Here are some communication-based strategies to prevent problems arising between doctors and administrators at your practice.

Source: Physicians Practice

As physicians, we might not always have the ability to choose our practice administrator. However, one of the best ways to prevent a problem in a practice is to not invite it inside in the first place. Understanding how your practice administrator (or office manager) thinks and handles specific situations is imperative for physicians. And knowing your own personality and how you like to work with others can help to prevent potential clashes with your administrator. I've found the best way to head off conflict between practice leaders is to be proactive and embrace open communication.

Communication isn't simply talking a lot. Some of us do that all too well. Try these communication strategies to be effective in your medical practice:

**Appropriate.** Administrators shouldn't interrupt a physician in the middle of his work flow by asking questions that have their own time and place. We're interrupted enough. My typical workday is one huge interruption mingled with patient visits in between. Administrators are due the same courtesy. We ask them to do a ton of work in the first place. They have a busy schedule, too. Asking them to get things done immediately may really throw the proverbial wrench in their day.

**Respectful.** Physicians speak to patients all day long. The idea is that they get a few seconds to speak, then we unload a boatload of information and the transaction is complete. Having a conversation with your practice administrator isn't the same. They aren't a patient. Listening is the inaudible respect given to the person on the other side of a conversation. Great ideas can be revealed this way; they might not even be from you.

**Frequent.** Having purposeful, planned meetings is a must to revisit goals, make adjustments, and plan for the future of your practice. Giving a state-of-the-practice address only a few times a year can leave your administrator feeling unheard and may feel like re-inventing the wheel each time you meet.

**Validate.** They didn't tell you in medical school that running a practice is easy. Likely, they didn't tell you anything at all about running a practice. Your practice administrator has a skillset that you don't necessarily possess. Let her use her knowledge. Our practice administrator will come into the clinic and mention improving "policies and procedures" and I'm immediately lost. I listen to his advice and we figure things out. Taking advice from somebody can be difficult, especially when you ultimately make the decisions for the practice. Some physicians may think "I built this practice from the ground up, on my own. How could an administrator know the best course for my practice?" A valid point, but it's worth considering that person's ideas regarding your "from-the-ground-up" practice if it prevents it from crumbling back to that same ground.

**Support.** Building a team starts with the leaders of the group. The cohesion of ideas and goals starts with the physician-administrator team and permeates through the remainder of the office staff. The administrator should be backed by the physician; the opposite is equally important. Divisive talk from either side is an encumbrance to building positive morale and eventually positive results regarding your ultimate goal: giving great patient care that becomes your brand throughout the community. So, be diligent to encourage and challenge each other to do what each of you does best.

Mark Birmingham, DPM, is a podiatric surgeon who practices with a multi-specialty group in Boulder, Colo., and is a member of the Physicians Practice Physician Advisory Board.

How do you create strong leadership teams? Tell us at editor@physicianspractice.com. Unless you say otherwise, we'll assume that we're free to publish your comments online.

This article was originally published in the May 2016 issue of Physicians Practice.
Source URL:

Links: