



Prescriptions *Medical Alert*

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By tapping into the strengths of all age groups, practice managers can create a more productive and harmonious work environment.

Bridging the Generation Gap in Your Practice

Most medical practices are staffed by professionals who span the generations, from ambitious Baby Boomers, to independent-minded Generation Xers (or Gen Xers), to technology-obsessed Millennials. Although these are generalizations, people from different generations have grown up under diverse social and political conditions that impact their professional lives, including their attitudes toward authority figures, social conduct, work-life balance, technology, and the practice of medicine. By tapping into the strengths of all age groups, and finding ways to prevent potential misunderstandings, practice managers can create a more productive and harmonious work environment.

Having grown up in a time of unprecedented prosperity after World War II, Baby Boomers (born 1946–1963) tend to be optimistic, career-oriented, and interested in building wealth, especially as they near retirement. Gen Xers (born 1965–1980), who came of age in the post-Vietnam era, may be more self-reliant and skeptical of authority, preferring less formal interactions with their colleagues and the freedom to determine their own working conditions. Meanwhile, most Millennials (born 1981–2000) can barely remember a time without computers or cell phones, and are very comfortable with multitasking and informal communication.

For practice managers, taking these multigenerational differences into account may make motivating employees easier. For example, older Boomers are likely to be more interested in retirement and health care benefits than Millennials and Gen Xers, who often have young families, and may be more concerned with a flexible or reduced schedule than

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Boosting Adult Immunization Rates

As every physician knows, immunization can drastically reduce the spread of certain communicable diseases and potentially save lives. But beyond the early childhood years, the percentage of Americans who continue to receive all of their medically recommended vaccinations falls off sharply. If many of your adult or adolescent patients do not have up-to-date immunization records, your practice should consider a strategy for educating patients about the need for vaccinations, and encouraging them to get their shots to stay healthy.

In a recent analysis of adult immunization data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases (NFID) found that, while around two-thirds of patients age 65 and older receive the recommended influenza and pneumococcal vaccinations, working-age adults who are not in the military or health care professions are far less likely to get all of their vaccinations. Immunization rates are especially low among minorities and younger adults.

NFID researchers attributed these low vaccination rates in part to a communication problem between doctors and patients. Results showed that, while 99% of primary care physicians say they or their staff members initiate vaccine discussions with patients, 47% of patients say they do not recall discussing vaccines other than influenza with their doctor or health care provider, and 21% do not recall any immunization discussions during office visits. At the same time, however, nearly 88% of the patients said that a strong recommendation from their physician would motivate them to get vaccines. The findings further suggested that the main reasons patients fail to get their recommended vaccinations are lack of information about the risks of certain diseases, vaccine safety concerns, and out-of-pocket costs.

When all of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act provisions go into effect, preventive care, including immunizations, should be covered by most health insurance plans. But, even if the cost becomes less of an issue, better communication with patients will still be needed to significantly boost vaccination rates. Most patients understand why vaccinations for influenza or diseases associated with foreign travel are necessary. However, other vaccinations such as pneumococcal, Tdap (tetanus, diphtheria, pertussis), Hepatitis B or A, zoster

(shingles), or human papillomavirus (HPV) are not as familiar. Therefore, your practice should have brochures or information sheets available in waiting areas that explain these vaccinations, and a knowledgeable staff member who can answer specific questions. Posters or tent cards can also be displayed to remind patients to talk with their doctor about immunizations, because additional age-appropriate vaccinations may be required.



If a review of your patient immunization records reveals significant gaps in vaccinations, consider setting up a tracking system for sending out automatic reminders to patients for their upcoming vaccination dates. Physicians in private practice can get help with tracking the vaccinations of children and adults by participating in CDC immunization information systems, or registries. In addition to helping doctors manage their patients' vaccination histories, these registries provide updates on the latest medical research on immunizations, and assist with organizing vaccine inventories. Physician practices that choose not to participate in the registry program can still make use of the CDC's online immunization information materials and recordkeeping tools.

As more physician practices adopt electronic health record systems, generating vaccination reminders and transferring patients' histories between medical providers, will become easier. Until these systems are implemented, your practice can take steps to improve vaccination rates, such as issuing wallet-sized immunization cards to patients for managing their vaccination schedule, and routinely checking immunization histories when patients are in the office. *P*

Measuring Your Marketing Efforts

In today's competitive marketplace, many medical practices are making substantial investments in marketing, including ad placements, direct mail campaigns, and an online social media presence. While your practice may recognize the value of these marketing efforts, and even notice an increase in patient numbers, you may not know which one of these initiatives has been the most effective. By tracking the return on your marketing investments, you can streamline your promotional campaigns and cut back on activities that fail to bring the desired results.

