.** Some team members may have resistance being lead by someone other than the doctor. Back your manager up and let your staff know this is the person they go to with questions and concerns. Your manager should be the person interviewing, hiring, and firing, so the staff understands the chain of command from their first encounter with the office to their last. Give your manager the tools needed to do their job.

So what happens if you are really truly following this recipe, trying to have the best relationship possible, but it's still not working out? You don't feel like you can go to your OM with any and all concerns, he or she is creating more work for you rather than making your life less stressful, or this person has shown he or she cannot be trusted. Are you sure this person is the right guy or gal for the job? Your manager needs to:

- Support you *and* your practice 100%

- View the practice as his or her own
- Be dedicated and devoted

For example, when making decisions for the practice, the office manager should evaluate the situation from the standpoint of a manager, not as a beneficiary. If your manager keeps trying to put more and more of the budget into their payroll and benefits, he or she may be in it for their own good versus the good of the office.

A good office manager will view the practice as their own. This person will dedicate all the tools needed- time, effort, blood, sweat and tears- to make your practice the best it can be. When I speak about Heartland Foot and Ankle Associates I constantly refer to it as MY practice, I have ownership and pride in this practice, just as your OM should. I may not monetarily 'own' any of the practice, but it is my home.

These are some qualities I believe all office managers should possess:

1) Managing is a people job; she better put people first. Managing is what you do with people, not to people.
2) Her # 1 job better be to create happy employees and happy patients. Expenditures, income, etc. should not be her first priority- people should.
3) She better walk her talk. Great managers lead by example. She should want to LEAD your team, not manage them. She should encourage and inspire and not be afraid to get her hands dirty.
4) She should criticize quietly and compliment loudly. She should build a personalized relationship with each team member and gain their respect and trust. She will know how to motivate and reward each different employee.
5) She should continuously go above and beyond. Ethics should be the foundation of all her decisions, she should make a difference in employees and patients lives, and hold herself to the highest standards in the office.

Your office manager is your right hand man- or woman. This is your go-to person. In order for your office to be productive, harmonious, and profitable, it is essential you have a healthy relationship with your office manager.