

The Role of the Practice Manager

A good practice manager is a valuable asset,
but what exactly should this all-important
role encompass?

Hanya Oversby provides an overview

Defining Qualities

If there is anything that needs doing at Dr. Greenwood's practice, Sarah is the one who gets it done. Sarah has been Dr Greenwood's secretary for eight years now, and was promoted to the role of Practice Manager two years ago. Her extremely busy days are spent managing the staff and the appointment book, as well as taking care of any day-to-day issues such as ensuring the banking is reconciled efficiently and treatment rooms are clean, sterilised and well stocked.

Despite all this efficiency, Dr Greenwood still has no idea how well his practice is doing. There's no doubt that his Practice Manager is working hard in the business, yet no-one is working *on* the business.

This highlights the importance of having the practice manager. Medical practitioners have limited time and need a skilled manager to develop an effective business plan and ensure it is implemented. As times are becoming more competitive and practices more expensive to run, an effective management process is imperative. Medical practitioners have short careers and therefore need to limit the margin for errors.

In Practice

So, what should a practice manager be responsible for?

First and foremost, implementing management systems that are logical and simple to use. This is crucial to ensuring that your customer-service levels are consistent and systems should be applied to:

- Clinical
- Financial
- Administration
- Operations
- People
- Marketing
- Risk

Each of these practice-management issues requires time. If you do not engage with the problem you will have the worst possible outcome. You are removing your opportunity to achieve a better outcome for yourself by not allocating time to your practice.

Implementing systems is important, but establishing a process of continuous improvement allows the practice to grow and improve proactively. This is important to avoid practicing in a reactive manner, which can prove stressful and costly.

Deming's Cycle (Continuous Improvement)



Benefits of a good system:

- Your business can operate without you
- Increases the effectiveness and efficiency of business
- Remove most risks
- You are able to employ staff with lower skill levels
- Eases the burdens of training staff
- Enables you to leverage your time, effort, knowledge and money

Lead the Way

All practice managers should provide regular monthly reporting to doctors to ensure the Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) of the practice are being met. This reporting is best when it is easy to read and the identified KPIs are clear.

How can you ensure your practice manager is working to full capacity?

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How can you help your practice manager?

To be fair to practice managers, they are expected to be able to manage many areas of the practice, where in a bigger organisation there would be a department allocated to deal with a specific area of business need. The key in a small organisation is to outsource. This may initially seem to be an expensive way of managing the business, but, with a closer look, you can have experts doing work in less time than your practice manager. This gives the Practice Manager time to work on your business and not get stuck with jobs they may not have expertise in. Bookkeeping is a common example of a task that can consume a lot of a Practice Manager's time yet can - and should - be outsourced to a trained bookkeeper. Practice management can also be outsourced. Management consultants have expertise in dealing with the challenges medical practices face on a daily basis and practice managers can benefit from this experience through a mentoring process. Along with having access to many contacts for outsourcing, consultants de-personalise issues that may need to be addressed at your practice, which cost you and your business time and money and lead to frustration.

Where can a practice manager find additional support?

Organisations such as The Australian Association of Practice Managers (AAPM) represent practice managers and the profession of practice management. Founded in 1979, AAPM is a non-profit, national association recognised as the professional body dedicated to supporting effective Practice Management in the healthcare profession.

Formal education for practice managers is available with UNE Partnerships, the University of New England's education and training company. In association with AAPM, UNE has developed the Professional Practice Manager Development Program - Australia's leading Professional Practice Manager Development Program, which offers nationally recognised qualifications and both national and international delivery. This program has been evolving over many years and offers qualifications developed against the latest industry standards for healthcare management.

Effective practice managers such as Sarah are out there, but unfortunately they are bogged down with day-to-day duties. The key is to ensure they have the time to stay true to their actual role and the necessary resources to do the best job possible.

On the Job

General Management duties include:

- Practice Analysis
 - A review of the current practice
 - Recommendations for improvement
- Business planning and implementation
 - Project Management
- Business Development
- Implementation of projects
- Development of Management Schedule
 - Change Management Facilitation
 - Facilitating changes in direction of business
 - Staff
- Education, mentoring and monitoring
- Assistance in recruiting
- Training and professional development
 - Systems and Operations
- Introducing systems that staff will use and understand
- Continuous Improvement of systems
 - Reporting
- Identifying and monitoring Key Performance Indicators specific for the business
 - Marketing
- Developing and implementing marketing strategies appropriate for the medical speciality
 - Information Technology
- Software and hardware advice
 - General Management
- Record keeping review and advice
- Benchmarking
 - Practitioner
- Scheduling
- Operational management

Sources

The Australian Association of Practice Managers: www.aapm.org.au

UNE Partnerships: www.practicemanagement.edu.au

OH&S Compliance - MONIT: www.monit.com.au

Watchmynumbers - Dashboard Reporting: www.sc.watchmynumbers.com.au

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