AdvancedMD

7 CRUCIAL STEPS TO REBOOTING YOUR PRACTICE Post-pandemic

COVID-19 Special Edition

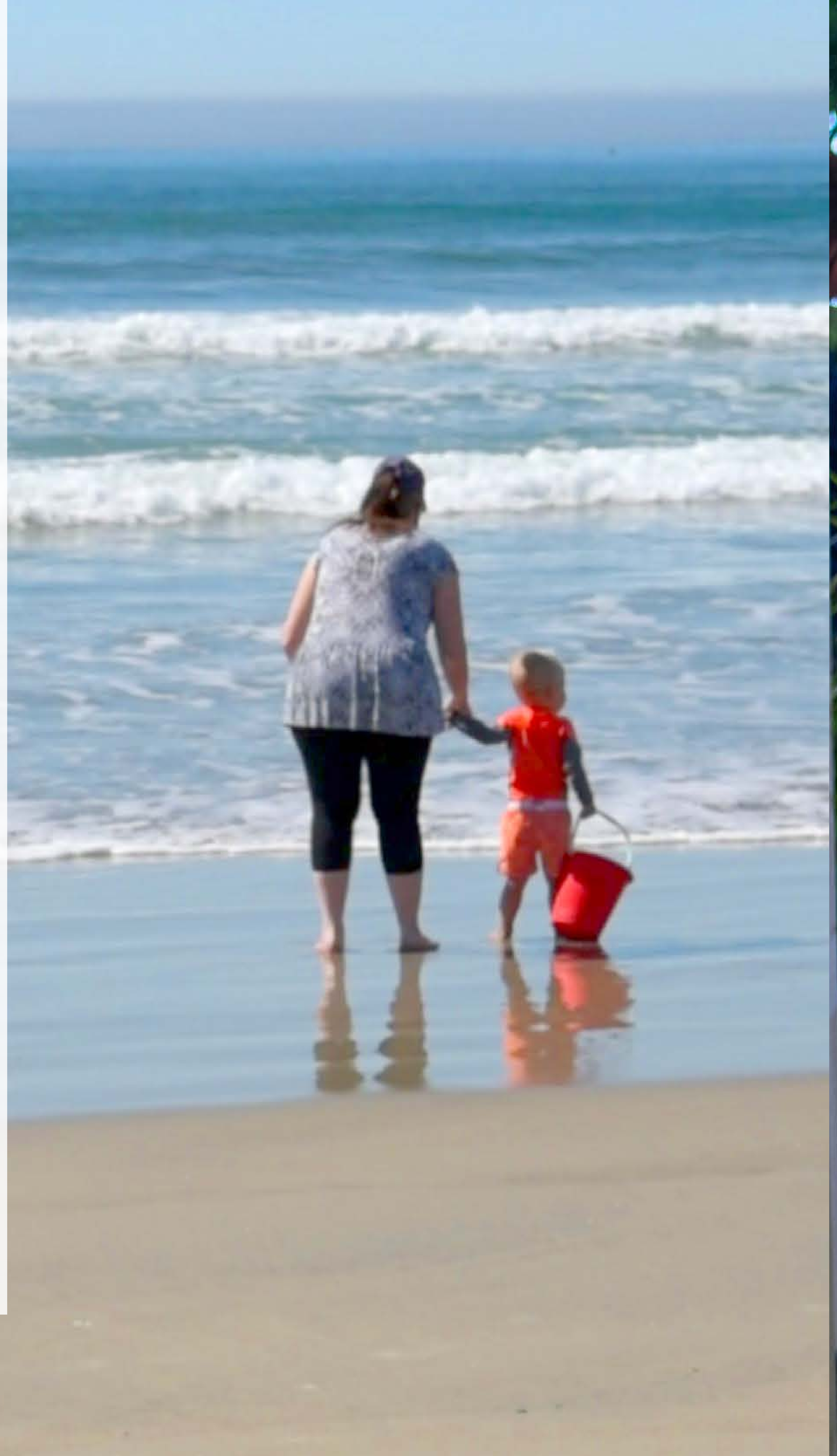
As we move into the pandemic recovery phase, the conversation shifts from how to handle the present crisis, to looking to the future and what a recovered world and economy will represent. We move from, “This is historic, unprecedented, unimaginable” to, “These are uncharted waters.”

