



How to Rebuild your Medical Practice

DURING AND AFTER COVID-19

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CURRENTLY, PHYSICIAN PRACTICES are seeing declines in patient volume of 30 to 75%, says Hilee Fischer-Wright, MD, president and CEO of the Medical Group Management Association (MGMA). The business of primary care practices is down 40 to 50%, she says.

The situation would be even more dire were it not for telehealth and the new willingness of Medicare to cover virtual visits. “Since CMS changed their regulation of reimbursement, we’ve seen telehealth enthusiastically embraced across the country, to the point where it has become an integral part of care delivery just in the last three weeks,” Fischer-Wright says.

Nevertheless, many small independent practices are having difficulty in ramping up telehealth systems and workflows, observers say. Even if they can master this technology quickly, most small practices have no more than two or three months of operating expenses in reserve, notes Medhavi Jogi, MD, a co-owner of a five-doctor endocrinology group in Houston.

COVID-19 CONVERSATIONS AROUND disease states have increased 1,000% among healthcare professionals (HCPs) and 2,500% among consumers, with both sharing the same types of content, according to a social listening study that ran from Jan. 1 through March 19.

“Practices should be reasonable about expectations for their volume and how long this downturn is going to last,” she says. “If you’re a primary care practice, this is probably a six- to eight-week period in which you can count on volumes being down 50 to 60%. Then you can figure another 4-6 weeks while that volume builds up, when your volume is down 20 to 30%. Then you’re going to have to expect your volume to be only 80 to 90% of what it was for the rest of the year. It’s not going to be 100%, because there will be high-risk populations who shouldn’t be in the office environment until we have an effective vaccine and treatment available.”

So what should a medical practice do? Rely on PHARMED for your post-COVID medical practice re-launch and:

1. Educate your staff
2. Prepare your practice
3. Project financial planning
4. Communicate online with your current and future patients
5. Promote your COVID-19 actions that safeguard your patients as well as your services

Checklist to Prepare Physician Offices for COVID-19

1. Educate your Staff on:

- Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), and why it is important to contain the outbreak.
- Facility policies and practices to minimize chance of exposure to respiratory pathogens including SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19.
- Job-or task-specific information on preventing transmission of infectious agents, including refresher training.
- COVID-19 evaluation and treatment.
- Alternative office management plans.
- How to advise patients about changes in office procedures (e.g., calling prior to arrival if the patient has any signs of a respiratory infection and taking appropriate preventive actions) and developing family management plans if they are exposed to COVID-19.

The PHARMED Solution: *We will provide you with the presentation materials or train your staff directly.*



2. Prepare Your Practice

- Design a COVID-19 office management plan that includes patient flow, triage, treatment and design. Explore alternatives to face-to-face triage and visits. such as providing more telemedicine appointments. Guidance for implementation and payment.
- Provide hand sanitizer, approved respirators, face shields/goggles, surgical masks, gloves, and gowns for all caregivers and staff to use when within six feet of patients with suspected COVID-19 infection. (See approved respirators). Provide training for staff on respirators to ensure fit and appropriate use.
- Ensure adherence to standard precautions, including airborne precautions and use of eye protection. Assume that every patient is potentially infected or colonized with a pathogen that could be transmitted in a health care setting.
- Implement mechanisms and policies that promptly alert key facility staff including infection control, health care epidemiology, facility leadership, occupational health, clinical laboratory, and frontline staff about known suspected COVID-19 patients (i.e. PUI). Keep updated lists of staff and patients to identify those at risk in the event of an exposure.
- Staff should follow the CDC guidelines collecting, handling and testing clinical specimens.
- Prepare for office staff illness, absences, and/or quarantine. Physicians should plan for increased absenteeism rate.
- Review proper office and medical cleaning routines. Routine cleaning and disinfection procedures are appropriate for SARS-CoV-2 in health care settings, including those patient-care areas in which aerosol-generating procedures are performed. Products with emerging viral pathogens claims are recommended for use against SARS-CoV-2. Management of laundry, food service utensils, and medical waste should also be performed in accordance with routine procedures.





