

DEDICATED TO EXCELLENCE

PRACTICE MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES
Improving Office Efficiency - Decreasing Stress and Strain

Hectic days with overbooked appointment schedules, difficulty returning calls, floods of paperwork, repeated interruptions, exam rooms not adequately stocked, nurses unavailable when needed, poor staff morale...these are some of the common symptoms of inefficient work flow in office practice.

Doctors are trained to respond to patients' symptoms actively through carefully thought-out processes of diagnosis and treatment. Doctors receive little, if any, training in responding to symptoms of inefficient work flow in their own offices.

Until recent years, advances in techniques to improve work flow in other industries had not been applied widely in healthcare. Now, there is a wealth of experience in healthcare that adapting such techniques often saves time, saves resources, and improves staff morale. Patient outcomes and satisfaction can also be positively impacted.

The concepts and tools for improving office efficiency are relatively straightforward. However, mastering them takes experience with repeated application. In addition, successful design and implementation require working as a team with your office staff. Since everyone in your office is engaged in work flow, everyone needs to be involved. This does mean that you have to meet as a team regularly (e.g. monthly, weekly, biweekly). Such a time commitment may seem impossible to carve out in the midst of already overloaded schedules. That investment will be returned greatly in reducing wasted effort and inefficiencies. A subsequent newsletter article will cover the topic of team work in more detail.

Additional resources regarding Practice Management can be found at: *Clinicalmicrosystem.org* and *IHI.org* (Institute for Healthcare Improvement)

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CONTACT US:

To request an appointment, ask a question, consult about an issue of concern or find out more about the resources & services available through the PAP:

Call us at 1-800-777-1323
(or via TDD at 1-800-777-4969)

Visit us on the Internet at:
www.FirstChoiceDoc.com

The First Choice Health Physician Assistance Program is dedicated to excellence in client care and customer service. We look forward to the opportunity to serve you anytime a need arises.

QUALITY, CONVENIENCE, & RELIABILITY

This publication is designed to provide accurate and authoritative information in regard to the subject matter covered. If specific health or medical advice or assistance is desired, the services of a licensed healthcare professional should be sought. The information in the First Choice Health PAP Quarterly Newsletter is not meant to replace the advice or expertise of your physician or healthcare provider. If you are experiencing health problems or contemplating lifestyle changes such as diet or exercise, consult your healthcare provider ahead of time to ensure your well being.

The PAP Quarterly Newsletter is published by
First Choice Health Physician Assistance Program

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Bringing Balance to Work, Home, and Life

Action Steps to Improving Office Efficiency

1. Identify key work processes (e.g. scheduling, messaging, check-in, rooming, prescriptions, medical records, etc.).
2. Prioritize the processes from most to least "problematic."
3. Choose a work process for initial focus. Don't necessarily choose the most problematic process to start with. You need some quick, easy wins.
4. For the chosen work process, create a "flow map." This is improvement jargon for simply listing the current steps in order from start to completion. You do not have to know the elaborate symbols often used to map out these steps. Note which steps truly add value for the patient.
5. Redesign the work process using the efficiency techniques listed in the adjacent box.
6. Test out the changes on a small scale for a short amount of time. Adjust the design as needed.
7. Decide when the process is ready to be adopted in your whole office.

Techniques ("Change Concepts") for Improving Office Efficiency

- Standardize work processes. Employees should all use the same process and same steps as much as possible. This reduces confusion, errors, and delay. Work flow problems are more easily identified and fixed.
- Simplify the process toward fewer steps and fewer people.
- Eliminate steps that do not add value for the customer.
- Eliminate waits and delays between steps.
- Optimize roles of staff to reduce unnecessary work demands on physicians. Shift tasks that do not require the physician to other staff members. Do the same, in turn, for nursing.
- Reduce interruptions. Record interruptions for one day including causes. Identify the work processes involved and revise them to eliminate interruptions.
- Don't "batch" work. Do work in continuous flow. For example, do not leave all documentation to the end of the day. Document each patient visit by the end of the visit. Change appointment lengths to accommodate this realistically.
- Synchronize all needed information with the patient and provider visit.
- Standardize exam room equipment and information.

Frequently Asked Questions

What's the difference between the online Work/Life Resources and real time Work/Life Consultation services available through the PAP Customer Service Team?

The online menu of Work/Life Resources at www.FirstChoiceDoc.com is available to all physician families served by First Choice Health PAP. The *Work/Life Resources* section of our site offers immediate access to trustworthy information in a single location. Out of respect for your time, the PAP makes high quality Work/Life content available as quickly and conveniently as the click of a mouse – simply enter the username and password shown in the Work/Life Resources circle. Your access to these articles, tools and tips is unlimited – 24/7.

Work/Life Consultation through the PAP can include access to expert specialty assessment services, including **Legal Consultation, Eldercare Consultation, Childcare Consultation, Financial Consultation, Personal & Family Mediation and Identity Theft Resolution.** Each organization decides which Work/Life Consultation services meet the needs of its physician families. To find out which Work/Life Consultation services are available to you and yours, ask your Medical Staff Office or contact the PAP. If your organization doesn't currently offer the Work/Life Consultation service you're interested in, we will let you know about relevant programs and resources that are available in your community.