Many people say, “We will never be fully the same,” and “The pandemic has forever changed our world.” If that is truly our new reality, then the question becomes, what will my future look like in the new landscape?

The answer to that question depends in great measure on what you want it to look like. While many things impact us that are beyond our control, in a large measure, the type of practice you enjoy in the years beyond the pandemic will be shaped by the planning, processes and attitudes you build during those crucial initial months of the recovery.

In any life pursuit there are always many more things to do than we possibly have time and energy for. This is particularly true for independent practice owners. The trick then is focus: funneling energy, creativity and skill into those activities that will produce the greatest payoffs down the road.

As you face the question of rebuilding your practice post-pandemic, many issues, questions and options will vie for your time and energy. To help focus your approach, we’ve compiled this priority list of seven crucial steps to rebooting your practice based on our experience with thousands of practice owners nationwide. These seven steps will help ensure that the most critical issues for building a recovery foundation are firmly in place to smooth the way to your post-pandemic goals.



BEFORE YOU BEGIN

In order to chart a successful reopening through uncertain waters, it’s important to have a clear idea of the challenges you will face, and a well-defined plan to address each one. But before diving into details and checklists, take a step back to ensure your efforts will be focused on the most central factors for your overall success.

REVERSE “READY, FIRE, AIM”

The speed at which this crisis (COVID-19) moved – both pathologically and economically – required many practices to move very quickly and act without a lot of time for preplanning. For most, it turned out to be pretty much a “ready, fire, aim” scenario. This is not a criticism, just a fact of life.

As you look toward reopening, you have time to more carefully plan the specifics of what that entails. Key areas to frame your approach include:

- Specific challenges and obstacles expected
- Processes, systems & solutions that will address each challenge
- Measurable objectives and specific accountability
- Regular check-ins to gauge progress and make adjustments

While it’s impossible to anticipate every contingency, focusing on a handful of the most crucial success factors framed by advanced planning and execution targets will accelerate your progress.

MAKE THE MOST OF “DRYDOCK TIME”

Big ships periodically go out of service and into drydock for maintenance and upgrades to make sure they are seaworthy. In a way, during a pandemic many practices are forced into mandatory “drydock”, unable to operate normally and provide patient services.

Reopening schedules and protocols coming out of the crisis will vary nationwide. Your state may already be reopening, while others wait for the indicators to turn more positive. Regulations governing reopening stages and procedures will also vary by locale.

Regardless of where you are on the recovery continuum, this is a great time to make the most of practice “drydock” time to prepare for what your reopening scenario will look like, and to put your plans, schedules and processes into place accordingly.

Rather than merely hunker down and wait for the starting gun, take advantage of this time to put all the pieces in place so that you can come out of the gate charging, seaworthy and ready to rebuild. It could be the ideal opportunity to address that system, workflow, process or protocol that was always on the back burner that you knew could improve your service delivery, but never had the time to focus on.

7 CRUCIAL STEPS TO REBOOTING YOUR PRACTICE FOLLOWING A CRISIS

1 CLEARLY COMMUNICATE

It's crucial that your patients know what is going on and how to interact with your practice during the reopening phase. During times of uncertainty, it would actually be hard to overcommunicate.

The best approach is to be proactive, targeted and personalized in your communications:

Give patients updates regarding planned reopening dates and times, office hours/extended hours, special restrictions, safety protocols, etc. Help them feel comfortable that your practice is on top of the situation, that you have a plan, and you are committed to their health and safety.

Communicate with each patient by their preferred method, or multiple methods. Some patients prefer email; others, a text. Some like to check status on the website or their patient portal. A phone call is best for some. And others still prefer a piece of paper in the mail.

Don't hesitate to employ all channels of communication you have at your disposal. Add those that may be missing from your arsenal (for example, if your current system doesn't support mass email or snail mail processes, extract the appropriate lists and employ outside resources). Providing multiple channels of communication will increase your reach and the chances that your patients will receive your messages and respond accordingly.