- Plan for cross-coverage with other health care professionals in your community and participate in local hospital planning exercises.
- Identify materials and supplies required for care to be delivered during an outbreak or pandemic, and suppliers that can provide those materials. Order appropriate materials and supplies. Guidance for optimizing use of PPE or reusing PPE.
- Contact representatives at your office’s waste- disposal service regarding plans for appropriate waste disposal so that they can prepare for an increased amount of waste materials. At this time, there is no evidence to support the need of different waste management protocols for facilities caring for patients with COVID-19.
- Stay informed. Visit your state and local department of health’s website weekly or develop a reliable method for routine epidemiologic monitoring. Make appropriate connections with local and state health department staff.
- Become knowledgeable about available testing and treatment as that information becomes available. This should include, general recommendations on COVID-19 from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC); Work with your state and local health departments on diagnostic testing protocols and procedures.
- Ensure that you and your staff are familiar with specific public health reporting practices legally required in your area. Familiarize staff with procedures on transporting patients from your office to the hospital or other facility if required.
- Post signage in appropriate languages at the entrance and inside the office to alert all patients with respiratory symptoms and fever to notify staff immediately.
- Post signage in appropriate languages with pictures to teach/remind all patients about correct respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette. Specifically, they should

cough and sneeze into a tissue (which then should be properly discarded), or into the upper sleeve. Remind patients to use appropriate hand-washing technique.

- Learn more about how health care facilities can prepare for Community Transmission.
- Designate an area at the facility (e.g., an ancillary building or temporary structure) or identify a location in the area to be a “respiratory virus evaluation center” where patients with fever or respiratory symptoms can seek evaluation and care.
- Cancel group health care activities (e.g., group therapy, recreational activities).
- Postpone elective procedures, surgeries, and non-urgent outpatient visits.

WASTE DISPOSAL

- ◇ No-touch methods should be used to dispose of waste materials with respiratory secretions.
- ◇ Arrange to use the currently recommended methods for disposal of dangerous waste.
- ◇ Routine cleaning and disinfection procedures are appropriate for SARS-CoV-2 in health care settings, including those patient-care areas in which aerosol-generating procedures are performed. Products with emerging viral pathogens claims are recommended for use against SARS-CoV-2.
- ◇ Management of laundry, food service utensils, and medical waste should also be performed in accordance with routine procedures.



CREATE A CHECKLIST OF REQUIRED EQUIPMENT/SUPPLIES

- Health care facility should provide Personal Protective Equipment in accordance with current CDC guidance and OSHA's standards (29 CFR 1910).
- Clear signage with pictures recommending patients call first if they have symptoms of any respiratory infection (e.g., cough, runny nose, fever).
- Signage in appropriate languages instructing patients to alert staff about respiratory symptoms and correct hygiene and cough etiquette. It's helpful to have signage with pictures.
- Alcohol-based hand sanitizer and masks placed at the front of office/practice.
- Boxes of disposable tissues for distribution to patients.
- Single-use towels and tissues for use throughout the office.
- No-touch wastebaskets and disposable liners.
- Alcohol-based hand rub for reception, waiting, patient care, and restroom areas.
- Single-use gloves.
- N95 respirators, face shields/goggles, surgical masks, and gowns for providers and staff, as appropriate.
- Buckets and single-use mops.
- Appropriate disinfectant for environmental cleaning. Train staff and assess that it is used correctly.
- Handouts made available prior to an outbreak or pandemic, and posters and patient education materials posted during an outbreak or pandemic.



3. Financial Planning:

The AMA has compiled a list of actions to help keep your practice open. Here are some highlights:

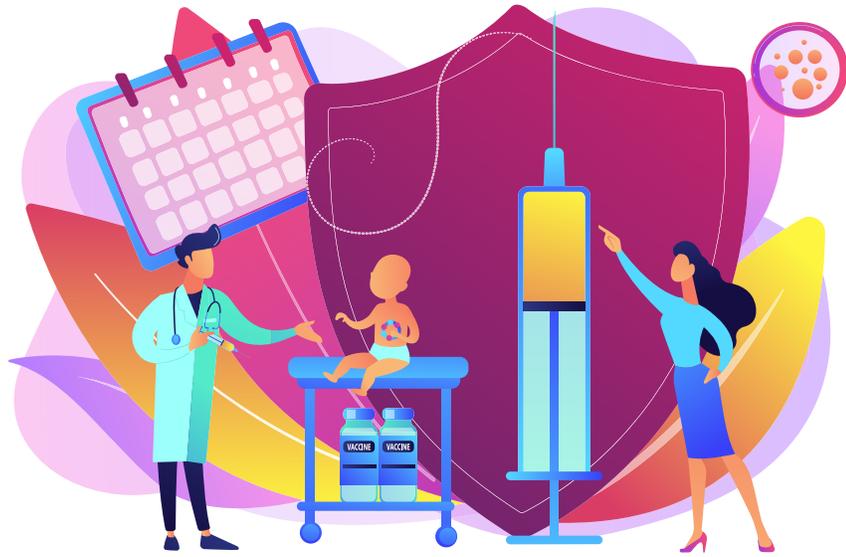
- Determine the minimal cash flow you'd need. Develop a contingency plan based on estimates of minimum cash flow to stay afloat.
- Track your losses and expenses. You'll need a record to make a claim through your business insurance policy. The policy may or may not cover COVID-19-related liabilities. Contact your broker to find out.
- Keep track of impending defaults. Review existing loan documents and financial covenants to determine whether a slow-down of business or collections could trigger a default.
- Negotiate with lenders. Contact vendors, landlords, and creditors to discuss reasonable accommodations for cash flow disruptions. Consider asking them for forbearance, forgiveness, or a standstill, and agree to establish a process for keeping them informed over time.
- Get a low-interest loan. The US Small Business Administration has begun to administer low-interest loans funded by numerous states, counties, and municipalities.
- Keep up with policy changes. State, local, and federal laws and regulations that affect practices are changing rapidly. Assign a staff member to follow these changes in the news and on government websites.

4. Communicate ONLINE with current and future patients

1. Create a COVID-19 message on your website's homepage so patients do not have to search for an update.
2. Create an Instagram story highlight dedicated to the pandemic. This provides patients with a chronological update that is easy to access.
3. Update your banners on Facebook and LinkedIn so patients do not have to scroll through your posts.

The PHARMED Solution:

- Our team can modify your current website or design a new site for your practice. Be sure to ask about our current deal that eliminates charges during the pandemic!
- Our physicians can design posts for each of your social media profiles! Let us create the content so you can focus on your team and your patients.



How to Communicate with Patients

1. If you have a patient-messaging system in place, use and promote it!
2. If you don't have a system in place, PHARMED will do it for you. We will re-engage your patients with direct email and targeted promotions.

Focus on Current Patients

1. Now is a time to build trust and confidence with current patients. Your level of interaction with current patients should be high right now.
2. Create social media campaigns and content that focus on building and maintaining patient trust.
3. Promote contests for current patients and reward them with prizes (e.g. practice gift certificates).

The PHARMED Solution:

- Our team of physicians can create your social media campaigns and content. We can even respond to questions and comments from followers if you want. Let us help you foster trust from current patients!

Rely on Telehealth

1. Create a webpage on your site that is dedicated to your telehealth services.
2. Don't have a telehealth system in place? We recommend Zoom for Healthcare.
3. Promote these services on social media!

The PHARMED Solution:

- Our team can create a webpage on your site that explains your telehealth services.
- Our physicians can create social media content based on your telehealth offerings—we can even post on your behalf if you are busy.

Tell Patients How You Are Preparing for Office Visits

1. The pandemic won't last forever. Are you prepared for office visits to resume? Your patients will need to trust that you are taking proper precautions to keep them safe. We recommend that you create an evidence-based sanitization plan and share it on your website, blog, and social media. This content should be prepared now, but not shared until businesses reopen.

The PHARMED Solution:

- We can create a webpage, blog posts, and social media content based on your sanitization plan. Our content will foster trust and confidence in your practice. We will also guide you on the proper time to release this content.



Utilize Online Scheduling

1. Practice groups are going to see an influx of patients following the pandemic. Reduce staff burden by utilizing your online scheduling feature.
2. Create content for social media and your website that promotes the use of your online scheduling feature. Don't release this content until businesses reopen!
3. Create an online scheduling system if you don't have one in place.

