A Tale of Two Practices

Our play opens at a specialty medical practice with 3 physicians and 3 nurse practitioners. The practice has been in business 40 years but, in recent years, due to changes in healthcare, trends in insurance and the impending retirement of some of the partners, it had become difficult to recruit physicians. Many young doctors coming out of school seemed to be more interested in lifestyle than owning a business. There was a loyal staff of 10 that had many years of experience – this would become an important factor in the success of the transition. A well-established team will continue to work together.

Fast forward to the next scene – a conference room at a local hospital medical group where, assembled for the first time, an implementation team of: HR, IT, Finance, Credentialing, Billing Office, Marketing and a few other as well as the practice manager. The COO, serving in an interim capacity had gathered the parties together in one room. The timeline was tight – three weeks. This group would meet weekly and assignments were given to each area of expertise.

In the third act, the transition of this practice into the health system occurred in the tight time frame established. The manager sometimes liked to joke that they “crash landed” into the system but, actually, things went remarkably smoothly. This is not to say that challenges did not present themselves along the way but there were a few things that helped the “relatively smooth” crash landing. Here are a few keys that you may look for if your practice becomes a sequel to this play:

Town Hall Meetings

Representatives from Administration made quarterly stops to the office inform of upcoming changes to the organization. This was especially important to as one of the things that had to be delayed was the connection to the information systems. The meetings always allowed plenty of time allotted for staff questions. Staff began to feel that their input was important.

Meetings/Huddles

For the first year, the manager stepped up her meetings and included daily huddles. As there was a new reality for the staff - to be connected to a larger institution - more was more when it came to communication.

EMR

When the practice converted from their EMR to the system’s EMR, there was plenty of support. Going from EMR to EMR, in some cases, can be more challenging than from paper to EMR. Plenty of IT staff was available for weeks
the practice worked through the small issues as well as the larger. An outside service was hired to move important documents from one system to the other.

**Flexibility/Fun/Food**

Remain as flexible as possible and try not to make everything so serious. When in doubt, bring in some snacks and hunker down. The cast needs to be nourished during these long days of rehearsing for the big performance. The little things that can mean a lot to a staff.

How will the audience respond to this play? Time will tell. If you are faced with this decision, we hope some of these tips are helpful. Leadership from physicians and managers, working hand-in-hand with system administration sets the tone for staff and directs the result to the one we all want – a successful, quality practice that cares for its patients.

*Julie Guethler is an experienced Practice Administrator, working with physicians in both the practice management and consulting sides of the industry. In addition, Julie will assume the role of President of the MGMA of Greater St. Louis chapter in 2016. Have questions about the article? Contact Julie at 314-420-1067 or guethler@sbcglobal.net.*