



Is a Professional Practice Administrator Right for You?

By Margie Satinsky

Managing a medical practice requires both vision and operational skills. In some practices, the physicians themselves run the practice, providing direction to an office manager and other staff. One alternative is for physicians to provide general guidance to a practice manager. A second alternative is for physicians to hire an experienced professional practice administrator (PPA) who is professionally credentialed. How do you know if a PPA is right for you, and if it is, how do you find the right person?

The best way to approach the PPA question is to start with your needs. Ask yourself the following questions about the current management of your practice.

Daily Practice Operations

- Do our current methods for overseeing daily practice operations meet the needs of physicians, managers, staff and patients?
- Do we work well as a team to identify operational problems, determine potential solutions and implement changes on a timely basis?
- Do we develop and clearly communicate practice plans and policies to physicians, staff and patients on a timely basis?

Planning and Marketing

- Do we have a strategic business plan that guides our thinking and that we update regularly?
- Do we know the demographic trends, community dynamics, new laws and regulations, and competition so we can respond to changes in the external environment?
- Do we have a marketing plan that sup-

ports our strategic business plan?

- Have we identified the external individuals, organizations and agencies with which we need to develop relationships?

Financial Management

- Do we have a revenue cycle management system that enables us to meet our financial goals?
- Are we satisfied with the way we prepare and monitor our operating and capital budgets?
- Do we have a managed care strategy that helps us maximize the revenue we receive and monitor actual vs. expected payments?

Human Resources

- Are all responsibilities and accountabilities clear?
- Do we have standardized job descriptions and a job classification system?
- Do we have and use a formal performance review system?
- Do we have systems for physician recruitment, hiring, orientation and performance?

Facilities

- Does our current facility meet our current and projected needs?

Information Technology

- Do we use information technology to support the administration of our practice and the direct provision of patient care?

Quality and Quality Improvement

- Do we have systems for responding on a timely basis to patient complaints and questions about claims?

- Do we use satisfaction surveys for patients and for referring physicians?
- Can we document the care that we provide to individuals and to groups of patients?
- Do we benchmark our practice against acceptable standards and take measures to improve the care that we provide?

Legal and Regulatory Compliance

- Do we have and use a compliance plan?

Obtaining Outside Help When We Need It

- Do we use consultants to help us with tasks we cannot perform internally?
- Do we manage the consultants that we have identified as appropriate resources for our practice?

WILL A PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE ADMINISTRATOR WORK FOR US?

If the responses to the questions above identify aspects of your current practice that need improvement, keep going. Honestly assess your potential for accepting a new management arrangement. Here are good questions to ask:

- Are we satisfied with the role that physicians now play in managing our practice?
- Does the current practice manager have the vision and skill to make the practice flourish?
- Are our physician leaders intellectually receptive to sharing power with a PPA?
- Given our personalities, what's the likelihood that we can adjust to hiring a PPA?