

PREFACE

"We are here to make another world."

—W. Edwards Deming

The practice of medicine is one of the oldest and most honorable of professions, but it is facing a revolution that is unprecedented. Navigating this revolution will require skilled and well-prepared practice managers and leaders.

In many ways, the opening quote to this section of the book exemplifies the intention of this text and the current state of medical practice management as a field. Deming, widely considered the father of the quality revolution, often said understanding the "why," not simply the "what," of our work is essential to provide superior services and performance. I had the good fortune to learn from Deming and experience firsthand the foundations of quality management. Through this experience, I gleaned many important insights about the operation of successful practices. Many years have passed since I realized the profound impact of this experience, but Deming's teachings are more relevant today than ever before. Much of his approach has been repackaged for today's industries, but the basis of its truths lies in the tenets Deming demonstrated decades ago.

The true meaning and philosophy of quality and performance excellence get lost in the details of targets, processes, and tools. The details do not replace wisdom or developing an appreciation for what it means to demonstrate excellence and be guided by quality principles. Simply documenting the "right" targets and adopting the right tools is not enough to succeed; process without purpose is pointless. We need to focus less on the

completion of discrete functions and more on understanding that function's purpose so that we can know how to improve it. To that end, education for practice managers must incorporate development of deep knowledge of healthcare delivery by the medical practice and its processes. Additionally, today's practice manager must recognize and embrace the need for change in the healthcare industry to provide the care patients need and deserve.

Practice management encompasses a broad range of activities. In large practice organizations, the manager may have responsibility for a narrow range of functions, but many practices are small organizations, in which the management must assume multiple roles. These may include all aspects of operating the enterprise, much like the responsibilities of a small-business owner. So, although practice managers indeed have a lot of "how-to" to learn, this book is more than a how-to text; it is intended to encourage the reader to think about why medical practice managers do what they do and how the roles of other stakeholders interplay with the manager's. How-to textbooks in healthcare become obsolete almost before they are published because the facts are constantly changing. To maintain their relevance, healthcare management texts must also teach when to carry out the tasks and process and why they should be done. Above all else, healthcare education books should emphasize, "First, do the right thing, and then, do it correctly," not unlike the often-repeated words of the Hippocratic Oath, "First, do no harm."

This text focuses on fundamental concepts and knowledge essential to manage, lead, and develop the wisdom to make the changes needed in medical practices to ensure a prosperous and sustainable future. Using strategies that are good for all stakeholders is necessary because healthcare must pose a value proposition for patients and society. This book is ambitious in its coverage of the field and does not assume the reader has prior knowledge of practice management; however, it may not cover particular topics to the depth that some may wish. A book covering every topic applicable to the healthcare administrator would span many volumes.

Although this text discusses many practical topics, from contract law to information technology, its primary focus is on people. We live in a time of diminished emotional, societal, and economic returns from quick-fix accommodations and processes. John Nash recognized this trend in his Nobel Prize-winning research on game theory: Cooperation is often better than competition for all to achieve their objects (Kuhn et al. 1994). This text aims to demonstrate that working together and putting people first is the best way to be successful in healthcare.

As noted in the first chapter, most people agree that the US medical delivery system needs to change, requiring strong, intelligent leaders and managers with a will to see a better future come to fruition. As Ian Malcolm said to John Hammond in the movie *Jurassic Park*, "Your scientists were so preoccupied with whether they could do it that they didn't stop to think if they should" (Spielberg 1993). This dialogue sums up much of what has happened in the practice of medicine over the past several decades. The industry has responded to short-term incentives and fragmented laws, rules, programs, and policies without a clear, unified strategy for the entire healthcare system. Most segments of US healthcare have worked to

serve their own interests, so past policies, regulations, advocacy efforts, and so on have made sense from that narrow point of view (Heineman and Froemke 2012). That time has passed.

Due to all the challenges facing the healthcare system, change is essential to the future of the medical practice. Furthermore, practices need to lead that change, not follow the unsatisfactory solutions offered by those who know less about the care of patients than practice managers, staff, and clinicians. The modern practice manager and leader must have courage and the ability to see beyond the immediate and the expedient to do what is necessary for the long-term viability of healthcare practices. Courage is required to face the numerous challenges confronted at every turn without taking the easy route.

To quote one final thought from Deming (2016), “A bad system will beat a good person every time.” The objective of this text is to not only provide knowledge but also to change the reader’s mind-set about the action, attitude, and fortitude necessary for a new era of practice management to emerge.

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