

What do patient satisfaction, safety and malpractice risk have in common?

Good medicine is good business. Practices that achieve high levels of patient satisfaction and actively work to assure patient safety are more likely to experience fewer liability claims, lower insurance costs and better profitability.

Unfortunately, however, many medical groups miss opportunities to enhance safety, reduce risk and improve satisfaction by making some relatively simple changes to office operating procedures.

Here are five suggestions that can help your practice provide better care — and improve your bottom line.

1. Set up a patient reminder system

Reminding patients that they're due for immunizations, screenings and check-ups can greatly improve preventive care, as well as chronic disease management. My

Why not use your practice's Web site to help educate patients after office visits?

internist recently asked me when I last had a tetanus booster; I replied, "Oh, maybe 35 or 40 years ago." If I'd ever received a postcard reminding me of the need, I probably would have made an appointment immediately.

Veterinarians send reminders to pet owners to keep their pets' immunizations up to date — why don't we follow their lead?

Similarly, patients taking statin drugs to lower cholesterol levels should have a lipid panel and liver function tests every six months. Diabetics should have annual eye exams, foot exams and hemoglobin A1c tests. Women should receive regular screenings for cervical and breast cancer.

Reminder postcards about such services will have several effects. Patients will perceive that the practice *cares*. Patient care will be enhanced and liability risk reduced. And practice revenues will increase from incremental service volume and the greater potential to earn pay-for-performance bonuses based on improvement in quality metrics.

2. Create a tickler file for patient referrals and diagnostic testing

Do you know whether the patient whom your physician referred for a mammogram ever got the exam done? Did the physician receive the lab work on the patient with anemia? Did the patient with the positive throat culture get notified and come in for treatment? A tickler file will ensure that your physicians get the answers to such questions. The 2006 Physician Practice Patient Safety Assessment pilot study found that fewer than half of responding practices had fully implemented a process for tracking patients' test results. A tickler file can help your group avoid "fumbles" in patient care — a common cause of patient dissatisfaction and potential liability claims.

3. Make follow-up calls to patients after procedures

Many dentists routinely have their staff call patients the day after a procedure to inquire about pain, bleeding, swelling or other

see **Coach's Corner**, page 6



By William F. Jessee, MD, FACMPE, president and CEO, Medical Group Management Association (MGMA), American College of Medical Practice Executives and MGMA Center for Research, wjf@mgma.com

mgma.com

Visit our patient safety Practice Solutions Web page at mgma.com/patientsafety

possible complications. Why not do the same after minor in-office procedures or ambulatory surgery procedures? It can help identify possible complications before they get out of hand. And even if everything is fine, it lets patients know that your practice cares about them. You'll see your organization's patient satisfaction scores soar.

4. Use your Web site to educate patients after their visit


Research shows that patients don't retain much of the information they receive during an office visit. Some will call to clarify information, but others will remain unaware of potentially important facts about their conditions.

Why not use your practice's Web site to help educate patients after office visits? It's easy to embed links to a huge variety of patient education resources; one of the best is the Patient Education Center, distributed by MGMA through an agreement with PriMed (www.patienteducationcenter.org). Better-educated patients can manage their health more effectively. Satisfaction with

their care improves, boosted by their perception that your practice is technologically savvy.

5. Look for environmental hazards in your office

Are your exam tables regularly examined for safety? How about equipment in your treatment rooms? Does your waiting room have heavy objects that children might pull down on themselves? How's the lighting in your parking lot? Take a walk around your premises and look for potential hazards to patients (or their children). You may be surprised at what you find.

Practice administrators play a key role in ensuring patient safety. By doing so, you can help control your liability insurance costs, enhance patient satisfaction and loyalty to your practice and improve your bottom line. That's a "win" for everyone. 

e-mail us: Does your organization have procedures to improve patient safety and patient satisfaction, and reduce malpractice risk? Tell us at connexion@mgma.com

Fresh feel, new departments in your *MGMA Connexion*

You've spoken, and we've listened. We've updated *MGMA Connexion* to bring you more data, more concise, practical content and more access to progressive Web-focused information. You'll also find more colleagues' voices from your member community.

We've also renamed On the Edge as The Data Mine, to convey the message that it examines the richness of MGMA survey findings. You'll also see these new departments in this issue:

- **Code of Conduct** – Coding news and questions answered by experts;
- **Bright Ideas** – Quick tips you can use today;
- **Solutions** – Inspired by MGMA's Practice Solutions Web pages, ideas and resources to tackle practice problems; and

- **Objective Advice** – Practice challenges solved by the MGMA Health Care Consulting Group.

In future issues, you'll find these sections:

- **Action Plan** – Practice-improvement strategies;
- **Practice Profile** – Medical group-practice case studies from MGMA members; and
- **The Download** – Web links and insights for your profession.

We're always striving to deliver a high-quality magazine that meets your needs. Let us know what you think at connexion@mgma.com.