



Why Use a Consultant?

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Consultants will give a doctor perspective regarding the practice's operation. They will help discover and achieve realistic goals. There is value for the doctor in knowing how his/her office is performing compared with the real benchmark. This is true for the team as well. Really great teams want to know "how well are we doing." Today the marketplace is more complicated than in the past and management is critical to get to the next level. Insurance companies and PPOs are interfering with treatment and diagnostics, and in order to change this, leadership skills and team motivation are required.

Practicing medicine has increasingly become an expensive business in recent years. Today, the doctor is faced with producing a profit, worrying about retaining staff, recruiting new patients, finding out about state-of-the-art technology and infection control issues; all of which require large sums of money. At the same time, PPOs and insurance companies are severely curtailing the reimbursement for procedures. Rising expenses and decreasing revenues depress profits and create stress. A good management consultant will help the practice thrive, not just survive, in such an environment.

2. When is it time to consult with the experts?

When does an Olympic athlete bring on a coach? No high performance athlete performs without a coach and neither should a 21st century practice. The coach's job is to step back and see the big picture of the talent and unique skills of the client, and how these unique talents can best be employed to attain the goal. By starting early, bad management habits can be avoided.

Team members are the absolute key to the practice's success and help in bringing them on board early can make life substantially less stressful. A consultant is a specialist much like an endodontist, periodontist, etc. When do you use these specialists? You use them when they have expertise that you need but don't have. Or, when you don't want to take the time to develop the expertise yourself.

3. How do I find a reputable consultant? What do I avoid and what do I look for?

First know yourself. What are you looking for? What goals have not been achieved yet?

What are the 90-day versus the one-year goals? Where does the practice stand financially in production, collections, overhead; how is staff morale? Do you want to share the workload, make more money, more time off? After some reflection, start asking colleagues about their experiences and interview consultants. Ask about their strengths in the areas that you have a need. Ask about what they do as well as how they deliver their work.

Some consultants prefer to concentrate their work with a client in one week and then leave. The better firms will work with their clients over time to insure that ideas are implemented. Ask for referrals and check out their level of experience. Is the consultant just an accountant who focuses on past performance and has a doctor as a client? Or is the firm able to work with many doctors and help them create a future of choice while using historical data to get there? Choose a consultant who will come to the office, and listen to your concerns and get to know you as well as the team.

Personalities are important but they are not as important as philosophy. What is their “world view?” It affects how they deliver services? How important are people versus numbers? Are relationships more or less valuable than data? Does the team like them? Being efficient is one thing, but today’s medical practice needs effectiveness more than anything. Management of people requires being effective, not being efficient.

4. Why not just do it on my own?

After spending hours working unsuccessfully, the wise doctor knows what he/she is good at and sticks with it. Wisdom is knowing what you don’t do well and getting someone on your side who will make you look good.

5. What can I expect to pay?

This is a difficult question to answer. What do you say when a patient calls and asks for a face lift fee? There are many types and without specific knowledge that comes from an exam and consult, whatever you say may be way out of line. Fees need to be based on a specific proposal outlining what is to be done and how much time will be invested in accomplishing the doctor’s goals.