Provide clear pathways for patients to self-manage their interaction. This is especially important in the early stages of reopening when staff will be inundated with service requests. The more a patient can self-serve, the higher the satisfaction will be for both patient and staff. Opportunities include:

- FAQs (frequently asked questions & answers). Many interactions can be answered with a well-crafted FAQ that addresses the repetitive, more global type questions many patients will have about reopening dates, times, in-office safety and protocols, etc. Point them here first before engaging in more time intensive interactions with staff.
- Calls to the office. If possible, automate and triage calls to point patients to your website or patient portal and then to your FAQs to address routine questions before talking to a staff member.
- Self-schedule on the patient portal. The system should interact with the live schedule to ensure schedules/changes are synched. These days, many patients prefer this method to waiting for a live phone interaction. NOTE: make sure your cancellation policy is clear and updated. See details under Step 2.

- Messaging options. This might include email messages from patients, question forms on the portal, or secure messaging to providers on the portal.

Send targeted, customized messages to populations that require specific actions for missed appointments, crucial follow-ups or priority care. This might include items such as:

- Surgery follow-ups, long-term care plan follow-up visits at specified intervals, continuity of care visits, or elective procedures that were scheduled during the shutdown period.
- Messages can be customized by type of situation, and sent to those in the database who fit that category.

Point them to additional information and resources. This is usually best on the patient portal or practice website.

- Post updates on the patient portal and website homepage.
- Provide educational materials regarding in-office visit safety protocols, use of masks, etc.
- Encourage physical fitness at home: How to keep healthy when world around is mostly sitting.

2 MANAGE THE FLOOD

As you reopen, you will be flooded with requests for service. This is obviously a good thing, but for the next 90 days, your schedule will be the most valuable commodity in your practice. You must manage it flawlessly in order to minimize disruption and confusion while efficiently moving back toward optimum productivity and profitability.

These items will be especially important to optimize in this process:

Phone Efficiency. The phone will be ringing off the hook. Ensure staff is trained and utilizing the full complement of advanced scheduling features (see details below), and that availability schedules are airtight.

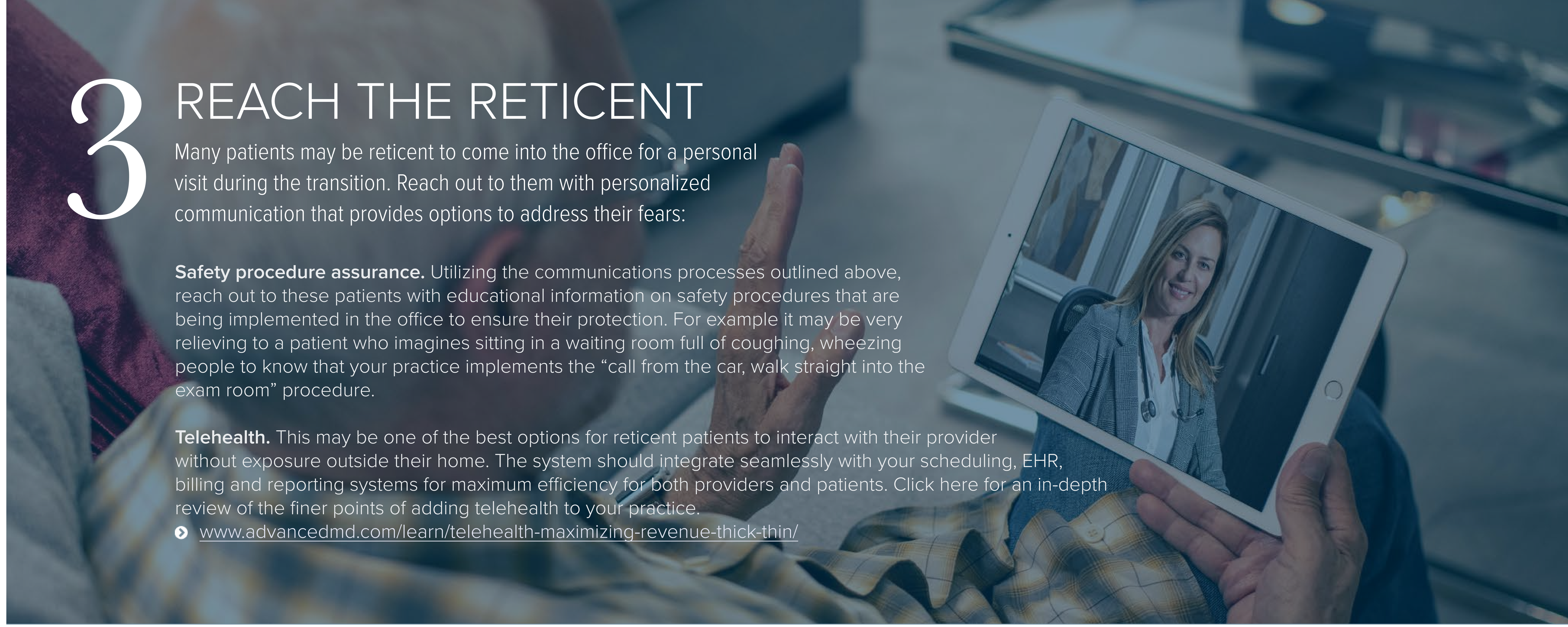
Self-scheduling. Maximize self-scheduling. Push as many as will to the portal to schedule their own appointments. This must be directly integrated with the live schedule, capture provider, appointment type, and ideally include telemedicine options.

