



15 Ways to Improve Your Practice

Here are a few things learned after 25 years in the trenches.

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Practice Management Pearls is a regular feature that focuses on practice management issues presented by successful DPMs who are members of the American Academy of Podiatric Practice Management.

The American Academy of Podiatric Practice Management (AAPP) has a forty-year history of providing its member podiatrists with practice management education and resources they need to practice efficiently and profitably, through personal mentoring and sharing of knowledge. To contact AAPP call 517-484-1930 or visit www.aappm.org.

the knowledge we gain from it, is what makes us wise.

1. Work harder than your competition. Both the early morning and late afternoon patients tend to have a higher per patient value (PPV). Most of them have commercial insurance that reimburses quickly, and easily treatable health issues such as

fore your staff and remain to close after them, you are setting a precedent that they can follow. You'll be amazed at the increased morale and efficiency in your office when employees see you working just as hard and long as they are.

Arriving early also gives you a chance to strategize for the day. Look at your upcoming patients and cre-

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After 25 years in practice, you learn a lot of important lessons. These were not learned due to a particular nimble-mindedness, but rather they were discovered over many years from the Groundhog's-Day-like repetition of certain situations. This persistent barrage of experience, combined with

plantar fasciitis, tendonopathies, and first ray pathologies. These are the working folks that can't get away in the middle of the day for an appointment without taking time off from work. Adjust your hours to give you the edge over other offices for early morning and later evening patients.

2. Arrive early, leave late. When you arrive at the office be-

ate a plan to manage your time and maximize treatment protocols, recovery plans, patient satisfaction, and of course, your revenue. At the end of the night, mentally review your day and see how well your strategy worked. Remember to make adjustments for tomorrow's patients.

Staying until all the patients have gone gives you the advantage

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of checking charges and collected amounts to stay on top of your finances. It also allows you time to check in on your new patient acquisitions. Are your patients showing up for their

calls our patients two days before their appointment with a friendly message.

3. Never lend money to a patient. Patients still believe that being a doctor is where the money's at. They see a shiny new car in the park-

should never be too busy working to earn money. Of course it's true that a certain amount of labor is necessary to rake in the dough, but are we earning enough money for the work we're doing? Find the difference in your office between breaking even and really *earning*, then work to push past that level. There's nothing more frustrating than putting a great deal of work into something only to see an average or poor return for your efforts.

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initial visits? New patients are more expensive to acquire than established patients and every missed appointment is a missed chance at revenue... and you know, helping people.

Investing in an automated reminder system can be extremely beneficial if you don't already have one in place. We use a system that ties into our practice management software and

ing lot or hear about the weeks you spend each year sitting in the Cancun sun, and feel perfectly justified in asking for your help. If a patient asks for financial assistance, just say no and blame it on your malpractice insurance carrier rules.

4. Hard work ≠ lots of money. There's a common saying that you

5. Why are you "booked"? Being booked up with only routine, labor-intensive patients yields little profit. Change the way your office schedules appointments to create a balance and variety of patients each day.

It is equally important to keep some slots open for same day calls, new patients, and other urgencies. People will appreciate your ability to see them quickly and become loyal patients for years to come. Maximiz-

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ing your schedule can do wonders for your practice.

6. Beware the creep! The “creep” is a phenomenon in which your schedule somehow shrinks, leaving wasted open spaces throughout your week. It will happen slowly over time and is completely imperceptible if you aren’t watching. Then, one day you look at your schedule and there is a 30 extra minutes open before your regular lunchtime. This is also bound to affect your Friday afternoons as you find yourself leaving earlier and earlier.

In any event, this is a totally correctible and a very human-like folly. Don’t berate yourself for letting it happen, just fix it and keep better watch next time. Remember that whole getting-there-early-to-check-your-schedule thing? Don’t skip it.

7. You can’t help everyone. A stranger with “all over” foot pain, passing through town at 4:00 p.m. on a Friday should go to an urgent care center. Enough said.

8. Keep it personal. Patients absolutely love it when you remember something about them. Not only does it brighten their day, but it also increases your connection with that patient, which makes them more receptive to treatment recommendations. It would take a brain much larger and more powerful than most to remember even a single fact about each of the thousands of active patients that you have at any given time. Instead, jot down one personal thing you learn about that patient during their appointment.

If you have paper charts, scribble something on a Post-it note and put it in the very front of their file. If you use a fancy electronic system, then you’re smart enough to find a blank space where a small note is appropriate. Jot down things like “loves gardening,” “husband has Alzheimers,” or “going to the beach soon.” It’s not enough to just write it down, though; on their next visit, be sure to bring up these subjects. Patients are typically delighted that you care so

much and are amazed at your fabulous ‘memory’.

