

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

4

ESSENTIAL
ELEMENTS IN
*getting past
merely*
NORMAL



As we move out of the pandemic crisis and into a post-COVID-19 world, there is much talk of what the ‘new normal’ will look like. How will patients, practices and care delivery be affected? How many of the temporary practices and workflows will stick to become a permanent part of the way healthcare is delivered?

These conversations often unintentionally carry a somewhat ominous, negative overtone. Phrases like, ‘things will never be the same,’ and, ‘far-reaching displacement,’ and ‘unknown lasting effects’ pepper commentary and forecasts.

As is always the case, there is an element of truth in these sentiments. There is no question the world has changed. Things will be different. But different isn’t automatically bad. In fact, in many cases things can actually turn out better than expected.

Forward thinking practices stay ahead of, and take advantage of changes, new attitudes and ways of doing things. They find ways of making these things work to their advantage. They are proactive vs. reactive. Enthused rather than grumbling. They anticipate rather than being caught off guard.

They view a crisis as a rare opportunity – a gift – to make the so-called ‘new normal’ a ‘better than normal.’ To come out the other side stronger, more tuned into trends, challenges and opportunities, and more capable of stepping up and taking the practice to the next level.

THE SHAPE OF NEW NORMAL

The reality is, the ‘new normal’ will largely be what you make of it. If your objective is to just get back to normal, the way things used to be, you may find yourself disappointed and passed by as new trends and changes emerge.

Some of the best innovations and improvements come in the face of the greatest challenges and defeats. This may be your opportunity to move a few steps closer to the practice you’ve always wanted with the patients you’ve always wanted and the dream-team staff and technology to help you get there.

Why settle for whatever the new normal dishes out when you can shape your own better-than-normal future?

MAXIMIZE THE TRANSITION

Moving to a new normal is not merely closing one door and opening and walking through the next. It’s a transition on a continuum requiring focus and planning at each stage. The flow looks something like this:

Crisis → Transition → New Normal (or better than normal)

Hopefully, at this point you’ve handled the crisis. If there are lingering issues still nagging for resolution, earlier guides in this series may be helpful.

- [Telehealth: The Ultimate Guide to Maximizing Revenue, Keeping More of What You’re Paid, and Thriving Through Thick and Thin](#)
- [7 Crucial Steps to Reboot Your Practice](#)
- [Patient Financial Engagement](#)

The transition phase is the pivot point that will largely determine your trajectory going forward – to a new normal handed to you by circumstance, or a better than normal shaped by your plans and superior execution. In the rush to return to normal, this is the step that is regrettably often bypassed.

This is where you pause, recalibrate, reset the sails, and chart a deliberate course based on the new reality you will be operating in, and where you’d like to end up.

To maximize results, focus on four essential elements: mindset shift, patient interaction trends, technology and team.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS IN CREATING “Better Than Normal”

1 LEADER MINDSET

Insurance eligibility is one of the most important, and one of the most overlooked. Surviving the pandemic crisis in your practice required the mindset of a manager: dealing with all the moving parts of restricting or temporarily suspending patient visits, dealing with employee issues, vendor issues, payer issues and a myriad of other details.

Moving out of the crisis, the temptation is to stay in manager mindset and start focusing on all the details of ramping back up. This is where forward-thinking practice leaders set themselves and their futures apart.

It requires a shift from manager mindset to, at least temporarily, what leadership experts call a leader mindset: Warren Bennis puts it this way: “managers do things right, while leaders do the right things.”¹

Pausing to carefully analyze the best data available, do a little visioning into the future, and putting together a specific high-level direction distinguishes leaders and visionaries.

THE 80/20 RULE RULES

Because of the complexity and uncertainty of the current situation, it's best to focus on those factors that will be the greatest leverage points in the future of your practice.

Practice consultant Owen Dahl FACHE, CHBC, LSSMBB suggests that in the post-crisis world, 80 percent of what we do will be similar or the same, and 20 percent will be substantially different. The 20 percent is the part that will need to be invented

and worked out. And the Pareto Principle has consistently proven that 80 percent of the results will come from careful attention to that 20 percent. ²

Our experience with forward-thinking practices nationwide now successfully exiting the crisis suggests that wrapping a leadership mindset around the following three areas can provide the highest leverage potential in creating a better than normal future.

BEST PRACTICE BOOST:

Leadership experts and high performing organizations find soliciting input from many levels and functions of the organization improves visioning and planning, often bringing to light consumer-focused insights that might otherwise be overlooked. Don't hesitate to include staff and providers at all levels in your planning process.

2 PATIENT INTERACTION TRENDS: THE PATIENT-CONSUMER

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated a trend that was already in motion among a growing number of patients, particularly in the younger cohort, toward treating healthcare decisions much like other purchase decisions. This is known as the patient-consumer trend, or consumer-driven healthcare.³

The basic rule of thumb is to put yourself in the patient's shoes and look at dealing with your practice as you would if you were shopping for other goods or services. While there are obvious differences and complexities in delivering healthcare than in, say, purchasing a smartwatch online or a Starbucks coffee, many of the same principles apply. Or better said, these are the principles and standards of value delivery patient-consumers are increasingly demanding in their healthcare purchase experience.

