

Mid-Level Providers

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Are you Using them for your Health Care Practice?

Timely access to a primary care physician (PCP) is an essential social necessity. In an ideal world, everyone would have easy and quick access to a PCP allowing them to maintain good health while also preventing any unnecessary last minute emergency room visits or avoidable health risks. However, as things stand today, there is a shortage of primary care physicians. According to the American Academy of Family Physicians by 2020 there will be a shortage of 40,000 primary care physicians. Compounding this projection is another statistic given by the U.S. Bureau of Health Professions which predicts a shortage of 109,600 physicians across all specialties by the year 2020.

This presents a serious cause for concern in light of the fact that health insurance has become mandatory which means a significant increase in the number of patients. Because of this most healthcare practices today are finding it extremely difficult to deal with the increase in patient flow. In addition to increasing wait times for patient appointments, the instances of emergency rooms visits have gone up significantly.

The real issue is that unlike other professions, medical professionals need to invest considerable time into completing their education and in gaining substantial experience to successfully treat patients. The time frame again differs depending on the kind of specialty a potential physician selects. Under these circumstances, the best option for dealing with the present and future shortage of PCPs lies in incorporating mid-level providers.

The Changing Role of Mid-level Providers

The role of mid-level providers has undergone extensive change in the last few decades. Today mid-levels practice not only in primary care practices but are also recruited to work in hospitals, specialty facilities inpatient and outpatient surgical facilities, as well as in emergency departments.

Mid-level providers can be authorized to take on a number of responsibilities. Important responsibilities include the following;

- Patient evaluation.
- Taking patient history and performing physical examinations.
- Diagnosing and treating health and medical issues.
- Ordering and analyzing a number of important diagnostic tests including X-rays and CT scans and lab results.
- Prescribing medications and treatments options/procedures for patients.
- Educating patients on important and necessary lifestyle changes/choices, as well as educating them on disease prevention practices.

There is immense pressure on hospitals and primary care physicians to not only re-evaluate but also to improve the way they manage and deliver healthcare for patients. By incorporating mid-level providers healthcare facilities stand

to effectively improve the quality of care they provide, significantly increase patient satisfaction, while also benefiting from lowered costs and increased revenue.

MID-LEVELS AND YOUR HEALTHCARE PRACTICE

The acceptance of mid-level providers - primarily nurse practitioners and physician assistants - is an important strategy for improving healthcare practice efficiency. This is one of the reasons why the use of mid-level providers is growing.

A mid-level provider whether employed in a private practice or in a group or academic practice can help address workload issues for physicians.

Mid-level providers can effectively help in lowering the burdens of primary care physician (PCPs).

Healthcare practices that accept mid-level providers can successfully work towards improving primary care delivery and improving practice productivity as they can perform about 80 percent of a primary care physician's work. Because of this an increasing number of PCPs are becoming more receptive to working with mid-levels.



3 COMMON WAYS

MID-LEVEL PROVIDERS ARE INCORPORATED IN A HEALTHCARE PRACTICE

Accepted to take care of acute care visits, extended practice hours, and or same day patients.



Incorporated to help the primary care physician on a care team and helps provide treatment for acute problems in addition to providing chronic and preventive care.



In accordance with state laws is accepted to take on full responsibility of patient care.



The growth in the number of mid-levels is expected to intensify. This trend will have a dramatic impact on physicians, whether employed or in private practice, in terms of both liability issues and day-to-day practice.

WORKING WITH MID-LEVELS BEST PRACTICES AND TIPS

The decision to add mid-level providers to your healthcare practice requires careful consideration of a number of factors. Keep the following in mind;



Make sure you research state regulations and reimbursement rules.

Give equal consideration to both education and level of experience.



Determine and carefully consider how the mid-level provider will function within the practice.

Provide extensive training and or orientation within the practice.



Introduce the mid-level provider as a valuable member of your practice to both colleagues and your patients.

Expanding the roles of Mid-levels in your Practice – Top 3 Benefits

Mid-levels definitely provide a number of crucial advantages for growing and expanding a practice. Consider the following;

- The time duration for educating mid-level providers is much shorter compared to the time that goes into educating physicians. This is one of the reasons why it is easier to increase the presence of mid-levels in a healthcare practice.
- Mid-level providers are a cost-effective alternative for a primary care facility. They can manage and provide routine care to a patient which means the physician is free to focus on more complex cases.
- Mid-level providers can ease scheduling conflicts without impacting quality of care delivered by a practice. Another advantage here is that physicians who are past their retirement age as well as women physicians with families can continue practicing without having to commit to full-time schedules.

How to make the best use of Mid-level Providers

The biggest challenge when it comes to incorporating mid-levels into your practice pertains to determining their role and responsibilities and making the best use of their skills and experience. Keep the following tips in mind when you integrate mid-levels into your practice.

- Start by evaluating your practice. Determine if your practice really needs a mid-level provider(s).
- Consider the cost factor. In addition to salary and benefits, you will also need to take into account rent for exam rooms that your mid-level provider will use, and other variable expenses (medical supplies, drugs etc.) associated with each patient visit.
- Be prepared to provide your mid-level provider with support staff and phone coverage among other basic necessary support.
- Provide extensive training as and when required and or orientation within the practice.
- Clearly specify case protocols with reference to types of cases the midlevel provider will see.
- Make sure you align with state laws with respect to supervisory requirements and prescriptive authority when it comes to mid-level providers.
- Take a proactive approach and introduce patients to your mid-level provider. Educate them on the role and responsibility of the mid-level provider so patients feel comfortable with your mid-level provider.

Conclusion

Improving patient access without diluting quality of healthcare delivered is one of the most important challenges that most primary care practices face today. Mid-level providers can easily address this issue as they not only effectively boost patient access, but they can drive practice revenue, and help lower the workloads for physicians by taking care of routine complaints which allows physicians to concentrate on more complex cases.

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