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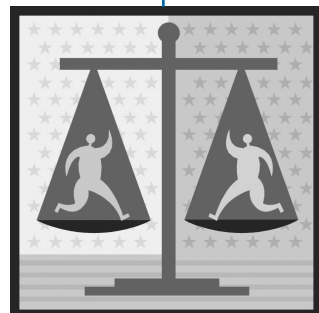
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The PAP Quarterly Newsletter is published by
First Choice Health Physician Assistance Program

Bei Lu and Daniel Freire, Web Developers
<http://www.FirstChoiceDoc.com>
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**Bringing Balance to
Work, Home, and Life**

DEDICATED TO EXCELLENCE

Practice Management Strategies

Creating a High Performing Team

Doctors wish to deliver superb care in a smooth functioning, efficient office environment with skilled, highly engaged staff.

Despite our goals, hectic and chaotic days may dominate, leading to stressed, dissatisfied doctors and staff. Even in the best functioning office, it may be hard to imagine taking on impending new challenges. The need to anticipate and adapt to change is a given in this healthcare environment. For example, increasingly, the government and health plans are exploring the use of clinical quality measures to assess physician performance.

Success requires that the doctor and staff work as a team. There is growing consensus about the characteristics of teams which create more satisfying work conditions and lead to high performance.

Medical practice has become too complicated for the doctor to manage the majority of work tasks alone. Delegation of tasks which do not have to be done by a physician is essential. Work processes have to be consistent to reduce confusion and error. Tasks have to be streamlined and designed to optimally use the skills of clinical and administrative staff.

Goals for improving work flow can only be accomplished by involving all of the office staff in work process design. This means meeting as a team on a regular basis.



Whatever the frequency, meetings allow the kind of interchange necessary to establish and maintain healthy office systems and

protocols. This cannot be accomplished by brief hallway conversations.

The team meeting can be thought of as an ongoing diagnostic examination for your practice. Carving out time for meetings may seem impossible in an over-worked environment, but it is the first step to getting off the stressful treadmill of inefficient practice.

The article is authored by Neil Baker, M.D. Dr. Baker consults with physicians on practice management and is a faculty member at the Institute for Healthcare Improvement. You can contact Dr. Baker at njeffbaker47@aol.com.

High-performing teams have many of the following characteristics. Start with one or two. Even a small beginning will make a positive difference.

1. The team meets regularly.
2. The team develops performance goals and obtains data for ongoing feedback. These goals may be in the areas of patient satisfaction, team satisfaction, clinical quality, access, and office efficiency.
3. The team knows the day-to-day activities of each staff member (tools for obtaining such information are available at www.ihl.org). There is an effort to maximize use of staff member skills, based on what they are best at doing, or on their training or professional degree
4. The team identifies the key clinical and administrative work processes (e.g. prescription refills, rooming of patients, making appointments, answering calls, etc).
5. The team develops and acts on ideas to improve work processes and performance. Ideas are generated with the aid of work done nationally on office efficiency (Spring PAP newsletter—www.firstchoicedoc.com/Newsletter.asp), access and chronic disease management (future newsletters).
6. Team members assure you that they have the right tools to do their work.
7. The team celebrates success and staff members help one another become enthusiastic about striving for perfection.

Team exercise

The following questions will engage your staff members and encourage reflection about working together:

1. Does each team member currently have the opportunity to do what they are capable of and do best each day?
2. Does the staff work like a team and appreciate the complementary roles that each person plays? Do they know what roles other team members play?
3. How often does the team meet to discuss changes in processes and staffing to make patient care better?
4. Does the team celebrate the contributions and successes of members and of the team as a whole?

(adapted from Institute for Healthcare improvement, ihl.org, 2005)

Travel Considerations for Seniors

Increasing numbers of seniors and retirees are taking advantage of the pleasures of domestic and international travel. 13-15 percent of all travelers in the USA are 65 years of age and older, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Although travel is an enjoyable experience for many seniors, mishaps can lead to the need for emergency medical attention away from home.



Emergency physicians are often the recipients of visits from elderly patients in need of medical care due

to falls, medication interactions, chronic illness, or as a consequence of not taking usual medications.

Although use of emergency medical services by older persons is increasing at twice the rate of other age groups, some travel-related emergency department visits may be preventable with early travel preparation and by passing along a few basic measures for caregivers and seniors.

