



“If you want to go quickly you can go alone, but if you want to go far you must go together.” African Proverb

The background features a white space on the left and a blue geometric pattern on the right. The blue pattern consists of overlapping, semi-transparent triangles and polygons in various shades of blue, ranging from light to dark. The text is centered in the white area.

8 Steps to a Successful Owner Doctor - Associate Doctor Relationship

GOAL

Create a relationship that benefits everyone: The Owner Doctor, the Associate Doctor and the Patients.

To Accomplish this you need to:

1. Articulate the Owner Doctor's Expectations in as Objective Terms as possible
2. Understand the Associate Doctor's Wants, Needs, Desires and Expectations.
3. Not have the attitude of "We'll figure it out as we go"

Failing to do #'s 1 & 2 before an agreement is in place can lead to an unhealthy relationship where either the Owner Doctor, the Associate Doctor, or both, will feel they are getting taken advantage of.

Communication, Communication, Communication

- ▶ There are still many aspects of developing and maintaining a successful practice that were true years ago and still hold true.
- ▶ But “This is how we’ve always done it” can be dangerous thinking.
- ▶ The Owner Doctor needs to be able to weave their knowledge and experience into the relationship with the Associate Doctor and the Associate Doctor needs to be willing to embrace it.
- ▶ The Owner Doctor also has to be willing to embrace new and better ways of doing things that the Associate Doctor can bring to the organization.

STEP 1: Know why you want to bring on an Associate Doctor

- ▶ Help with the current patient volume?
- ▶ Help to grow the practice?
- ▶ Allow you to work fewer hours?
- ▶ Provide additional / different services?
- ▶ Eventually purchase your practice?
- ▶ Other?

STEP 2: Discuss the Clinic Schedule

- ▶ It is important, at least early on, for the Associate Doctor to be in the Clinic at the same time as the Owner Doctor for the times he / she has questions about a patient they are seeing.
- ▶ It is also important to have time when the Associate Doctor is the only Doctor in the Clinic to give them more access to New Patients.
- ▶ Does the Clinic currently have early morning hours, evening hours, or weekend hours? If not, does the Owner Doctor feel it would be beneficial to have them?
- ▶ Is the Associate Doctor willing to work those hours?

Step 3: Discuss the Associate Doctor's Work Schedule and Time off Policy

“It takes forever for a patient to know you are there for them, and an instant to know you aren’t.” Dr. Mark Bledsoe

- ▶ There is a lot of talk lately about the Millennial Generation and the perception they lack a good work ethic.
- ▶ The Owner Doctor needs to have an open and honest discussion with the Associate Doctor about his/her expectations for the Associate Doctor's work schedule.
- ▶ A compensation policy of “Eating what you kill” does not always correlate into a work schedule that meets the Owner Doctor's expectations.
- ▶ Most employers have a Paid Time Off (PTO) Policy. Even if the Associate Doctor is being paid on a % of their Billed, Allowed, or Collected I highly recommend you have PTO policy in place.

Step 4: Discuss the New Patient Policy

Most Owner Doctors are still at a point in their practice where they want and need to see New Patients. However, since the Associate Doctor will more than likely have more room on the schedule to see New Patients, the staff may be inclined to schedule more New Patients with Associate Doctor than with the Owner Doctor.

Therefore, it is imperative you have a New Patient Policy in place that the Owner Doctor, Associate Doctor, and staff all understand.

An example would be:

- If a patient requests a specific doctor, the New Patient is scheduled with that doctor.
- If the patient does not request a specific doctor the staff can schedule the New Patient with whichever doctor is available. However, the New Patient totals will be monitored on a weekly basis to make sure the New Patient distribution is relatively equal.

The Goal is to have the Associate Doctor develop their own practice and obtain their own New Patients and not depend on the overflow from the Owner Doctor.

Step 5: Discuss Marketing, Promotion and Community Involvement

- ▶ Associate Doctors are well aware of the need to be involved in their community to not only make the community better but to market and promote themselves and the Clinic.
- ▶ However, once they begin practice and see how much time and energy it takes to see patients, complete their documentation and other duties, it becomes harder to make the effort to get out in the community.
- ▶ The Owner Doctor should set some objective levels of involvement for the Associate Doctor, including:
 1. The number of civic, community, or religious groups they must join and participate in.
 2. The number of volunteer hours they must achieve on a weekly or monthly basis.
 3. The number of talks or presentations they must give each month.

Step 6: Discuss Use of Staff

One of the conflicts that can arise is with the use of patient care staff by the Associate Doctor. While it is appropriate for the Associate Doctor to utilize staff to take x-rays, until the Associate Doctor builds his/her practice to a level where it is no longer feasible, he/she should be expected to take the patient's History and perform their own evaluations and examinations, as well as the therapeutic modalities on their patients.

It doesn't make sense for the Associate Doctor to order a staff person to take the patient's History, or to perform a therapeutic modality, when the Associate Doctor has the time to do so.

This can be monitored, and as the Associate Doctor's practice increases, the amount of staff services that are available to them can be increased as well.

Step 7: Discuss Education and Training

Covering the cost of continuing education and training will more than likely be included in the discussion about compensation. However, the Owner Doctor should require the Associate Doctor to approve any continuing education and training with him/her, especially if the education and training is paid for by the Clinic.

The goal is to:

- Make sure the Associate Doctor is attending relevant continuing education and training.
- Diversify the services provided in the Clinic. The Associate Doctor should look to obtain training that complements, not duplicate, the services provided by the Owner Doctor unless the Owner Doctor wants him / her to do so.

Step 8: Discuss Compensation

The final piece of the puzzle is Compensation. In my experience I have learned that most Owner Doctors want their Associates to have the same feeling they had when they started their practice, which is to be scared and hungry, and to “eat what they kill.”

However, they also don't want them to be so worried about money that they aren't able to concentrate on attracting new patients and providing quality care.

Therefore, I recommend a Compensation Package that is a blend of salary, plus additional compensation when the Associate Doctor reaches a certain level of Collections.

Final Thoughts

If done correctly, and with a great deal of quality communication at the beginning, the Owner Doctor can create a situation that is a win for him / her, a win for the Associate Doctor and a win for the Clinic's patients.

Doctors have enough headaches to deal with already, literally and figuratively. Therefore, they must take the necessary steps, in order to avoid creating another one when onboarding an Associate Doctor.



Questions

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