The PHARMED Solution:

- Don't have an online scheduler? Let us create one for you! We can create one for your website so it is ready to go after the pandemic concludes.
- Need help creating content that promotes your online scheduler? Our team can create all of this content now, that way you can be prepared to share it later.

Priority #2 Promote Your Practice to New Patients

After you've implemented strategies to communicate with and reassure your current patients, next it's time to promote your practice to new patients. Use your extra time to strategically position yourself as the go-to doctor in your area once all of the dust settles post COVID-19. Preparation is the key to success, so use your time wisely and start implementing these strategies now! Don't let perfectionism or fear of the unknown prevent you from acting now. Take the first step. Remember, good now is better than perfect later!

Get Referrals from Current Patients

1. This is one of the most cost-effective and simple ways to get new patients. Acquiring referrals from established patients must be done proactively.
2. How do you get referrals from current patients? First, you have to actually ask them! This can be challenging if you aren't used to doing it, but there isn't really any downside to asking, and there is a huge upside. To make it easier for you, start by asking your patients who already love and praise you!
3. Set up a "referral goal" once you figure out how you want to ask your current patients. Having a daily, weekly and monthly referral goal gives you a specific and achievable target to hit, which increases the odds of actually getting referrals.
4. Another great way to get referrals is to get your whole team involved! Make it into a game and see who can get the most referrals each week. You can decide whether or not you want to reward the winner each week.
5. These potential referrals are likely to check out your social media pages and your website, so make sure you have those updated and are posting consistent content.

The PHARMED Solution:

- We will perform a demographic audit for your practice and target your current and future patients where they are.
- We will create engaging content for your social media pages, written by doctors and delivered by seasoned social media marketers.



Increasing Your Social Media Presence

1. Not only is social media excellent for staying connected and engaged with your current patients, it's also a wonderful way to get new patients, both referral and non-referral.
2. According to PricewaterhouseCoopers, 41% of patients said that social media content impacted which doctor or hospital they chose. That's a huge percentage!
3. Now is the perfect time to increase your social media presence. You want to make sure you're getting ahead now while you have the time before your practice fully opens again.
4. If you don't have a social media page, that's okay, it's never too late to start. Remember, good now is better than perfect later!
 - Pick 1 platform. A great way to start is to create a Facebook Group that can be publicly viewed.
 - Ask your current patients to join the group and invite their friends and family. In this group, you'll want to provide education about your specific niche as well as engage with people in the group by answering their questions as best you can.
 - Create a posting schedule for what specific topic you're going to post about, and when you're going to post it. The key is consistency.
 - Expert tip! Schedule a block of time in your calendar to create content and schedule it to post automatically. Some of the best platforms for scheduling content include Buffer, Hootsuite, Sprout Social and MeetEdgar.
 - For help with social media content management and creation, reach out to Pharmed for help!

Manage Your Reputation

1. According to a study by Software Advice, 71% of people use online reviews as the very first step toward finding a new doctor, compared to just 25% making decisions based on reviews back in 2013. Another amazing statistic is 43% of people said they would choose a doctor out-of-network if their reviews were better than their in-network doctor. Don't underestimate the power of positive reviews!
2. How do you manage your reputation?
 - a. First, you want to make sure you have claimed your listing on some of the major healthcare directory websites, such as Vitals, Google My Business, ZocDoc and Healthgrades.
 - b. By having multiple profile listings, you're increasing your online presence and therefore the odds of a new patient finding you.
 - c. The next step to getting great reviews is to ask for them! If your patients are experiencing positive results and are happy with their care, this is the perfect opportunity to ask for a review.
 - d. You can ask them at their appointments, in your emails, or in a text if that's how you send patients information. Remember, you will likely have to ask more than once because they are busy people too!

The PHARMED Solution:

- We will work with you to develop a positive reputation for your practice and individual physicians.

We hope you find this information very useful and it serves you, your practice and your patients well. Reach out to us if you would like to find out how we can coach you even further!

We would love to help you thrive now and in the future.

Stay safe,

On behalf of the entire PHARMED Team



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