Cancellation. Clearly communicate and enforce a very strict cancellation policy. This is crucial. As physicians' doors open back up, many patients will be "fishing" for the earliest appointment available, booking with several different providers in an attempt to get the best time slot. This inevitably results in a higher level of no-shows. Implement a cancellation policy with teeth: many practices require patients to lock in their appointment with a credit card, which will be charged a $50 no-show fee if they fail to show up. There should be no charge for re-scheduling within reason.

Onboarding. Ensure online consent forms are built, configured and ready to go. You can create a library and have each form easily queued up for new patients on the portal. Automated reminders can be set to monitor and execute messages to those who are slow in getting their forms filled out in advance of the appointment.

Advanced Scheduling. Utilizing advanced scheduling features will significantly smooth the path of your reboot. Features include: automated visit type/length, multi-location view, find next available appointment and waitlist hold. Utilize this latter feature to potentially double or triple book available patients as slots open up. This is essential in keeping your schedule fully booked in this important chapter of your practice's history.

Reminders and Reschedules. The system must include automated reminders to minimize no-shows. Rescheduling must be quick and simple, both for staff and self-serve patients on the portal.



3 REACH THE RETICENT

Many patients may be reticent to come into the office for a personal visit during the transition. Reach out to them with personalized communication that provides options to address their fears:

Safety procedure assurance. Utilizing the communications processes outlined above, reach out to these patients with educational information on safety procedures that are being implemented in the office to ensure their protection. For example it may be very relieving to a patient who imagines sitting in a waiting room full of coughing, wheezing people to know that your practice implements the "call from the car, walk straight into the exam room" procedure.

Telehealth. This may be one of the best options for reticent patients to interact with their provider without exposure outside their home. The system should integrate seamlessly with your scheduling, EHR, billing and reporting systems for maximum efficiency for both providers and patients. Click here for an in-depth review of the finer points of adding telehealth to your practice.

