Nate Moore doesn't have a crystal ball, but he says that every practice should be able to plan ahead based on appointment data.

Moore, president of Moore Solutions, based out of Centerville, Utah, a business intelligence consulting firm, says practices need to realize they have a lot more information about their upcoming appointments than the average business. "Think about how an average retailer would stock and staff their store if they knew who exactly was coming in, what they were going to buy, and they had [that kind of information]. They'd run their business differently and act accordingly," he says. For instance, having this information, Moore says, could help practices anticipate when they can expect a wave of patients coming in, when there are slowdowns, and help them adjust staffing levels.

This will be the subject of his session at MGMA17, "Seeing Past Tomorrow: Using Appointment Data to Thrive in the Future," which is slated for Wednesday, October 11 from 10 a.m. PST to 12 p.m. MGMA's annual conference will be held in the Orange County Convention Center in Anaheim, Calif. this year.

Moore spoke with Physicians Practice about his session, what is needed to capture this kind of data, and more. Below are excerpts from this interview.

There is a lot of data that practices have to track — billing data, medical data — why should they add appointment data to the mix?

One of the first slides in my presentation is a picture of me on a plane. I live in Utah. One of my biggest clients is in Fort Wayne, Indiana. The way to get to Fort Wayne is through Detroit, so you fly Fort Wayne to Detroit and back to Utah. Two summers ago, the flight [from] Fort Wayne was delayed six hours. From a geography standpoint, Fort Wayne is about a two-and-a-half hour drive to Detroit. All the locals drove to Detroit and skipped out on the plane. So at 9 pm, I'm the only guy on the plane. There is a picture of me, two pilots, and one flight attendant.

The whole point is you don't want your clinic to look like that plane. A big portion [of the session] will be on unsold appointments. How do you keep your practice from looking like that Delta plane? Your biggest cost is your providers and the support staff and real estate around those providers. If you're not using those efficiently, because you've got unsold appointments, no shows, or last minute cancellations...that's a huge economic opportunity you are walking away from.

Do you think physicians and admin are hesitant to use appointment data and if so, why?

I think practices are so busy trying to manage all of the regulatory, compliance [requirements]...from an administrative and clinical side, they haven't had time to focus on [data related to] their upcoming day, week, and month. They could staff differently, plan differently if they could see the data. Also, most practice management systems, the software doesn't give them the kind of insight could around [appointment data].

What are the technical capabilities needed in order to capture this data?

The key is to own your data. If you don't own your data and you have to say "mother may I" every time you want data, it's going to be hard. If your data in cloud or you don't have control of your data, you're stuck with the reports that they give you. If own your data and you can get IT help to mine that data, a lot of the examples I'm going to show [in the presentation] are in spreadsheets.

What example of a dataset that practices miss when they are looking at appointment data?

One biggest thing to capture from appointment data is [finding] who owes [us] money. I can leverage that information. I can have a patient financial counselor or someone in the business office say, "Hey Nate I see you're coming in. You have a copy of $35 and an outstanding patient balance of $300. How are you going to take care of that tomorrow?" You can contract these patients...you can send out an email [to staff] and say here are patients coming in today who owes us money and
here's what they owe us.

**What are some reasons to attend this session?**

I plan on talking for the first 30 minutes, and then what we're going to do, it's two hour session, we'll spend an hour of the session in small group roundtables. The roundtables will deal with reducing no shows, unsold appointments, collecting copays, etc. There are going to have poster board and a marker and draw up reports and dashboards [to determine] the kind of data [you can get] from your system. We'll discuss as group how can we take existing data and [determine] a take-home [lesson] on how to use appointment data in your practice.

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