

FAQ

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



WEBINAR

Teaching the Business of General Practice

What are the benefits of teaching my registrars about the business side of general practice?

The key goals of (and benefits from) teaching the business of general practice are:

- building understanding;
- managing expectations; and
- setting standards.

A healthy relationship between registrars and GP supervisors/ owners/ practice managers is far easier to achieve when the latter emphasise the challenges and risks of operating a GP clinic as part of their registrars' training.

Pay disparity between hospitals and GP clinics can come as quite a shock for registrars, especially when they are typically pre-programmed with the notion that general practice is the "cash cow" of the medical world. To avoid an undercurrent of resentment which may lead to ineffective supervision and a breakdown in team dynamics, this misconception needs to be addressed early in the working relationship. Teaching the business of general practice is a vital tool in this endeavour.

What are some of the details about the business I should share with my registrars as part of their training?

HARD SKILLS

To help your registrars see what a general practice business is all about, the first step should be one that helps them understand what their own role within a training practice represents. If done up front, giving clarity as regards their contribution should help them see that the practice values and takes on registrars for reasons other than financial advantage. In other words, they are not the cheap and convenient labour false perceptions about general practice might lead them to believe they are!

Revenue

Rather than offering all the answers, ask your registrar to consider general practice as a business, identifying revenue and expenses they might otherwise take for granted or overlook. Ask them to think on these questions:

- What generates income in general practice?
- What are the expenses that don't generate income?
- What do you have to spend to keep the business running?
- What does it cost to recruit the right staff?
- What professional non-clinical skills are required for the

practice, and at what cost?

- Who is the practice's typical patient?
- Are consults in the practice typically bulk-billed or privately billed?
- How much does it cost to achieve a good culture in the workplace?

A collection of easy-reference charts has been provided here to help you facilitate a better understanding about practice running costs and the registrar's contribution towards these - without the need to disclose sensitive financial information about your own practice.

These charts offer sample details you can use to highlight the billables required to keep a general practice in business, and the need for your clinicians to streamline their processes with respect to case notes and clinical reasoning so they can achieve the consults per hour targets you set for them.

You may also find the business intelligence software currently used in your practice will offer reports in line or bar chart format so you can provide regular billing analyses by clinician or by item number that can be edited to show only percentage comparison not the actual dollar amounts. These types of charts can be particularly useful for pointing out seasonal variances and showing the effects on the business by extraordinary situations such as dealing with the COVID-19 crisis.

SOFT SKILLS

Quite apart from the financial challenges of running a general practice, the registrar needs to understand these risks are coupled with and affected by many other non-financial considerations. These can be broken into two distinct business domains that need to be kept in balance with revenue:

- recruitment; and
- culture.

Recruitment

Finding and keeping the clinicians and non-clinical staff that create the best fit for the patient profile is perhaps the greatest challenge involved in the business of general practice. The financial cost of recruitment is in itself substantial, but, in the absence of any formal teaching in this area for them, the soft skills needed to effectively bring together and manage the right people for a GP clinic are what your registrars will really look to you for. These same skills are of course necessary for developing long-term relationships with patients – the repeat business that keeps general practices afloat:

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- empathy / emotional intelligence
- conflict management
- customer service (in the broader context, this refers as much to interactions with patients as respect shown to fellow team members)
- productivity
- time management
- stress management
- communication skills
- creation of a business culture that reliably achieves the above

Culture

To make the registrar appreciate the value of their contribution to the practice's culture, you might ask them to think on the following:

- What would be the best business they have worked in, and why?
- What would be the worst business they have worked in, and what made it that way?
- How much is good culture worth to a business?
- How much is good culture worth to them personally?
- What are the magic ingredients?

It is important to remember that, when a new registrar enters a general practice to start their rotation, they come equipped with expectations of the work environment - and the relationships within this - as shaped by their hospital experience. The supervisor's role from the outset is to explain the way things are done in this new environment, setting expectations in terms of not only their performance, communications, benefits, learning paths etc, but also their basic goals for the patient experience. While these may not be altogether dissimilar to what they were in the hospital context, they perhaps have a different emphasis due to the nature of general practice as a business dependant on repeat clientele:

- negligible / minimal wait time
- positive interaction during consult
- consistency in case details discussed during follow-up appointment (ie effective and accurate patient notes on file, illustrating that the patient has been listened to and their concerns addressed)

Patient Experience

While the above points outline the most obvious aspects of the patient experience for the registrar new to the general practice, as this individual settles in as a vital part of the practice team and thus the practice culture, you need to explain that all of the below are ultimately vital for them to understand and contribute to:

- cleanliness and appeal of practice's physical environment
- accuracy and transparency in billing
- ease of scheduling appointments
- social media platforms and currency of posts
- access to pharmacy
- friendliness and efficiency of staff
- access to clinic via telephone
- website providing up-to-date information
- consistent (positive) perception of practice reflected through online booking platform, website, social media, clinicians and non-clinical staff, physical environment

How do I increase the registrar's financial contribution to the business?

Outside of their medical studies and work, most registrars would be aware of the concept of business and marketing on some level. Accordingly, a big-picture approach to the risks and challenges that go into operating a general practice as a business may be all you need to offer in order for them to give due focus to their role in the practice's success. To this end, you might highlight not just the typical operating costs but the barriers to market entry and exit for a general practice, and the need to constantly improve and innovate in order to maintain adequate market share to meet the business' financial goals.

Where they are negatively impacting the business by failing to meet consult targets, the registrar is possibly losing time with lengthy patient notes, poor clinical reasoning, and ordering tests without clear justification. If this is the case, you may need to pull random case files to review together, and invite them to sit in on your consults so they can observe the tools you have personally developed to better manage your time with patients, eg: software shortcuts and note-taking using shorthand.

By making them aware of the revenue they generate against the practice's running costs - especially in the situation where the registrar is reluctant to privately bill their patients in a mixed billing context -, you can help them be more proactive in their financial contribution to the business. The Easy-Reference Charts provided here may prove useful in this effort.