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GOOD BEDSIDE MANNER = STRONG PATIENT RELATIONS

Communicating with patients has become tougher. Visits are briefer, patients arrive armed with dubious medical advice from the Internet and physicians are challenged to try to relate to patients while using new technologies like the electronic medical record (EMR). Today's healthcare environment creates many communication challenges. The biggest is time pressure. It means that doctors have less time with patients and also have a less developed relationship on which to build strong communications.

While poor communication can lead to missed diagnoses, patient resentment and noncompliance, creating a better rapport makes the patient's visit more gratifying for both parties. Patients are more likely to keep appointments, take their medicine and accept your medical advice when a good relationship has been established.

To improve rapport during patient



visits, physicians need to identify situations that undermine communication, adopt tactics to correct problems and enrich their own personal communication skills.

While patients rarely tell physicians when communication fails, there are two quick ways to determine if there is a problem. First, ask the front desk receptionist what patients are saying as they exit the examination room. Are patients confused or

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Recession Survival: Ways to lower your overhead

As jobs continue to disappear, many physicians are seeing fewer patients because people have lost their health insurance, are making do with high-deductible health plans or are simply reluctant to spend money.

In a February 2009 study, more than half of consumers responding said they had cut back on getting recommended medical treatment or seeking routine healthcare during the past 12 months because of cost concerns. Some 35 percent of respondents reported relying on home remedies and over-the-counter drugs rather than visiting a physician.

To stay ahead of the deteriorating financial

curve, doctors need to cut costs. Financial advisers say you are more likely to remain solvent in a down economy if you follow the two-thirds rule: put two thirds of your energy into reducing costs and one third into increasing income. The reason: expenditure cuts yield immediate results, whereas efforts to boost income often involve additional outlays and offer no guarantee of success.

Ways to cut costs

✓ **Look at your phone bill** - Are there excessive long distance calls, calls to

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RED FLAGS RULE TAKES EFFECT AUGUST 1

In November 2007, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) issued a set of regulations known as Red Flags Rule. These new regulations require that certain entities develop and implement identity theft prevention and detection programs to protect consumers from identity theft. The regulations effect entities considered to be creditors. Since healthcare providers who accept insurance or provide deferred payment options are deemed creditors by the FTC, Red Flags Rule also applies to them.

Initially, the regulations were to go into effect May 1, 2009. However, due to late notification to healthcare providers that they fall under the Red Flags Rule, implementation has been pushed back to August 1, 2009.

There are a number of steps to take in establishing Red Flag Policy:

1. Identify what possible red flags could occur in your office.
2. Indicate how you will detect red flags:
3. Establish a procedure for responding to red flags:
4. Review and update your red flag policy at least once each year.
5. Incorporate specific administrative elements into your red flag policy.

Examples of Red Flags

- ✓ A complaint or question from a patient based on the patient's receipt of a bill for another individual; bill for a product or service that the patient denies receiving; bill from a health care provider that the patient never patronized.
- ✓ Records showing medical treatment inconsistent with a physical examination or medical history reported by the patient.
- ✓ A patient or insurance company report that coverage for legitimate hospital stays is denied because insurance benefits have been depleted or a lifetime cap has been reached.
- ✓ A complaint or question from a patient about information added to a credit report by a health care provider or insurer.
- ✓ A dispute of a bill by a patient who claims to be the victim of any type of identity theft.
- ✓ A patient who has an insurance number but never produces an insurance card or other physical documentation of insurance.
- ✓ A notice or inquiry from an insurance fraud investigator for a private insurance company or a law enforcement agency.

JPA has put together a document template to assist with meeting the requirements for developing a written Red Flag Policy. Contact Cheryl in the JPA office (817-2140) to obtain a copy or if you have any questions.

Priority Health



Congratulations on your performance!

We're pleased to announce that the 2008 Partners in Performance (PIP) program final settlement payouts were distributed on April 15, 2009. Many of the local Jackson area practices exceeded benchmarks for quality and/or efficiency measures in the PIP program, and a reward check was processed and distributed.