These are the 20 percent focus points that post-COVID-19 patient-consumers will likely be most sensitive to:

Remote healthcare delivery. This trend, which made painfully slow progress over the past two decades, suddenly catapulted to the forefront in a matter of weeks during the pandemic. Led by telehealth visits, it also

includes self-care at home, and other web-based assets in payment, regulation, and training.

If your practice is hesitant in adopting these new delivery modes, now is the time to move to stay ahead of this trend and meet patient-consumers' growing appetite for virtual care. A robust telehealth system should be the starting point (see details in #3 – Technology).

Financial and insurance changes. Many families find themselves in dramatically different employment, financial and insurance circumstances post-pandemic. This will require practices to step up their financial systems and offerings to more closely mirror interactions these same consumers experience in the commercial world. This includes financial policies, financing options, flexible loans, and automated and online payment capabilities. In-depth information on

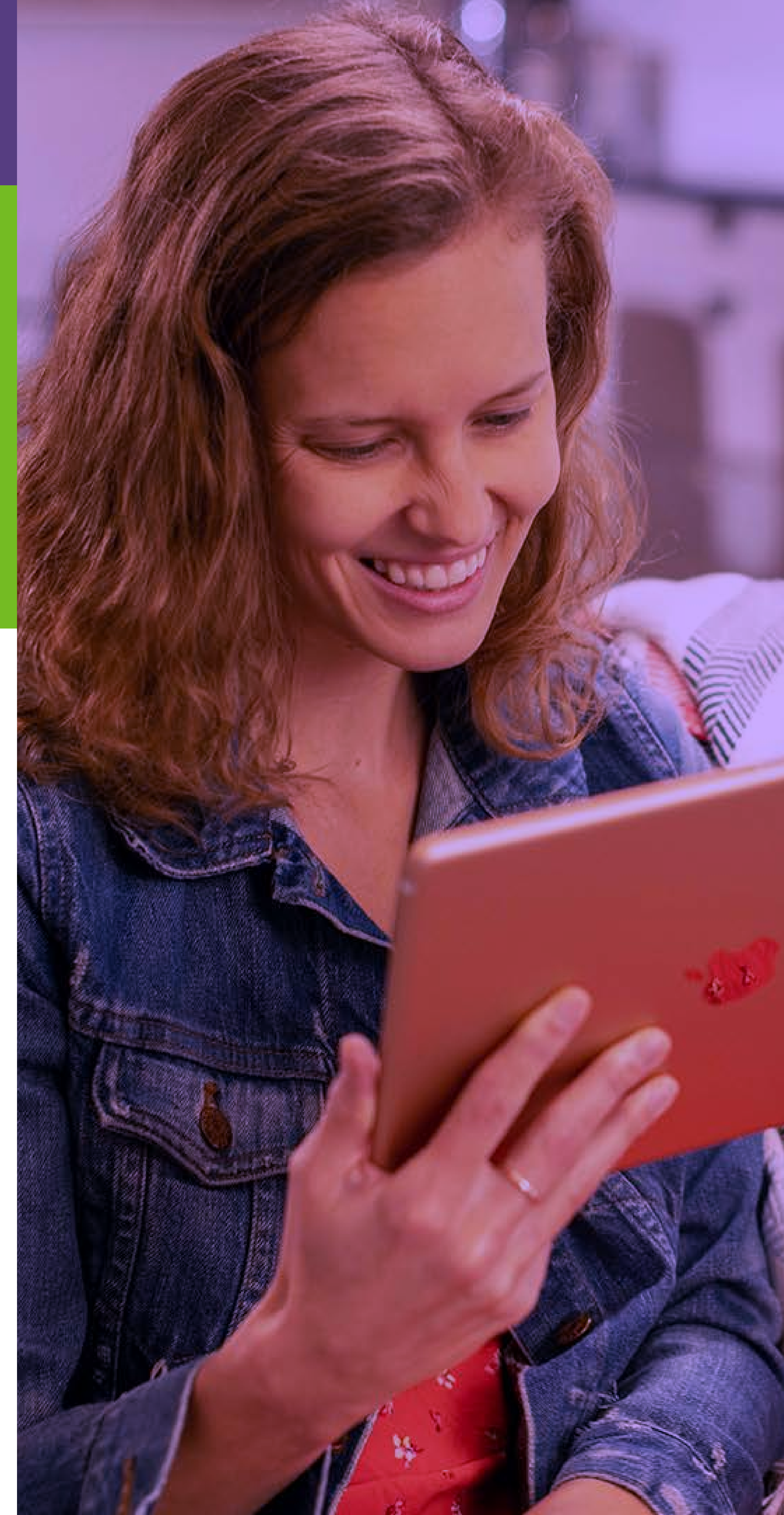
each of these topics is available in the guide [Patient Financial Engagement](#).