One quick word of caution on this: anything in a patient’s chart is part of the permanent record and you may have to provide a copy that includes your notes when asked. Therefore, if you write down “fruit-

cake,” make it clear the patient brought you one last holiday season, not that they act like one.

9. Where’s the Doc? Everyone needs a rest now and then, and podiatrists are no exception. But patients

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don't want to hear that you've headed out for a week of skiing in Utah; they just want an appointment. Therefore, the doctor is never on vacation, rather s/he is "at a conference." Posting copious selfies of your globetrotting adventures on social media is probably not a good idea either. Patients may view your hard-earned vacation time as "privileged" and assume you have more interest in travel than you do in treating them.

Conversely, when you are actually at a conference, make sure your patients know. When they see that you are expanding your knowledge and experience, it inspires trust in your skills and could sway them towards newer and better treatments.

10. Don't get interrupted!

The most effective diagnosis and treatment plan is the one your patient actually listens to and remembers. You expect their undivided attention for this and they expect the same attention in return. Allowing interruptions of "Doctor, your spouse is on the phone" does not inspire respect from patients. They know you can talk to your spouse during lunch or when you get home like everyone else does. If you do need to take calls from spouses or other family members, use a code such as "Doctor, I have Dr. Spencealot on the line for you."

11. ...Except by your kids.

While taking calls from spouses only leaves patients feeling unimportant and abandoned, taking calls from your children is totally fine and even encouraged. In fact, many of your patients will smile when they hear the staff saying, "Doctor, your daughter is on the phone." Making time for your kids exhibits a nurturing spirit that patients recognize and appreciate.

12. ...Or by Other Doctors.

When a medical professional (MD, DO, PA, NP, DC, PharmD, etc.) calls, make sure the front office knows to connect them to you immediately, even if you are busy with patients. Promising to call back later will only initiate a never-ending cycle of phone tag and messages. It's a courtesy you

would expect when calling other physicians, which means the same standard should be implemented in your own practice.

13. Make your own calls.

Doctors are busy people, but there are certain tasks that should not be delegated to other staff members. Calling patients and other doctors is one of them. Nothing is more irritating than being told Dr. So-n-so is on the phone, only to pick up and find it's really their assistant on the line. Now, that assistant has subjected you to

diatrist. Instead of just reading about your industry, why not contribute something to it? Research papers and management articles are a great way to share knowledge with other doctors. You may be thinking, "I'm a busy professional; I can't just sit down in the middle of the day and write." If that's the case, then sit down at the end of the day or early in the morning; dictate notes to yourself while on the treadmill or get a waterproof notebook for the shower. You'll have more to say than you might think.

Don't settle for being an average podiatrist.

minutes-on-end of stickey jazz music while s/he goes and finds the doctor who was supposedly calling.

It goes the same for patients. It's a good practice to make calls to patients after surgery, but they won't appreciate it if your receptionist calls and then makes them wait for you just as you waited on those inconsiderate other doctors to answer the phone when they called. Some things just need to be done personally.

14. Don't shy away from referrals.

Many podiatrists balk at the idea of sending a patient to a competing local practice for treatment, believing they are losing money. The truth is, putting patients before profit will return to you in a big way and can actually help grow your business. Sounds crazy, right?

If you don't like doing the Lapidus procedure, refer those patients to other offices, which opens your schedule for different and potentially more lucrative patients. Besides, if the other physician is better at it, why not let him/her do it? The truth is, referring a patient to another podiatrist isn't giving money to the competition. Our real competitors are the family practitioners and urgent care centers that snare patients who really need our specialty.

15. Go above and beyond.

Don't settle for being an average po-

The hardest part of writing an article is getting started. First, you must think of a subject, ideally one highly applicable to our profession. Next, you should gather your writing materials and organize your space. For me to reach writing nirvana, my desk must be spotless, Mercury needs to be in retrograde with Mars rising, and I must have a perfect ratio of ice to Diet Pepsi. Your requirements may be different, but once you relax and get into the correct mindset, the words will come with ease. For those spare moments when you're experiencing writer's block, keep something like a fidget spinner or your nose hair trimmers nearby. The only bad article is one that never gets written.

Too many podiatrists look only at the big picture and do not see the small nuances that make a practice run well. You are a podiatrist so that you can help people. In order to complete that objective fully, your habits must be in tip-top shape. **PM**



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