- www.advancedmd.com/learn/telehealth-maximizing-revenue-thick-thin/

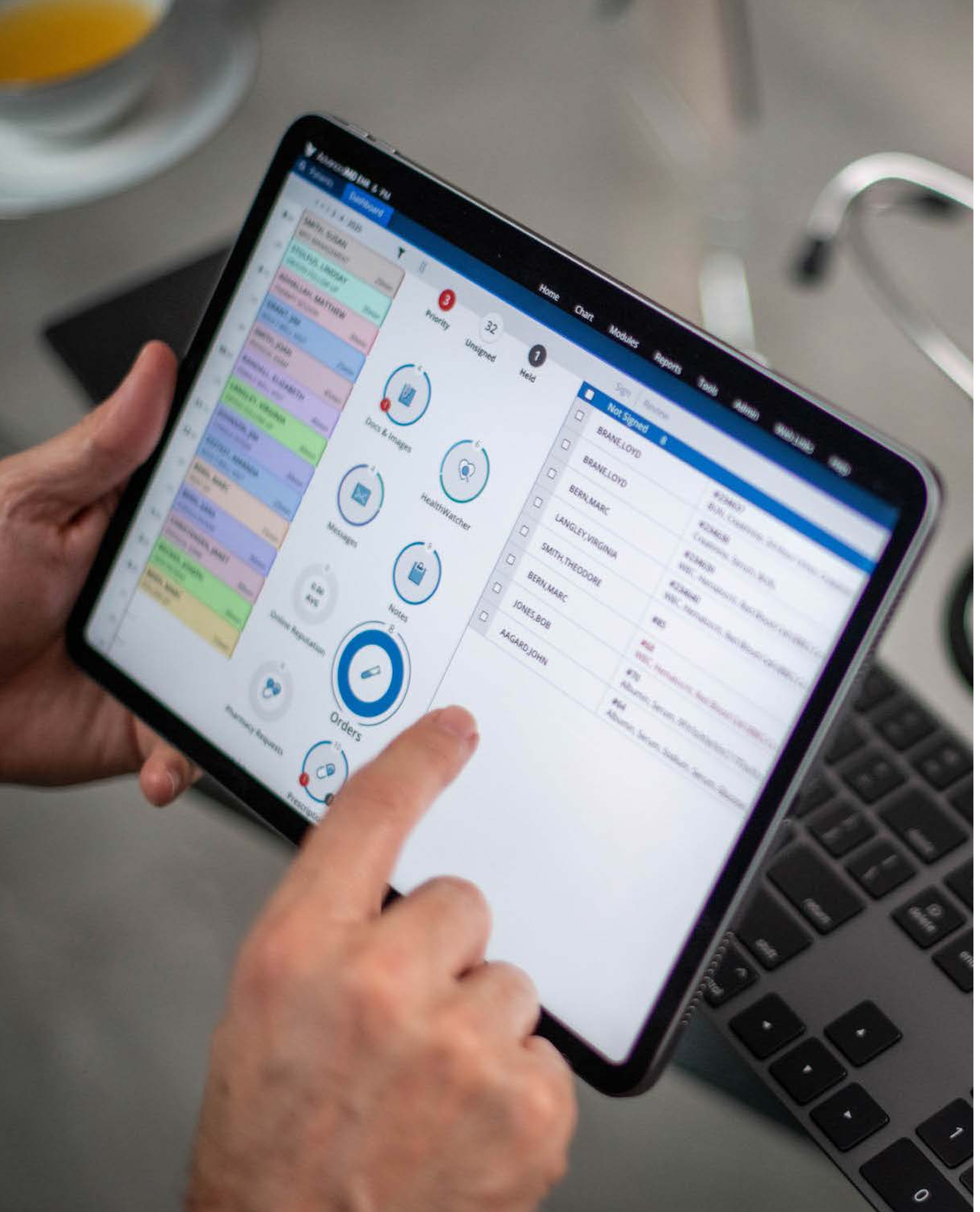
4 NAIL CONTINUITY OF CARE

The disruption to continuity of care processes in place prior to the crisis must be addressed and reestablished. Especially important are issues such as critical or required treatment plan follow-ups, missed appointments, overdue Rx fills/refills and screenings.

Pull this information from the EHR and practice management systems to identify these highest priority populations and reach out to them with targeted communications. For example a targeted email might say, "Sorry we missed your recurring appointment during the shutdown. Your case is a high priority for us, and we'd like to get you rescheduled as soon as possible now that we are open again. Please call today, or go to the patient portal and schedule a convenient time."

If your current system doesn't make this type of customized reporting easily available, it may be a good time to upgrade to a unified platform that seamlessly pulls information from the practice management, EHR and billing systems to create customized and targeted patient populations so you can provide more personalized, effective care.

These systems will also allow you to monitor your progress in reestablishing continuity with frequent reporting and updates to review and revise your approach.



5 FLAWLESS ONBOARDING

Due to the necessity of trimming expenses during the shutdown, many practices will be hiring and training new staff as they ramp up. Getting staff up to peak efficiency as quickly as possible will make a major difference in your recovery.

Well-established workflows and systems will be your greatest allies as you onboard new employees over a very short timeframe. Review your practice's crucial workflows through a new employee onboarding filter, and update/refine or create new as necessary to maximize efficiency.

Advanced workflow capabilities built into leading practice automation systems can help you take this process to the next level. A few examples include:

- Simple, visual dashboards that update and inform in real time to keep providers and staff coordinated and on-task
- Task donuts customized to specific crucial workflows
- Patient cards for summarized, top-priority information
- Unified communication and rooming tracking
- Direct-to-billing superbill submission

6 MIND THE STORE

In all probability, as you come back online you will be digging out of a financial hole. It's crucial to keep a sharp eye on the economics of recovery and your financial progress. You need to get cash flowing again as quickly as you can.