(Reprinted with permission from the American College of Emergency Physicians)

During Travel

- Travelers should keep a list of all medications (including name, strength and how often is to be taken) as well as all allergies or special conditions; this list should be with them at all times.
- Seniors should continue taking medications as advised by the physician, even though travel activities may change their daily routine.
- Travelers should take and use an alarm to remind them to take medications at the regularly scheduled times.
- Seniors should, as possible, walk around and stretch their legs every 20 minutes or so when seated for long periods. This encourages blood circulation, and helps prevent blood clots.
- Stay hydrated. Travelers should drink more water – avoiding excess alcohol and caffeinated beverages
- Diabetic seniors should monitor blood sugar and follow dietary restrictions.
- Encourage travelers to eat regular, well-balanced meals, and to avoid foods that are high in fat and sugar content.
- Comfortable clothing and shoes should be encouraged.
- Remind senior travelers not to overexert themselves.
- Travelers should inform tour guides or other contact persons about any chronic medical conditions.

Before Travel

- Get all necessary medications filled. Make certain the traveler has enough to cover the length of their stay and a few days after the return home.
- Keep essential medications and medical equipment with the traveler, rather than in checked luggage.
- The traveler should wear a bracelet or necklace that identifies any special medical conditions - and this information should be in a purse or wallet.
- Program an emergency contact number into the traveler's cell phone using the address notation "ICE" as medical providers are increasingly using this mechanism to obtain medical information.
- The traveler should consider packing an extra pair of eyeglasses.
- Plan daily travel activities so as not to overtax the traveler's physical abilities.
- In preparation, the traveler should be encouraged to schedule an office visit before any lengthy or extended period of travel.
- Friends and family should have access to a copy of the traveler's itinerary.
- Identify emergency medical facilities in the areas being visited.

Skill Building for Children and Teens

During vacations and holidays, parents of school-aged children – and especially children with special needs – seek meaningful activities to fill their schedules. Many parents see scheduled breaks as a time for catching up on academic skills through tutoring or one on one instruction. Other parents view vacation as a time for their children to be free of the stress associated

with school and learning activities. There is no single correct answer. It all depends on the child and his or her needs.

Breaks are great times for older students to



Elementary Age Learning Activities

- Explore a reading program at the library.
- Use a children's cookbook to read and follow directions to make favorite foods.
- Encourage your child to read the newspaper. Some newspapers have special pages for children.
- Read to your child and talk about the book or stories.
- If possible, have your child read books that could be used for reports during the school year.
- Improve vocabulary by learning three new words a week. Post the words on the refrigerator and talk about them each day.
- Older children could write in a journal each day. Encourage two or three sentences.

do volunteer work. Volunteer opportunities for teens are often listed in the newspaper. Red Cross has a youth volunteer program - as do many hospitals. Other opportunities exist in nursing homes, senior centers and summer camps. Volunteering has many advantages including enhancing self esteem, job sampling and providing structured experience that can be listed on resumes or for future job applications.

Swimming lessons, camps of all kinds and music lessons are also great options. These activities focus on areas of development that might be neglected due to the demands of the school year. When selecting activities, make sure that the leaders or teachers of the activity have some understanding of your child's needs. If your child needs time to

process information, tell the activity leader how this is handled at school or at home.

Adapted from the Learning Disabilities Association of America

Secondary Age Learning Activities

- Encourage reading of any type. Reluctant readers might enjoy books on tape to listen to as they read.
- Many parents obtain the required reading list for the next grade's English class and have their child read at least some of the books ahead of time.
- Encourage vocabulary improvement using "Word a Day Calendars."
- Read about places that the child or teen will visit on vacation and encourage writing about them in a letter or journal.
- Figure mileage to various locations using a map scale.
- Go to www.math.com for a variety of math review activities.
- Go to www.bibliomania.com for free online books, stories and poems.
- Use computer programs or ACT or SAT preparation books to prepare for ACT or SAT testing.

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Things to Know About Sleep

- Adequate sleep has been shown to increase resilience to colds and the flu.
- Getting enough sleep helps in the battle of the bulge (inadequate sleep is linked to weight gain).
- Proper sleep helps people recover more quickly from exercise and injury.
- Getting forty winks seems to benefit the skin.
- Sufficient sleep is necessary for having full and consistent energy during waking hours.
- Research shows that better sleep leads to better memory.
- A person's moods tend to be higher and more consistent with proper sleep.
- The amount and quality of sleep influences the human sex drive.
- Being rested is a primary ingredient in managing stress effectively.

Managing Stress

It's important to realize that your stressors (those things that create stress for you) are yours to recognize and manage.

You have a choice. Rather than waiting for circumstances to change or for someone else to do something about a distressing problem or situation, be aware that how you think about circumstances or events is likely to have an effect on your attitude,

your perspective and on your ability to cope or respond effectively—cognitive habits often influence conscious experience.

The choice is yours, and it really is important to choose wisely! Developing new and different ways of thinking can lead to effective ways of dealing with many kinds of life situations, events and opportunities.

Cognitive Habits Often Influence Conscious Experience