

How to Become the Best Doctor & How to Build The Best Medical Practice?

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The Art is long, Life is Short. -Hippocrates

The current practice of medicine faces many opportunities and challenges going forward. There are many forms of clinical Practice today, including Solo Practice, Group Practice, Corporate Practice, Institutional Practice and newer forms of Practice Consolidations and

Mergers. There are also newer challenges (clinical establishment act, generic drugs, possible price cap on devices, Goods and Services Tax, etc), which have an impact on the way we practice medicine, and it is in our best interests to stay ahead of the challenges posed by these policy changes. With decreasing reimbursements, increasing cost of equipments and a changing economy, it may become increasingly difficult to stay afloat and flourish.

In this write-up, we share valuable pearls for the young doctors to overcome these challenges—from personal enrichment to building a practice and dealing with increasing patient loads and the eventual difficult patient.

What are qualities of best doctor to build best medical practice?

A good doctor needs to be a people's person at heart. Someone who enjoys interacting with all sorts of people. He/ she needs to be truly skilled in art and science of medicine and surgery, as modern medical science has really evolved to a very high level of precision over the last few years, and therefore the patient expectations have also risen dramatically. However, in this competitive and demanding world, both the science and technique as well as the art are important. And therefore, while it is quite enough to be a good surgeon and give good results, to excel, one has to learn good communication skills, strive constantly to give the best surgical results, as well as the best overall experience to the patients.

How young doctor(s) can imbibe these qualities?

Young doctors first and foremost need to learn and fine tune their surgical skills as best as they can, and the earlier, the better. At a young age, without the additional responsibilities of

family and children, it is possible to travel to different cities and countries, and get the best possible training. Good surgical training is the bedrock, that no one can do without in today's age. Along with this, young doctors should also make it a habit to observe their seniors interacting with patients, particularly difficult and demanding patients. If you have plans of having your own practice, then you need to know the basics of financial planning and administration. Observe the facilities that are provided in good practices, and the small things that can make a significant difference to the overall patient satisfaction.

How these qualities can help young doctor to start and run a new medical practice?

By default, even today most young doctors end up starting their own practice, though the practice patterns are now changing rapidly, with more emphasis on group practices, shared facilities etc. When one starts a new practice, often they realize that the residency training has not prepared them for this at all. When managing a new medical practice, the doctor needs to go beyond clinical medicine to truly satisfy and manage a patient, and beyond patient management to run an efficient, financially viable growing medical practice. Someone said that "The education of the doctor which goes on after he has his degree is the most important part of his education". At this stage, we need to keenly and quickly learn the basics of practice management, in terms of staffing, administration, providing the right ambiance, marketing, communication and patient handling skills etc. in short, while we need to hone our surgical skills during training, we must also focus on our soft skills if we want to run a successful practice.

How to manage high volume patient workload in medical practice?

If you are fortunate enough to have a high volume patient workload in your practice, it often becomes a challenge to give enough time to each patient and fully satisfy them. Here effective communication skills become very important, where you can give all the necessary and relevant information in a short time, and utilize your chair time with the patient most efficiently. However, despite all this, there will be patients and attendants who need repetitive explanations and guidance, and

here the role of well trained staff, and particularly counselors becomes very important. We must utilize the services of well trained and groomed staff and counselors who can take over the work of explanations and can give the patients more time, thereby reassuring them and satisfying all their queries. Depending on the workload and the practice setting, we can delegate many other tasks to the staff members. For example our high volume ophthalmic practice, optometrists do more than half the work, and trained ophthalmic technicians perform investigations etc. However, it is important to keep motivating the staff regularly to provide their best services to the patients.

How to handle unsatisfied patients?

This is becoming an increasingly difficult but necessary art to master. We must take part of the blame for raising the patient expectations so high, that they have become very difficult to satisfy. A lot of aggressive advertising, tall claims and high surgical costs have convinced the patients that surgery (in branch like ophthalmology-for example cataract and refractive surgery) is a ten minute wonder, where nothing can go wrong, and the patient will get “super-vision”. In this scenario, the first thing is to have good counselling for all surgical patients. Adequate chair time needs to be given so that the patient expectations are realistic, and there is no mismatch between their expectations and what can be delivered. Despite these efforts, if a patient ends up dissatisfied with the results, the first thing is to give a patient hearing. Many irate patients often cool down enough with a feeling of having been heard and understood. Never try to brush aside their complaint, even if they seem insignificant to you. Patients will seldom create much trouble if the doctor is respectful and sensitive and hears them out, but will become increasingly aggressive if they get the impression that the doctor makes them feel inferior or is too rushed to listen to them. Also, it goes without saying that we must do the best that we can to solve the cause of their dissatisfaction, and be financially considerate while doing so to minimize patients to take course of consumer court.

How to market yourself early on for successful medical practice?

Marketing and image building is an essential part of practices today, and is no longer considered a unhealthy word in medicine. However, marketing in medicine bears a greater responsibility to be ethical and appropriate. We owe it to the dignity of our profession to ensure that our marketing is not in poor taste. Marketing is not synonymous with advertising, and aggressive advertising is still controversial among medical circles. Subtle marketing on the other hand is less expensive, often more effective and also acceptable. But with the increasing presence of corporate sector in the medical profession, advertising is here to stay. Marketing in the medical

field can initially be cold call type like newspaper advertisements, billboards etc., where we make unsolicited contact with a wide audience. For a new practitioner, this is necessary as he needs to inform the widest possible audience in his area of practice about his services and expertise. Later, one can progress to inbound marketing using the internet and social media for potential customers, giving them a platform to ask queries and know you and your services before they choose you and in-house advertising, where the services available in your practice are prominently displayed in your own premises with clear information and staff is willing and capable to answer any queries related to these services. For a young practitioner, it is important to control the finances in marketing, and after the initial few cold calls, turn to more focused marketing and do not try to “outdo” competitors in advertising. It is also a good idea to organize educational awareness activities and camps at sites of public gatherings, which is a cheap and effective way to market yourself. Finally, you must aim for a scenario, where your satisfied patients become your best marketing tools, because this word of mouth publicity is the strongest and most convincing to potential customers.