Key business-related elements include:

Financial-focused KPIs tuned to the ramp-up. These are tied to your overall plan (see "Before You Begin" section." Custom analytics are essential here:

- Identify and target your highest value procedures. Ensure those are ramping back up on plan. As part of this effort, optimize your payor mix and focus on those that reimburse at the highest levels.
- Provider productivity. Benchmark and watch these numbers to ensure that scheduling and utilization are on track.
- Staff productivity. Initiate or revise reporting that will help track progress of new staff and workflow onboarding.

Billing turnaround. Implement flawless coding and billing systems that will ensure fast reimbursement to get cash flowing again. This includes direct submission from EHR to billing system and extremely high first-pass claim success.

Best practice patient collections. The crisis will likely have affected the employment status of many patients or potential patients, with many more unemployed or with different or restricted insurance options. Two important processes will help you manage this challenge:

- eEligibilty. Check each patient's insurance eligibility prior to every visit. It's surprising how many practices ignore this simple, painless process.Fee for service policies. Make sure these policies are updated, in place and consistently applied for a potentially larger than normal cash-payment surge.

Telehealth integration. Telehealth should become a mainstay of your practice post-crisis. Seamless integration with the EHR and billing systems ensures a more efficient service-to-cash pathway. Make sure you understand the specifics of telehealth billing. With the help of CMS, this service delivery model has become much more mainstream, with greatly expanded allowable codes. Check the details for those that apply to your practice and specialty.

Automated patient collections posting. To maximize staff utilization, ensure your credit card system automatically posts payments directly to your medical office software. Many practices still utilize a tedious manual process that is time-intensive, expensive and error-prone. AdvancedMD partners with OpenEdge for a unified, seamless way to manage patient payments, credit card on file and hardship payment plans.

Learn more about credit card processing.
➜ www.advancedmd.com/medical-billing/software/payment-processing/

Reassess entire financial structure. As you identify strengths and weaknesses of your current systems, this may be a good time to ask the tough questions that could end up paying bigger dividends down the road. For example, if your billing process needs help, does it make sense to move to an outside billing service? Or if the issues are with a current outside service, does it make sense to bring it in-house? This is the time to open it up and set the direction that will guide your practice's success for the foreseeable future.

7 EXPAND THE BASE

As you are adjusting your approach to a post-crisis world, this is a good time to revisit your growth and expansion plans, particularly if you have lost patient load during the shutdown.

Advanced practice automation systems include intuitive tools and analytics across a unified database that provide insights and options not available with many of the more basic systems. These capabilities expand your options for rebuilding and expanding your practice in innovative, targeted ways. Here are a few examples:

Advanced analytics. Utilize analytics to identify highest value options based on geography or population growth patterns, ages, family status, etc. A different analysis might reveal insights into trends regarding specific procedures or conditions.

Referral management. Create customized tracking and reporting on referrals to identify highest referral rates, profitability by referral type, growth/loss trends, etc. This can help you zero in on the most attractive referral options and where to focus relationship building.

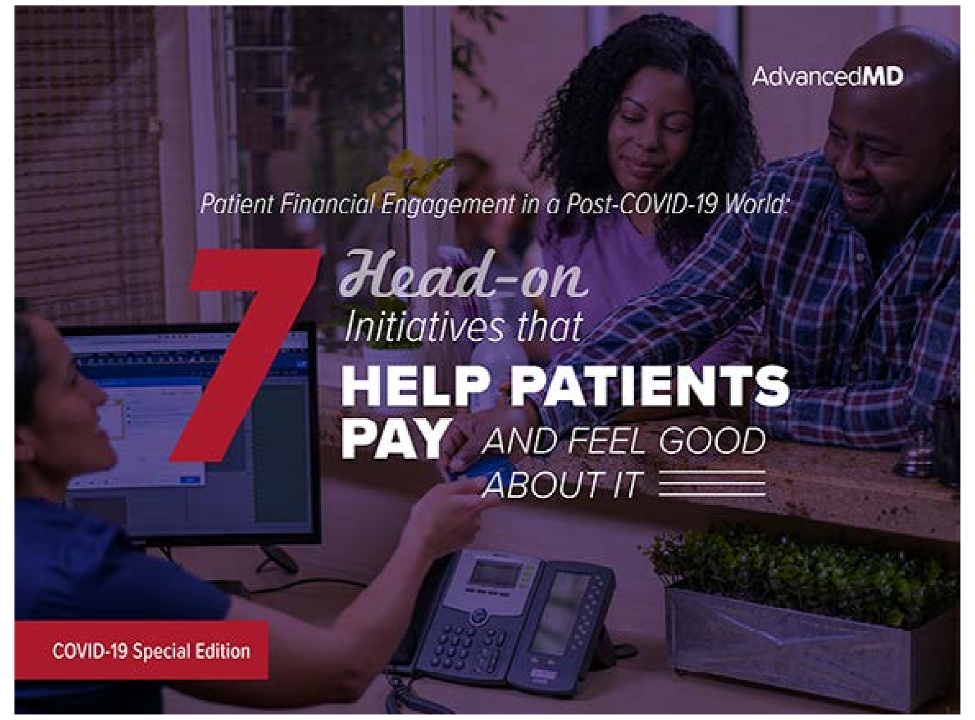
Online reputation management. In today's mobile, digital world, a physician's online reputation (reviews) can have a major impact on either driving positive patient growth, or hampering new patient adoption. Advanced systems include built-in survey tools that make it easy for staff to solicit reviews from patients as part of the checkout process, and simple for patients to submit reviews. These systems also include features for managing and responding to negative feedback in a way that builds patient rapport within online platform requirements.

