

Five Ways to Boost Practice Efficiency on a Shoestring Budget



These steps will help boost your bottom line.

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It is every manager's mantra: "Do more with the same number of staff." Translation? See more patients. Submit more claims. Generate more revenue—all while providing high-quality, low-cost care. How do successful managers accomplish this? They remove the organizational-level barriers that drain productivity, says Michael Mankins,¹ co-author of *Time, Talent, Energy: Overcome Organizational Drag and Unleash Your Team's Productivity Power*.

"Organizational drag" refers to the cumulative effect of institutional factors that drain energy and decrease output. Through his research, Mankins found that companies lose more than 20% of their productivity capacity—more than a day each week—to organizational drag. The good news is that boosting productivity doesn't require a huge budget or even major changes. The reality is that small steps can make a big difference in terms of yield.

Following are five cost-effective ways practice managers can reduce organizational drag to boost productivity and improve staff satisfaction.

1. Delegate certain tasks ... to patients.

Most of today's medical practices use an electronic health record (EHR), but not all of them use the patient portal. Although portals have been slow to catch on, practices that deploy them

effectively are seeing results in terms of reducing the time that is needed to complete certain administrative tasks.

Effective deployment requires strategic patient education from the physician and staff at the point of care, as well as ongoing reminders that the portal is an integral part of "how you do things" at the practice.

Direct patients to the portal, for example, when they want to self-schedule non-urgent appointments, request medication refills, download copies of records, make payments, and more. Provide educational materials about the portal, and hang posters stating the portal is "the new normal." Make it known that the portal is there to give patients 24/7 access to their information and self-service options.

2. Automate.

Project management and productivity expert Tony Wong told Forbes.com that 20% of what employees do each day produces 80% their results.² He says to eliminate tasks that don't matter so you can focus on the 20%

that do. That's where automation can help. Use technology to automate repetitive tasks such as appointment reminders or reminders to schedule preventive health exams (e.g., annual mammograms, colonoscopies, or physicals). These reminders also can incorporate language reminding patients to arrive 15 minutes early,

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bring their insurance card, and be prepared to pay their copayment or deductible amount. Let patients choose their preferred method of communication—text, phone, or email. Practices can also use similar technology to automate life science rep scheduling, thereby reducing the administrative burden on front office staff.³

3. Use free productivity apps.

Many free apps are available to measure and ultimately increase staff productivity. A few of my favorites are the following:

- Doximity: send and receive free HIPAA-secure faxes from your mobile device, and call patients from your

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personal cell phone while displaying your office number;

- Wunderlist: create and share digital to-do lists that include due dates and reminders;
- OhMD: communicate with patients, colleagues, care teams, referring providers, and others via HIPAA-secure texting; and
- RescueTime: track staff time spent on various applications and websites.

4. Promote self-care

Creating a culture of self-care improves productivity because it reminds staff that they, too, are important. It's not all about driving dollars to the bottom line. When staff take care of themselves, they're naturally inspired to work smarter and harder. Mankins discovered that inspired employees are 125% more productive than those who are merely satisfied. They have better cognitive ability and better focus, which translates directly to improved output. What are some ways to promote this type of culture within the practice? Consider the following:

- Ask employees what they want. Then try to make it happen. For example, an employee may want paid time off once a month to volunteer at a local homeless shelter.

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Someone else may want a 10-minute break in the morning and afternoon to meditate. This is all important for self-care, and managers should try their best to accommodate staff.

- Make employees comfortable. Provide a water cooler, coffee machine, ergonomic desk and chair, and kitchen or break area where people can relax. Let employees personalize their workspace as much as possible using photos, décor, and music.

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- Respect employee lunch breaks. Employees need breaks—even on busy days. Juggle schedules to make it work—or simply post a note at the front desk stating, “The office is closed from 12–1 so our staff can take a lunch break. Please have a seat until our receptionist returns.”

5. Employ the right people

Productive practices are those staffed by enthusiastic employees who are passionate about providing high-quality patient care. Recruit talented and enthusiastic individuals for all positions throughout the practice, with a special emphasis on those in leadership positions, who have a disproportionate impact on strategy execution and performance. According to Mankins,⁴ leaders should be able to:

- Align the operating model with true sources of value;
- Create ways of working that allow employees to focus their time on delivering for customers;
- Fight bureaucracy; and
- Simplify their organization's structure.

Using these cost-effective strategies, practices can increase productivity and improve overall operations while freeing up time and resources to focus on quality patient care. **PM**

References

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² Pozin I. 9 habits of productive people. Forbes. www.forbes.com/sites/ilyapozin/2013/08/14/9-habits-of-productive-people/#1d32b0022d3f.

³ Right rep. right time. right information. zero hassle. zero cost. RxVantage. www.rxvantage.com/for-practices/.

⁴ Mankins M. Great companies obsess over productivity, not efficiency. Bain and Company. March 1, 2017. www.bain.com/insights/great-companies-obsess-over-productivity-hbr/.



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