There are a number of technological tools that make it easier to follow your interactions with current and potential patients. For example, Google Analytics is a free service that provides detailed

statistics about visitors to your practice website and social media profiles or accounts. The service tracks how many people visited your website or social network pages through search engines, display ads, pay-per-click networks, or e-mail marketing. Using additional tools, you can also find more detailed information, such as how long visitors viewed a particular page, and their geographic locations. This information can help you determine which parts of your website or social media profiles are the most popular, and which online ads or search engine listings are driving traffic to your website or generating phone calls.

To measure more precisely the response to direct mail campaigns, your marketing letters or brochures can direct recipients to a web page created specifically

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getting a promotion or salary bump. Further, Millennials may appreciate working in teams more, and may expect more feedback from managers and mentors.

Older physicians and managers, especially those who were raised in the more traditional 1950s and early 1960s, often struggle with a perceived lack of respect for authority among younger employees. Since physicians of the Boomer generation or even older typically have more seniority—and therefore more power—they may communicate in ways that intimidate and alienate younger colleagues with more casual communication styles.

A refusal of older physicians to take the input of younger physicians and staff members seriously, could potentially damage morale affecting staff retention. Younger employees can contribute up-to-date knowledge about technology and medical innovations, which in turn, can benefit the practice. So, if interpersonal communication problems should arise in your office, an open discussion about how decisions are made and what forms of interaction are appropriate may help to improve relations.

The use of technology for recordkeeping and information management has been adopted by most physician practices. However, a failure to clarify how office communications are to be conducted can lead to confusion, inefficiency, and even dangerous mistakes in clinical care. Millennials, in or out of the office, rely heavily on texting and smart phones to communicate and manage information, while Gen Xers are more likely to e-mail from a laptop or PC. By contrast, Baby Boomers may still prefer in-person or phone interactions, and written records, letters, and memos. So, when formulating your communication management policies and procedures, remember that some employees may need additional support as they transition to new methods.

Medical practice professionals have similar goals: excellence in delivery of patient care, professional advancement and recognition, financial compensation, and a healthy work-life balance. By supporting different approaches to reaching these goals, while encouraging all staff members to engage in a productive manner, your practice group can benefit from the experience and insight that multigenerational employees bring to the practice of medicine. *P*

Patient Satisfaction with Office Makeovers

Although medical practices use considerable resources for marketing, the importance of the office waiting room atmosphere and the decisive role it may play in patient satisfaction and retention may be overlooked. Patients are more likely to enter the exam room relaxed and content if they have been waiting in a comfortable, peaceful environment. If a complete makeover by an interior designer specializing in medical offices is not in your budget, even minor changes to your practice waiting areas can dramatically improve the patient experience.

The main goal of designing a waiting room is to create an attractive, clean, and tranquil space. Wall and floor coverings need to be both durable and appealing, in muted colors or patterns. Artwork and wall decorations depicting scenes from nature can also help to reduce patient stress levels. The reading materials on coffee tables should be up-to-date and family-friendly, and toys for children need to be kept clean. Plants are recommended, but must be watered regularly. A water fountain or aquarium may also help soothe anxious patients and entertain small children.

Playing instrumental music may have a calming effect if kept at a low volume. Patients talking on their cell phones should be directed away from the waiting area.

To minimize glare, lamp lighting or dimmable overhead lights are preferable to harsh office fluorescents. Window shades may also be opened to let in natural sunlight. Individual soft chairs are preferable to sofas and should be as wide and comfortable as space allows.

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for your campaign, or even a microsite with a personal URL including the name of the recipient, such as www.medicalpractice.com/john.doe. Activity on each prospective patient's personalized page, which can be tailored to include content targeted to the individual, then provides you with information about the prospective patient's level of interest.

Similarly, rather than listing your office phone number on a mailer or advertisement, each campaign should have a call tracking number that measures the exact response to that campaign. Some call tracking services also let you record data about each caller, and even the content of phone conversations. If your campaign involves response cards, each piece of mail can be tracked using a unique code, so that each response is linked to a specific campaign and prospect.

New patients do not always respond immediately to marketing campaigns, therefore the information

forms patients are given to fill out on their first visit should ask about referrals to your practice, such as a friend or relative, radio or print ads, an online search engine or social media site, the Yellow Pages, or your office sign.

To ensure that your marketing dollars go the distance, your marketing department or agency should then collect and analyze this information, and use the results to formulate recommendations for future campaigns. It is important to remember, however, that medical practice marketing differs from marketing of other businesses because potential patients may wait months between your promotion and calling for an appointment. For this reason, you need to give each campaign enough time to demonstrate its effectiveness before determining the cost/benefit value of your marketing efforts. *P*