How young doctors can take leadership role- e.g. presenting their in conferences and as office bearers of medical societies?

To grow professionally among peers, one needs to have good oratorical as well as public relation (PR)/communication skills. Start by attending the meetings of the medical societies in your area and offer to organize one or two activities at special occasions, where you can display your organizational as well as presentation skills. Societies always need young, dynamic people willing to take on responsibilities, without displaying any ego. Remember not to get involved in factional politics, and be respectful to all seniors.

How to grow medical practice?

If you can provide good services, the work is bound to grow. You need to ensure that you deliver not only good surgical results, but also ensure an overall good experience for your patient. This would mean that you focus on all services provided in your practice right from the ease of parking near your practice to the reception, waiting time, comfort in the waiting hall, adequate facilities for drinking water, toilets, refreshments, if needed, reading material to keep them busy while waiting, professional reasonable

quick service, cheerful and cooperative staff and an adequate explanation of all their queries and concerns. Of course, the satisfaction provided by the doctor would be the main driver, and you need to develop your own soft skills and communication skills so that the patients feel reassured on meeting you, and you can inspire confidence in them. Learn to

connect with your patients and empathize with their concerns. As you grow, try to provide more services (like cornea and retina etc. in ophthalmology) depending on the financial viability.

How to manage the team of doctors, managers and other staff members?

If you have other doctors and managers/staff members working for you, it is crucial and often difficult to keep them satisfied and motivated. One crucial factor is opportunities for financial and/ or professional growth. Also, be accessible to listen to genuine problems of your staff and give them a patient hearing. Just like your patients, the staff also wants to feel heard and understood. Do small activities (for example we celebrate birthday of every staff member at our practice), to foster the team spirit among all the members, and make them feel valued. At the same time, also let it be known that you observe everything, and any misdemeanors will be strictly acted upon.

Managing yourself- How to work efficiently managing a busy practice and how to achieve work life balance?

In a busy practice, efficiency is important to ensure that the patients are seen quickly, and your working time also doesn't overstretch. Learn to delegate all except the core work. Develop a good team and employ good quality staff that can take off some of your burden. Have enough staff to guide the patients and answer their queries and develop effective communication skills yourself, so that you can give a quick yet comprehensive explanation to the patient about his/ her condition. If your practice is managed efficiently, this will leave you time for your family. However, the most important factor for achieving a good work life balance is to firstly recognize its need and importance. Remember that your work is just one aspect of your life, which cannot replace the equally or often more important aspects like health and family. Ambition is an endless race, and therefore work to satisfy yourself and not get ahead of others.

Violence Against Doctors: What Doctors can Do to overcome this Frightening New Epidemic?

There is increasing trend of violence against the doctors in India and it has become a frightening new epidemic. Almost every week, there is an incidence of violence against doctor or hospital. In today's world, sadly doctors do not hold the same place of respect as they did 15-20 years back and there is a steadily declining mutual trust and erosion of the doctor patient relationship. As a responsible member of medical fraternity, it is our duty to strengthen doctor-patient relationship and follow measure to prevent or minimize violence against doctors. Small and medium healthcare establishments are vulnerable and there are increasing incidence of violence against doctors. All the members of

medical fraternity need to remain alert about violence and aggression against doctors. It is advisable to look for indicators of violent behavior such as staring and eye contact, tone and volume of voice, anxiety, mumbling and pacing (STAMP).

Violence and aggression against doctors can be minimized by following P.S.M.

P: Prevent or restrict entry of public. At no stage hordes of relatives should be allowed at the patient's bedside. Entry should be strictly by passes and this must be implemented through good security, preferably by ex-army personnel. Security guards and good quality CCTV cameras must be placed outside as well as inside the hospital at sensitive areas like ICU, Operation theater and casualty.

S: Strengthen Doctor patient relationship by Communication: As mentioned earlier, much needs to be done to improve doctor-- patient relationship. This must begin by the doctor informing the relative of what is going on. Always inform about the cost of the treatment, prognosis, need of repeat surgery and regular follow up, etc.

M: Medical Unity and Media: Last but not the least, medical community need to be united to handle the crisis of violence against doctors, especially by forming an whats-App group (Rush to Stop Violence against Practitioner: RSVP). United medical fraternity can also build pressure on Govt. to bring and implement tough law to protect medical professionals. The Prevention of Violence Against Medicare Persons and Institutions Acts, which have been notified in 19 states in the past 10 years, have failed to address the issue. To prevent violence against doctors, government spending on healthcare must be increased and the Indian Penal Code should be changed to provide for a tougher penalty that could act as a deterrent to violence against doctors. Also doctors need to ensure to publish their version in media so the balanced view can be published.

Take Home message for Young Doctors –

Young doctors can select their career path carefully. If they decided to pursue private practice keeping in mind that running your own practice is a huge work and responsibility. Think well before you choose what exactly you want to do. If you feel you are not cut out to handle all the responsibility (including clinical, financial, administrative etc.), choose another option like working in hospital or a shared facility.

If you do choose to have your own practice, the initial few years are very crucial and remember to focus only on patient satisfaction at this time. Also, remember to be strong even if there are minor setbacks. Keep the big picture in mind, and do not fret over small things. In the end, remember that the ultimate aim of life is to be happy and professional success is just one means of achieving that along with many other things.