

New Year New practice New horizons

Specialist medical accountant Pauline Hogg gives her views on how practice managers can help improve how their practices look, feel and operate

Are you planning to use the new year to focus on changes in your practice that will make life easier for you and your team? As a finance expert, I visit GP surgeries every day and observe similar patterns of behaviour that, if changed, could fundamentally alter the way practices operate. It's not just about crunching the numbers – that is relatively straightforward. It is as much about altering the DNA of the place – the culture, the people and the processes.

Here are my top three recommendations for implementing change in your practice:

1 Take courage, take responsibility

I was recently looking on LinkedIn and came across Simon Sinek, leadership expert and inspirational speaker who says: 'So much of affecting change is the confidence and courage to simply try.' Not all of us have the capacity to respond to suggestions to do something differently without a rumbling sense of fear. If, however, you're committed to making changes, take courage, start at the beginning and acknowledge where you are.

Then take full responsibility for it and decide what you want to do. No situation, however

difficult, is unsolvable and as a practice manager you are in a strong position to make a difference. Don't worry if you don't know how to fix things. Advisors such as your practice accountant are there to provide the help you need – just ask.

2 Examine your culture

So, you have acknowledged that the practice needs to change – what next? I recently went into one practice where trust had fundamentally broken down between the partners. Acting as a referee in a boxing match, prizing people apart, the practice manager felt like she was hitting her head against a brick wall and asked me in to see if we could help. So, we carried out a session with the partners and facilitated a discussion around why trust had broken down. And what a difference that made. Partners opened up, said how they felt and agreed as a team what to do next. They acknowledged what was not working for them and agreed that they, as a partnership, had to change how they worked with each other if they were ever going to move things forward and make the practice work better. They also agreed that they had to change some of their own behaviour and set



Pauline Hogg is a partner at Condies Health, a member of the Association of Independent Specialist Medical Accountants. For more information call 01383 721421 or email pauline.hogg@condie.co.uk. To find an AISMA accountant visit www.aisma.org.uk

an example for the rest of the team. By the end of the session you could just feel the air lighten and the clouds lift. Naturally, their next question was, 'what next?' And that is my third recommendation:

3 Restructure and change

The trigger to restructure is very simple. If you imagine that your practice was a person, just ask yourself how would it be feeling today? And if the response is 'frustrated' or 'exhausted', or 'overworked', or 'fed up', or something a lot stronger than this is the green light to move forward and restructure. It might sound alarming but restructuring is nothing to be worried about. I liken it to a thorough spring clean – afterwards you just feel organised, refreshed and in control. We encourage our healthcare clients to stand back, take a good hard look at their practices and identify everything they need their practice to do to:

- a) serve the patient
- b) support the practice's infrastructure.

We then work with the practice team to visualise their business, mapping out everything that needs to be done to look after the patients and run the surgery. We look at who is currently doing what and how and ask ourselves if it could be done differently or better.

This lets us get creative and consider other ways of working. People soaking in fear loathe this bit; those dying to see progress embrace it! The upshot is that we change some of the areas and keep others; we look at the capabilities of the team and train staff to learn additional skills if necessary. We tear up the unnecessary and re-work the necessary. And we inject life and positive energy back into the practice and those working in it, creating a more harmonious and happier place for everyone – even the patients!

