

Reap What You Sow

“You shall reap what you sow” is a common saying. Online I found interpretations at several sites stating that it means that you will be rewarded for your good efforts or suffer for your neglect. The saying has its roots in the Judeo-Christian religion although something similar can be found in most religions. I have observed in my many years of life that this is often true, though not always.

You may remember that in my February 2018 newsletter *Time is of the Essence* the following: ‘I was reviewing comments about a medical practice in my area on Yelp!, the app that rates all different kinds of businesses... This is one of the comments that I found:

“NEW PATIENTS BEWARE!!! Never have I had such a consistently poor health care experience....

I’ve been to 3 visits and never waited less than 40 minutes to see provider even with a first morning appt. At my physical I was told that we did not have enough time to address my concerns because she had to get on to ‘the next one’ after I had waited 50 minutes. This was my annual physical from a brand new primary care physician!” Needless to say, the patient switched physicians.’. Lesson—the practice performed poorly and lost a patient.

Healthcare providers who focus on providing superior care to their patients are often rewarded for their efforts. Some non-financial rewards, which some may find the most important, are:

- Higher patient satisfaction
- Better patient engagement
- Higher employee satisfaction
- Better patient outcomes

Providers also can be rewarded financially for their efforts on improving patient care. A local practice, Mercy Health Physician Partners of West Michigan, a group of primary and specialty physician providers, has been rewarded by Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan for becoming certified as Patient-Centered Medical Home at all of its sites by the NCQA. Many of its sites are certified at level 3. The Blues have negotiated a contract with this group to provide a narrow network of care. Medicare patients can buy a Medicare Advantage plan through the Michigan Blues at a greatly reduced cost if they agree to use the services of Mercy Health Physician Partners and designated local hospitals that are a part of the Trinity Group. Physician Partners is rewarded by an increase in Medicare Patients. Also, it is reimbursed at enhanced rate on its schedule of fees with the Blues.

I am working with a local infusion practice to improve its patient satisfaction scores. This, as you may recall, is one of the aims of the Triple Aim for healthcare (better care at a lower cost with increased satisfaction). The CEO of the group intends to use the data from patient satisfaction surveys that I analyze and report upon with dashboards and graphs to negotiate enhanced reimbursement rates with its payers. The patients will benefit too.

You too can benefit from providing improved care. The Medical Group Management Association publishes an e-book *Transitioning to Alternative Payment Models* that describes how practices can benefit by negotiating with payers for better reimbursement for providing better care. It can be purchased online at the MGMA website. Let me share some ideas that they have in the Pay-for-Performance (P4P) chapter.

In this chapter one finds the suggestion that payer and provider negotiate to align their objectives. Payers are very interested in the Triple Aim of Healthcare as it will save them money and improve their clients' satisfaction. They are willing to make it a win-win for providers who will also work towards this goal by enhancing their fee-for-service schedule for hitting negotiated targets.

The challenge for providers is in negotiating good P4P contracts. The first step is to meet with a payer and explore possibilities together. Some areas suggested to explore are:

- Percentage generic prescriptions
- PCMH accreditation
- Transition of care to more cost-effective settings
- Lower readmission rates
- Avoidable emergency room visits

Your practice should focus on its strengths. Some of the above or other processes that produce better outcomes at a lower cost may already be a part of your healthcare routines. If so, then you should negotiate to receive an enhanced reimbursement for these.

What kinds of rewards can you focus on. This chapter points out these possibilities:

- Pre-determined percentage increase to base contract rates
- Added dollar amount to select CPT codes
- Increased reimbursement for becoming a PCMH

The basis for contracting will be the ability to demonstrate that you can reach or have reached the targets that are negotiated. The only way to do so is through data. Data that you and the payer collect must show that you are moving towards the negotiated targets or have reached them consistently. For instance, in providing preventive care you may need to demonstrate that a certain percentage of your Medicare patients receive an annual wellness visit or that a certain percentage receive a flu vaccine. The payer will be able to determine this through billing codes. Other measures may be self-reported.

The chapter in a table lists the steps that both payer and provider take in negotiating and reimbursing enhanced performance measures and achievements. They are:

1. Review payer performance reports with practice leadership
2. Validate payer performance reports with practice data
3. Identify potential metrics for contracts
4. Craft proposal including timelines
5. Submit proposal to payer
6. Negotiate contract financial and language implications and measures

7. Develop communication plan with data component
8. Perform an interim review
9. Validate achievements and reimbursements

As you can see, your practice can be rewarded financially for providing superior care to patients. Achieving such enhanced rewards should be viewed as a journey for your practice. That is, this journey involves transforming your practice to implement processes and practices that enhance outcomes while reducing costs. This will involve using Process Improvement models such as Lean Healthcare or Business Process Management and Improvement.

As you can see, “You reap what you sow” is important in healthcare and will become more so in the future. Working hard to achieve the Triple Aim can be a win-win-win for payers, providers and patients. I believe that the transformation of care at your site is necessary now and will be even more so in the future.