

Want to help physicians thrive? Stop doing these 6 things now

JUN 21, 2022

Tanya Albert Henry

Contributing News Writer

There are little steps medical practices and health systems can take today to begin chipping away at the unnecessary tasks in a physician's day—the ones that don't improve clinical outcomes, suck the joy out of practicing medicine and contribute to doctor burnout.

Studies have found that even small steps toward reducing or removing nonessential work—such as not having to wade through EHR inbox messages that aren't necessary for a physician to read, or finding ways to refill medicine more efficiently for long-term prescriptions—can make a big difference in freeing up critical time during the day and helping improve a physician's efficiency.

Reducing physician burnout is a critical component of the AMA Recovery Plan for America's Physicians. You took care of the nation. It's time for the nation to take care of you. It's time to rebuild. And the AMA is ready.

Far too many American physicians experience burnout. That's why the AMA develops resources that prioritize well-being and highlight workflow changes so physicians can focus on what matters—patient care.

The AMA's STEPS Forward[®] team has compiled a “Stop This, Start That Checklist” (PDF) to help your practice or health system get started on the journey. Each recommendation is complete with links to AMA STEPS Forward toolkits that can help guide leaders through the steps to take to make changes.

Here are six habits to consider changing today.

Stop: Automatic notifications about scheduled appointments hitting the inbox. This includes notifications of patients' specialist visits and diagnostic testing. Instead, ask your IT department to help turn off the inbox notifications. Following this five-step EHR inbox management toolkit can help get your organization started. If the IT department says it is not possible, escalate the ask to the chief

information officer or the compliance officer.

Stop: Directly answering patient inquiries that come through the patient portal. Instead, develop standard protocols that allow team members to address the messages. This AMA STEPS Forward patient portal optimization toolkit offers five steps to help make this change.

Stop: Being caught off guard by a patient’s unexpected agenda items. Start implementing pre-appointment questionnaires. This AMA STEPS Forward pre-visit planning toolkit can guide your practice in developing a questionnaire for patients to complete.

Stop: Making a phone call or sending a patient portal message to review lab results. In its place, develop pre-visit lab protocols and review results with patients during their appointment. Follow the pre-visit planning toolkit for concrete steps on how to implement that into your workflow.

Stop: Refilling long-term medications at each appointment. Providing only enough refills to last the patient until the next appointment is an added burden on physicians. Instead, implement 90X4 annual prescription renewals, allowing long-term medications to be refilled as a 90-day supply with four refills once a year. This medication management toolkit offers concrete guidance on how to implement this approach.

Stop: Resigning yourself to “stupid stuff” just because that’s how it has always been. Instead, engage your leaders to start a “Getting Rid of Stupid Stuff” initiative. This toolkit offers five steps to help physicians reclaim their day, including appointing a high-level champion of the project and engaging doctors and their teams.

Stop: Reading laboratory results ordered by other physicians. As an alternative, ask your IT department to help turn off notifications in the EHR. The AMA STEPS Forward “De-Implementation Checklist” (PDF) offers ways to reduce unnecessary daily burdens for physicians and other health professionals including minimizing alerts in the EHR.

Committed to making physician burnout a thing of the past, the AMA has studied, and is currently addressing issues causing and fueling physician burnout—including time constraints, technology and regulations—to better understand and reduce the challenges physicians face. By focusing on factors causing burnout at the system-level, the AMA assesses an organization’s well-being and offers guidance and targeted solutions to support physician well-being and satisfaction.

The AMA STEPS Forward open-access toolkits offer innovative strategies that allow physicians and their staff to thrive in the new health care environment. These courses can help you prevent physician burnout, create the organizational foundation for joy in medicine and improve practice efficiency.

Additionally, the “Saving Time Playbook” is another AMA resource to help your practice become more efficient.