A total of 1,651 providers shared \$ 7.2 million in program rewards for 2008. This brought the 12-year program rewards total to more than \$ 50 million. We are looking forward to continued success in 2009 from all area practices.

Reports and training

Priority Health has collaborated with Jackson Physician Alliance (JPA) to take the lead on providing the reports and training for the Priority Health PIP program. Your practice should have received the first available 2009 PIP reports, which identifies what members need data entered for each measure. If your practice needs help with registration for Priority Health's online tools, would like training on how to enter the data via the online Patient Profile tool, or has questions on PIP, contact Cheryl Meschke or Bonnie Mauch at 517 817-2140. They'd be

happy to schedule a one on one session with you.

Find a Doctor "apples"

Starting next year, the PIP results will be published in the online Find a Doctor tool (provider directory) at www.priorityhealth.com. Physician's individual pages will show 0 to 4 apples based on a number of PIP measures. The number of apples displayed will be driven by performance in the 2009 PIP program. Remember to stay on top of the PIP measures this year. Many members use the "apple" quality indicators to evaluate their physicians.

Online PIP 2009 tools

Through the Provider Center at priorityhealth.com, you can access information on the PIP program. Go to priorityhealth.com > Provider Center (be sure to log in) > Manual > Performance Programs > 2009 Partners in Performance (PIP) Program.

Some of what you will find here includes:

- Details on each measure
- Guiding principles for the program
- PIP tips for Quarter 2, 2009
- Downloadable PDF of the PIP Technical Manual

Employee
Health Insurance

**JPA'S OPEN
ENROLLMENT IS NOW**

Employee
Health Insurance

Open enrollment for JPA health insurance will take place throughout the month of June. JPA offers its member practices the opportunity to enroll employees into its health insurance program. To learn more, JPA members should contact Phil Gillespie (of JFP Benefit Management) at 1-800-589-7660 or pgillespie@JFPbenefitmanagement.com.

Ambs VP receives prestigious award

Startel National Users' Group [TeamSNUG] is pleased to announce that Aaron Boatman, Vice-President of Ambs Call Center, has received the Don Berry Award of Excellence.

TeamSNUG selected Boatman because of his exceptional dedication and involvement in the business. He has demonstrated service to others through TeamSNUG and he and



his company are leaders in the industry.

Ambs Call Center (www.ambscallcenter.com) is a telephone answering and call center based in Jackson, MI.

Boatman has served the SNUG Incorporated board during various years as President, Technical and Conference Chairs.

Communication Skills

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frustrated? Secondly, track the phone calls your practice is getting. You should primarily be hearing from patients calling for an appointment. However, if you have a high incidence of patients calling 24 to 48 hours after their appointment to ask questions about the visit, then you're not being clear in the office.

Asking your staff for patient feedback can also unearth problems. Patients more readily complain to a nurse or receptionist than to the physician. Use your staff as team members to improve patient relations, and show appreciation when office personnel convey negative patient comments.

Expand your communication skills

Effective communication starts with attitude.

Examine your mindset toward seeing patients. Tell yourself you will have a good relationship with patients no matter what and you will. Also, body language, eye contact and nonverbal aspects can heighten patients' perception of the physician's concern for them. How you say something is often more important than what you say. Patients are very aware when you're paying close attention to them so sitting at a patient's eye level and giving your full attention with a few minutes of friendly, unbroken eye contact makes a huge impression. Because patient visits are fairly brief, finely honed skills are vital.

Focus the patient visit

"Uh, doctor, by the way – there's another thing . . ."

Recession Survival

From page 1

Information, excessive phone numbers that are being billed? Consider other phone service plans or new phone strategies.