Your Good Name and Resources

In the *Winter 2004* PAP Newsletter we discussed **Identity Theft** as an increasingly common source of consumer distress (see the article in the Newsletter section of the PAP Internet site). In today's mobile and "connected" world you also need to know that subscriber fraud – a variation of Identity Theft – is significant problem for consumers and businesses. Credit card fraud tops one billion dollars a year in the United States and the cellular services industry reports annual losses of \$150 million dollars as a result of subscriber fraud.

Subscriber Fraud occurs when a perpetrator opens an account, attaches to an existing account or activates a service by misusing someone else's personal or financial information. In 2005, according to the FTC, 53 percent of instances of fraud were for the purpose of hacking someone else's credit card account, and 27 percent were for the purpose of acquiring telecommunication services.

To minimize your vulnerability to subscriber fraud, be intentional about protecting your identification and account information – in public as well as online. Always pay close attention to the details of account statements and monthly invoices. If an account statement or a bill doesn't arrive in the mail when it's supposed to, contact the account administrator right away. Consider installing a USPS-approved locking mailbox. Protect the data on your computer by using a firewall (ask the PAP, it's not as complicated as you think), and beware of Internet and e-mail phishing schemes. Contact your bank or service provider immediately if you spot any account irregularities. Be safe, not sorry.

For additional resources and consultation on this and related consumer topics, contact First Choice Health at 1-800-777-1323 or visit the Work/Life Resources section of the PAP Internet site.

- Information from the Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau of the FCC and the Center for Problem-Oriented Policing was used in this article.



Family and Caregiving

Adoption
Parenting
Childcare
Teens
Older Adults



Daily Living

Financial
Legal
Safety
Fraud/Theft
Pets
Volunteers

Working Smarter

Being Effective
Accomplished Employee
Career Development
Career Transitions
Managing Stress



USERNAME:
firstchoice
PASSWORD:
health2005

Personal Growth
Relationships
Grief and Loss
Mental Health
Addiction



Emotional Well Being

Health Tools
Infant/Toddler Health
Children's Health
Adolescent's Health
Adult's Health



Health and Wellness

Tact is the knack of making a point without making an enemy.

-Issac Newton

Book of the Month Club

Thanks to all everyone who participated in our *Book of the Month Club* drawings during February. People from across the country participated and ten readers received the book – compliments of First Choice Health. We are pleased to offer a new drawing during May 2006.

Each Friday in May we will select two recipients for *And Never Stop Dancing – Thirty More True Things You Need to Know Now*, Gordon Livingston's follow-up to the popular *Too Soon Old, Too Late Smart*. With his new book, the author offers generous second-helpings of insight, down-to-earth perspective and encouragement for anyone interested in discovering news ways of responding to old problems.

To enter the May book drawings, contact the PAP by email at info@FirstChoiceDoc.com or by phone at 1-800-777-1323. Provide your name, the name of the hospital through which you have PAP services, and a phone number or valid email address at which you can be contacted (and where a message can be left) if your name is drawn. Your name and contact information will not be shared and you will be contacted only if your name is drawn.

The first drawing will take place on May 5th, 2006 and there will be a drawing every Friday during the month. Good luck again and good reading from all of us at First Choice Health!

This promotion in no way implies endorsement of the book's contents (nor of the author or the publisher) by First Choice Health. The PAP makes this book available as a free-standing educational tool and resource for interested participants.

Lessen the Stress of Conflict

Although you might know it as an interaction that makes your heart beat faster or your blood pressure boil, dictionaries define conflict as *a state of disharmony or disagreement between incompatible or opposite ideas, interests or persons.*

Whether it's establishing household rules with your child, clashing with your teenager over expectations and responsibilities, coordinating vacation and travel plans with family or friends, negotiating tasks with a co-worker or keeping your cool when there's friction with a service provider, increasing your understanding and comfort in response to disagreement can be a worthwhile investment in health and well being.

Raising your awareness and effectiveness in response to disagreement helps minimize the negative, corrosive effects of stress.

By taking the online *Conflict Resolution* training, you'll identify your existing style for dealing with disharmony and you'll be have the chance to develop new habits and strategies for responding effectively. It all begins by becoming familiar with the dynamics of disagreement and five key principles:

- Conflict is inevitable
- Conflict is resolvable
- Conflict cannot NOT be dealt with
- Conflict equals opportunity
- There doesn't have to be a loser

The PAP Online Trainings Menu

In addition to the Conflict Resolution training described in this newsletter, you might also be interested in the following topics, available in the *Practice Support* section of the PAP Internet site:

Diversity Education: Meet the fictional "Office Gang" and explore the importance of recognizing and respecting the values, culture and life experience of others.

Drug Free Workplace: The "Gang" introduces you to situations, realities, facts and figures pertaining to the impact of alcohol and drugs in the business setting.

Sexual Harassment Prevention: Our cast of "characters" will open your eyes to the sometimes subtle (and sometimes not so subtle) choices and behaviors that can be offensive and inappropriate in the workplace.



www.FirstChoiceDoc.com
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info@FirstChoiceDoc.com

Whenever you're ready - at no cost and from the convenience of a computer connected to the Internet - you can begin to increase your comfort level for conflict. The *Conflict Resolution* training is available 24/7 in the *Education & Training* section of the Physician Assistance Program Internet site. To access the trainings you'll need the password and username designated for the hospital through which you have PAP services. If you're not sure of your username and password, contact the Medical Staff Office or call our customer service team.

Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle.

-Plato