Conclusion

While no one knows exactly what the post-pandemic healthcare world will look like, following these crucial seven steps will position you with a practice tuned and poised to deliver on your vision of patient care, profitability and contribution for many years into the future.

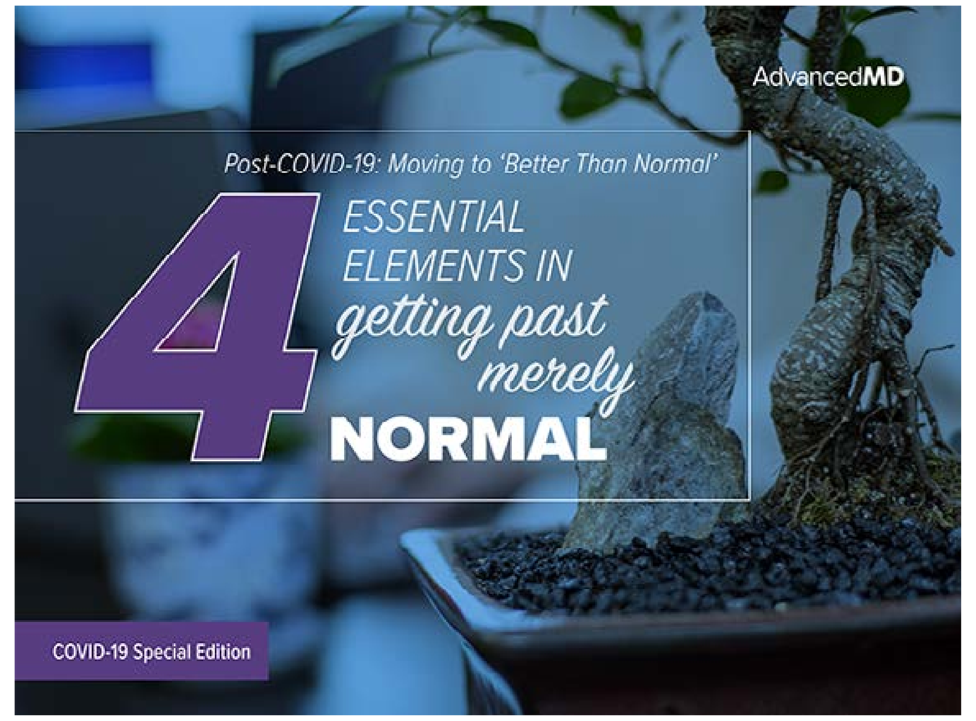
Check out the other eBooks in our COVID-19 Special Edition series:

Telehealth Maximizing Revenue Through Thick and Thin



Patient Financial Engagement in a Post-COVID-19 World

Hitchhikers Guide to Managing a Sustainable Patient Mix



Post-COVID-19: Moving to 'Better than Normal'

The Human Siide of Telehealth

Our exclusive COVID-19 series of eBooks provides a foundation on how to reboot your practice following this crisis. Download these free eBooks to learn more.

AdvancedMD

Visit **advancedmd.com**
Call (800) 825-0224