

# Is a Professional Practice Administrator Right for You?

By Margie Satinsky, M.B.A.

## Is a Professional Practice Administrator Right for You?

Managing a medical practice requires both vision and operational skills. In some practices where the physician(s) owner(s) has both managerial skill and an interest in administration, the physician runs the practice, providing direction to an office manager and other staff. An alternative is for the physician(s) owner(s) to hire an experienced professional practice administrator.

How do you know if a professional practice administrator (PPA) is right for you, and if it is, how do you find the right person? The best way to approach this 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 appropriately to ongoing changes in the environment?
- Do we have a marketing plan that supports our strategic business plan?
- Have we identified the external individuals, organizations and agencies, with whom 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?

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### 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 systematically respond 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 office 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?
- Are we willing to support an appropriate compensation package?
- If necessary, are we willing to revisit our governance structure and distribution of responsibilities?
- Would a PPA give physicians more time for patient care, practice planning and professional education?
- If we have multiple locations, can a PPA help us centralize functions that are not decentralized?
- Are physicians receptive to working in partnership with a qualified and experienced non-physician PPA on practice finances and on other

appropriate issues?

- Are we comfortable having a PPA work with us to develop a vision for the practice and assume responsibility for assuring that our operations support that vision?

### Finding the Right PPA

If your responses to this second list of questions indicate that your practice is receptive to hiring a PPA, make sure you find the right person for you. Begin with a job description and an employment agreement that covers salary, benefits, profit sharing, bonus, leadership development and professional education.

With respect to posting the job opportunity, decide if your recruitment efforts will be national, regional or local and contact the professional organization to which most practice administrators belong – i.e. Medical Group Management Association (MGMA), North Carolina

Medical Managers (NCMM) and/or Triangle Medical Managers. Some of our clients have had good luck with Craig's List or indeed.com.

If you already have a practice manager who has some but not all of the skills that you want in a PPA, invite him or her to apply for the position. Use your structured job description to objectively match skills against requirements and minimize any discomfort that arises if your current person isn't qualified for the job. You may find that with education and coaching, your current employee can actually do the job.

### Conclusion

By doing an honest assessment of your practice, determining your practice's readiness for a PPA, and using an objective process for recruitment and hiring, you can make sure that the management of your practice meets the highest standards of excellence.

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