5 Tips to Help Physicians Be More Productive

In order to maximize productivity at your practice, you need to take control of all aspects of its operation. Here’s how to start.

Source: Physicians Practice

It's no secret that physicians are busier than ever, and not necessarily busier seeing patients. Earlier this year, the Physicians Foundation, a non-profit advocacy group, found that the average doctor spends at least 20 percent of their time on uncompensated tasks. These days, many doctors get paid based on patient productivity, but rarely do we delve into topics such as office and electronic medical record (EHR) efficiency that take up so much of our time.

I have always been somewhat of a productivity nut. I remember reading time management books during medical school, so I could better consume the voluminous hours of information we would learn each day. Understanding that every practice is different, here are some overlooked strategies that have worked in my practice and will hopefully help you become more productive in yours.

• Avoid getting sucked into the black hole of the Internet. We live in a connected world, and many of us spend late nights tapping away at our EHRs. We all know we are just a few clicks away from the latest funny cat video on YouTube, or the latest political debate on Facebook. With the average attention span for adults being 20 minutes, having a timer by my side keeps me on track. If you are really having trouble getting rid of internet distractions, there are apps such as RescueTime that will disable you from browsing to the most common social media sites.

• Get to work earlier to better plan your day. Early in my career, I helped incorporate what we called the "five-minute huddle" in our clinic. Basically, I would get together with my medical assistant and nurse and quickly peruse the list of patients that we had for the day. The purpose of the huddle was to anticipate any issues that might arise. For example, if we knew that Mrs. Anderson who is always perennially late is scheduled for a 2 o'clock appointment, it might be helpful to send a quick phone call reminder to her early in the morning. Knowing that there's a procedure in Room 1 at 10am that requires significant preparation time, we may not want to put patients at 9:30am in the same room in case that appointment runs late. If you work alone, taking just a few minutes to plan before starting your day could better streamline the rest of it.

• Small changes now can lead to big transformations later. You may be familiar with the word "Kaizen" which is the Japanese word for "continual improvement" and often used in business. It is the idea that small incremental changes to enhance efficiency can ultimately have great long-term effects. Are there any things in your practice that you can improve? For example, I was always forgetting common ICD-10 codes and was having to look them up online. Typing up a simple sheet of the most common codes and pasting it on my desk, shaved not only a few minutes each day, but prevented me from another internet distraction. Are you familiar with all the templates and shortcuts you could be using on your EHR? Taking the time now to make sure you know all possible shortcuts could save you a ton of time in your practice.

• Learn to delegate and avoid being a doormat to others. Admit it, we doctors tend to be control freaks. I have a friend who's an OBGYN and a group of us were planning to go out for the evening. After several minutes of waiting for her to come down from her clinic, I went up and found her watering the plants in her office. After asking her why she was doing this herself instead of having a staff member do it, she replied that they often forget and it was easier for her to do it herself. If you are always taking on more tasks just to "get it done," you are doing both you and your staff a disservice.

If you are an employed physician, being known as the "team player," can often lead to becoming "Dr. Pushover" if boundaries are overstepped. I remember in my first year of practice, the nurses would come to me first if my colleague conveniently forgot to call in a prescription or fill out a patient form. Things did not change, until I spoke up and learned to say "no" and took charge of my own...
Guard your schedule with your life. There will always be people in your professional and personal life who will suck up your time. How many times has that pharm rep just wanted to take a few minutes to talk about great new information she learned at a conference? My staff has my entire schedule, and when something is blocked out and the office door is closed, short of a medical or family emergency, they know my work time must be respected and not interrupted.

I challenge you to gain better control of your day and your professional practice. If you have time productive tips you would like to share, feel free to add them to the comments.

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