

Smart support helps my pediatrics group face industry headwinds

JUL 28, 2022

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This column is part of a series of firsthand physician accounts that detail how AMA medical group partners are moving medicine to support patient health and the medical profession.

The second I started working with children during my last rotation in year three of medical school in 1993, I knew I wanted to be an independent pediatrician. Every day presents me with opportunities to do what I love most: care for patients and reassure parents they are, in fact, doing a great job. Unfortunately, the realities of health care often interfere with the joy of medicine. Health care, while making progress in many areas, has largely left both pediatrics and independent practices behind.

As a result, many pediatricians have found it impossible to remain independent and have shifted to employment. I watched as hospitals bought out the practices near mine. At our practice in Virginia, Manassas Pediatrics, preserving autonomy over our schedules and practice of medicine was non-negotiable.

However, we needed a partner that could enhance our operations with the right technology and network while still allowing us to run our practice as we saw fit. These factors informed our decision to partner with Privia Pediatrics, a pediatrician-focused organization that equipped us with the tools to help us maintain our autonomy.

Through our partnership, we found three forward-looking ways the health care industry can create a supportive environment for independent pediatricians, as detailed below.

Advancing clinical informatics

As I watch my younger patients fluently use tablets and smartphones, I reflect on how far we've come since the days of scribbled handwriting and paper charts. However, many of the great advancements

in health care technology have not translated into pediatrics. Pediatricians rarely have a platform to voice what they need from their technology. This often leads to disparate, disconnected digital systems and services that can drive physician burnout.

What we need are next-generation tools for the next generation of patients, technologies built with pediatrician input. Physician-governed groups and organizations can help promote this critical feedback and optimize products. Promising improvements include tracking immunization status, evaluating social determinants of health and family dynamics, and integrating patient portals and telehealth. Combining these separate services into one technology platform can help pediatricians deliver high-quality care.

Creating a pediatrician-led network

Just as health care can build a platform to advance clinical informatics, health care can further elevate the pediatric voice by establishing pediatric-led medical groups and organizations. Our partnership affords us the opportunity to meet with fellow pediatricians every month to analyze patient and performance data from practices similar to ours.

During these meetings, leading practices share tips on everything from improving patient satisfaction to streamlining revenue-cycle management. We also discuss evidence-based medical practices and strategies for optimizing our EHRs. These discussions help us convert data into meaningful insights so that, together, we can transform pediatrics in the communities we serve.

Providing a team of health care experts

When you are an independent pediatrician, day-to-day operations like managing your practice's IT and phones, revenue-cycle management and payer contracting can be tedious and time-consuming, especially when you have many patients to see that day. And that's on top of the pandemic's changes to compliance requirements.

In the past, my colleagues and I were left to navigate these everyday complexities and government regulations ourselves. Having a supportive team of experts on call to understand the nuances of contracts or troubleshoot technology problems gives us valuable time back with our patients.

Finally, while it is important to empower pediatricians, these changes cannot happen successfully unless the health care industry meets pediatricians where they are. Our roles will only continue to grow and evolve as we work to address the growing mental health crisis among adolescents. Independent pediatricians will need this kind of support to continue doing what we love most: providing



the best care possible to our patients and their families.

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