Closing Arguments; Pleasing Patients; Digital Diagnosis

February 08, 2014 | Patient Relations [1], Law & Malpractice [2], Physician Compensation [3], Technology [4]
Noteworthy items from Physicians Practice.
Source: Physicians Practice

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Percentage of Americans who said that they would be interested in and/or happy to receive weight management tips from their doctor.
Source: Survey of more than 1,130 adults and 463 healthcare providers conducted by TeleVox and Kelton Research

**Pay Up**
"Women go to the doctor much more often than men. Maybe they're smarter, or maybe they're hypochondriacs. They live longer. But if it's insurance, you ought to be able to charge the people who use the services more, more."
Fox Business News's John Stossel, on why women should pay more for health insurance

**Closing Arguments**
"Her death was not the result of an accident, and it certainly was not the result of a heart condition. The defendant carried out a cold and calculated plan to murder his wife. He relied on his knowledge and experience as a doctor and also as a lawyer to accomplish this."
Prosecutor Chad Grunander in October, referring to plastic surgeon Martin MacNeill, who was found guilty of the 2007 murder of his wife.

**Pleasing Patients**
Making your medical practice easy to do business with will differentiate it from others and establish a competitive advantage. Therefore, your practice's marketing strategy should be centered on pleasing patients, writes practice management expert Bob Levoy in a recent post for Practice Notes, Physicians Practice's blog. One way to do this: Make hours that are convenient to your patients' schedules, such as having evening hours that end at 8 p.m., 9 p.m., or 10 p.m., to accommodate commuters. For more tips, see bit.ly/pleasing_pts_ideas.

**More Money**
To survive despite declining reimbursement and increasing overhead, practice owners need to make a "more granular" response to their practice's profit and loss statement (P&L) or income statement than in previous years, writes Carol Stryker in Practice Notes, Physicians Practice's blog. One way: Consider adjusting contractual reimbursements. "Contractual adjustments are the adjustments necessary to bring a practice's reimbursements into line with its payer contracts," says Stryker. "With the consolidation of payers, individual practices have little pricing power. A practice can improve its pricing power by merging with other groups or selling itself to a hospital or payer." For additional ideas, see bit.ly/incomeboosts.

**Don't Legalize It**
While a growing number of prominent doctors have recently offered their endorsement for medical marijuana, the AMA is voicing strong opposition to general legalization of the drug. The physician organization called the current federal approach to reducing the drug's use "ineffective" and endorsed a review of the "risks and benefits" of new legal markets in Colorado and Washington, according to USA Today.

**Digital Diagnosis**
Wouldn't it be neat if an app would diagnose diseases by quickly evaluating blood work? Thanks to innovative internist Joel Ehrenkranz, one might be market-ready soon, KSLTV reported. The physician recently unveiled i-calQ, a smartphone app that helps record, quantify, and interpret point-of-care diagnostic tests for many conditions, including HIV, thyroid disease, syphilis, diabetes, adrenal disorders, malaria, kidney disease, infertility, and anemia. Using a drop of blood or saliva, a test can be performed and the results interpreted anywhere, anytime, and results can come as quickly as 15 minutes. Ehrenkranz got the idea for this new technology in 2007 while working on the border between Uganda and the Congo during an Ebola break.

**Stay Alert**

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Are you habitually bypassing EHR alerts due to fatigue? If so, your decision could mean the difference of life or death for some patients. According to a recently released report by the Department of Veterans Affairs' Office of Inspector General (OIG), inadequate use of a Memphis VA Medical Center's EHR resulted in at least two patient deaths. The OIG conducted its inspection after receiving a complaint and found that in one case a nurse had inputted a patient's aspirin allergy into the EHR, but the attending physician bypassed the EHR and hand-wrote an order for an anti-inflammatory drug that is contraindicated for use in a patient with an aspirin allergy, FierceEMR reported. The patient went into full cardiac and respiratory arrest soon after receiving the drug and died eight days later, according to the OIG report.

**A Call to Expand Funds**

Although record numbers of students applied to medical schools in 2012 and 2013, and although medical schools have opened up more room for prospective doctors, the United States still faces an impending physician shortage if Congress does not raise caps on residency funding, according to the Association of American Medical Colleges. In 1997, as part of the Balanced Budget Act, the government limited Medicare funding of graduate medical education at 1996 levels for most teaching hospitals, according to Medscape. Today, teaching hospitals still face restrictions on their ability to develop or expand new programs.

**Dug Up**

Czech archaeologists excavating a site 17 miles south of Cairo recently discovered what they believe to be the large limestone tomb of a top royal physician from about 2400 B.C. The spacious dimensions of his tomb — roughly 46 feet (14 meters) by 70 feet (21 meters), and 13 feet (4 meters) high — indicate the physician was a VIP in royal circles, as tomb space is associated with success in the afterlife. The funerary complex features an open court and eight burial chambers for the physician and his family, National Geographic reported.

**App of the Month**

Trying to help your diabetic patients engage in their own healthcare when they're not in your office? Consider recommending Care4Life, a new app from Voxiva for Apple iOS and Android-based smartphones. The app, developed in collaboration with the American Diabetes Association, provides users with a broad range of tools to help them take better control of their disease; for example, tools that allow users to record and monitor blood-glucose levels, and remember to take their medications. Care4Life also stores data on actions taken in an online personal health record.

**NPs Happy but Overextended**

A recent survey of 222 nurse practitioners (NPs) — that Staff Care, an affiliate of AMN Health, conducted at the annual American Association of Nurse Practitioners meeting back in June — revealed that nearly all NPs are happy about their career choice. It did, however, highlight many of the ways NPs feel they have reached their workload limits:

• 75 percent said they see a shortage in their profession.
• 81 percent said they are either overextended or are at full capacity.

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