- ✓ **Identify and reduce optional expenses** such as awareness advertising - Is the phone book display ad effective?
- ✓ **Reduce work schedules** - Rather than eliminating positions, cut employees' hours. One benefit of this strategy is that when your situation improves, you can easily restore the original hours of all employees.
- ✓ **Provide lower-cost staff benefits** - Providing employee-only health insurance and consider dropping vision and dental coverage or look to health savings accounts and high deductible health plans.
- ✓ **Cap pay increases or give employees bonuses** instead of raises.
- ✓ **Reduce supply and equipment purchases.**

Spoken as the physician is leaving the examination room, those words can throw off the whole day's schedule. Alternatively, the new subject may not get the attention that is needed. To avoid this scenario, it is best to learn all the patient's concerns for the visit up front without seeming abrupt.

A good question to ask (up front) is "Why did you decide to come in about this now?" A patient may have what looks like a harmless nothing on their skin. It turns out their best friend just learned they have skin cancer, then you understand why they're concerned. If a patient comes in for a consult, ask about their timeframe and what they hope to gain. Some people have trips they want to go on, or a wedding coming up. You can sense whether a patient wants a diagnosis or just wants reassurance.

Deflect Misleading Internet Health Advice

"Doctor, I got this from a web site and it's different from what you said."

Physicians can dethrone anonymous Internet "experts" by providing handouts that tell patients how to evaluate medical sites. Patients can also be referred to the US Food and Drug Administration Web page article, "How to Evaluate Health Information on the Internet," which can be found at fda.gov/oc/opacom/evalhealthinfo.html.

Despite today's patient communication challenges, physicians can become better at developing rewarding patient relationships. The way is to get feedback – from patients, staff and colleagues; act on their input; and never relinquish one's own goal of creating a satisfying rapport with patients.

- ✓ Cut patient communication expenses (postage, telephone, etc.) **by developing a web site** - Once your site is up and running, it can reduce mailing and telephone expenditures by allowing patients to pay you, make appointments, and request prescription refills online.
- ✓ Check into lowering your rent - If you are renting office space, consider **renegotiating your lease**.
- ✓ Ask for employees' help and suggestions - Established staff usually have good ideas on how to cut costs. **Call a staff meeting** and share **money-saving goals** with employees and be frank about the difficulty in making ends meet.
- ✓ **Minimize no show and cancellations** by confirming patient visits a day in advance of scheduled appointments using an automated service.
- ✓ **Manage your accounts receivable aggressively**, making sure payments are received timely to maintain cash flow.

JACKSON PHYSICIANS ALLIANCE

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***Making
Healthcare Better***

Welcome JPA's newest preferred vendor

Collecting outstanding debt is essential for any practice's survival and, given today's economic condition, it is imperative these issues be resolved now. JPA's newest preferred vendor, American Profit Recovery (APR), can help you.

APR, a collection agency with a very different approach to resolving past due debt, works with countless practices across the country and has a proven track record of improving the profitability of many medical practices.

With early intervention and a strong focus on diplomacy with patients, APR works hard to preserve the relationship between



AMERICAN PROFIT RECOVERY
You'll Profit From Our Difference!

you and the patient with an ultimate goal of keeping the business relationship intact. APR has also developed a proven system of third-party debt resolution with a flat, low fee system and state-of-the-art client-controlled technology, not typically seen in the collection

industry. In short, APR will preserve patient relationships, make collecting on past due accounts easier and free up valuable staff time so you can focus on patients, not paperwork.

For more information, call Sales Consultant Dale Erickson at (248) 948-0657 or e-mail dale.erickson@americanprofit.net. Visit American Profit Recovery at www.AmericanProfit.net.

In the Door

**Welcome the following new
JPA physician members:**

Dr. Imdad Ayyar
Hospitalist
Dr. Bency Mathai
Internal Medicine
Dr. Vania Nguyen
Hospitalist - Pediatrics



Save the Date!!

September 10, 2009

PGIP Physician Training Session

Survey winner announced

Suzie Freeman from the medical practice Daniel Freeman, MD, PC was the winner of a **\$50 VISA gift card**. Freeman was one of 45 respondents who were entered into the drawing after completing the JPA 2009 Survey. Congratulations Suzie!!

To see the results of the survey, go to www.JPAdocs.com.