Speed and efficiency. Make it Easy. Consumer expectations are molded in a major way by their purchase interactions on a wide variety of products and services. Popular brands have consistently pushed the envelope on making shopping and buying as fast and efficient as possible. And consumers sequestered at home have had more than their normal share of exposure to these highly efficient systems. This becomes the new mental standard applied to all purchase interactions, including healthcare.

Look at all aspects of patient interactions for areas to bring up to more of a consumer interaction standard. This includes scheduling (including automated reminders), onboarding, online payment and credit card management, office workflows, proactive communications, and online reputation management as starting points.

Proactive communication. During the COVID-19 crisis the majority of practices took a proactive approach to communicating with patients regarding office visit status, rescheduling appointments, re-opening restrictions, etc. The need for clear, accurate information was obvious.

Forward-thinking practices recognize this type of outreach as a better than normal opportunity in the post-pandemic patient-consumer world. Consumers appreciate helpful, educational, value-driven communications that improve their lives, help them solve problems, and keep them in the loop regarding emerging trends or treatment opportunities. Continue to proactively communicate with your patients and prospective patients on a regular basis. Automated technology integrated into the practice management system can relieve much of the burden on staff, and produces customized, personalized interactions.



3 FOCUSED TECHNOLOGY

In a very short timeframe the pandemic illustrated the crucial role that specific technologies play in keeping things running efficiently and pivoting to deliver services in new and innovative ways.

This insight can help your practice focus on aspects of technology that will be of greatest benefit in creating your post-pandemic world. Here are a few of the top technology pieces to start with:

Telehealth. As mentioned earlier, rather than a way of coping with pandemic-induced shutdown, this should become an increasingly important part of your service delivery going forward. To be most efficient, your system should be seamlessly integrated with the practice management and clinical systems, including scheduling, automated reminders, one-click video call initiation, direct EHR chart updates and access, prescriptions, orders and billing. Adopting or installing these features will keep you at the forefront of patient-driven demand for remote healthcare services. (For details regarding adopting telehealth in your practice, see [Covid series eGuide #1](#)).

Unified data and analytics. With so many trends still evolving, it's crucial to keep a close eye on trends in your patient population. Leading systems offer a unified database that incorporates demographic, clinical and billing data, backed by a powerful, easy-to-use analytics engine.

Utilizing these tools, you can create reports that track important trends and changes. For example, growth trends by geography, visit type or diagnosis can highlight shifts in patient location and health needs. Or utilization of remote healthcare and no-show data can help track demand for telehealth and satisfaction trends. These and many other insights can help you hone your offerings and delivery to the evolving demands of patient-consumers.

Communication. Engaging in more effective, more frequent communication – both with patients and within your team – is a vital take-away from the pandemic experience. However, as your practice ramps back up to packed schedules and demanding

distractions, this priority will tend to drift back toward its pre-pandemic level.

Automated communications technology can help keep things on track by handling all the details and tedium. Examples include:

- Automated patient reminders for appointments, completing intake/onboarding forms, bill and payment plan payments.
- Proactive messages to a group or segment of your patient population, e.g. by condition, age, gender, etc. These can be personalized with their name and contact information.
- Automated workflow and inter-staff/provider communications that helps ensure quick, efficient care delivery throughout the patient visit.
- Reminders and dashboard triggers that alert staff and providers of key tasks and follow-up.

Leading practice management systems provide these and many more options for stepping up your communications capability with virtually no incremental labor and system costs.

Online interaction. The pandemic spurred the virtually universal migration from personal interaction to online living. People's use and comfort with online interactions skyrocketed. While this level won't be sustained as things open up, a new highwater mark has been established in online expectations.

Make sure your online patient experience is up to this new level. This includes all features of the patient portal, such as online scheduling and re-scheduling, prescriptions, lab results, billing statements and payments, and secure provider communications. Let your technology platform do the heavy lifting of interacting with patients at the level of automation they've become accustomed to.



Better Than Normal

No one has the crystal ball to describe precisely what practices will face in the post-pandemic world. However, you can take proactive steps to focus on the 20 percent of factors that will help shape your long-term future to be anything but normal.

AdvancedMD offers every feature and capability outlined in this eBook. To learn more, schedule a demo.

4 TEAMS

Perhaps the longest-lasting disruption of the pandemic shutdown for medical practices is the impact on the care delivery team. Dealing with furloughs, layoffs, changes in schedules, workflows and responsibilities will all influence the direction of your care delivery in the future.

To up the game of your post-pandemic team, consider these key areas:

Patient-consumer skills. With strategy and systems aligned to a patient-consumer approach, the last piece of the puzzle is to ensure staff are skilled and trained in implementing the new direction. This starts with ensuring they are educated and on board with the new consumer-patient direction, but also includes technology skills, patient interaction skills (e.g. discussing different payment options, enforcing policies, etc.), and specific workflow and team communication skills as they relate to each position.

The key point is don't leave this to chance or pick-it-up-as-you-go mentality. A little training and orientation upfront will help the team to quickly coalesce and execute at a higher level.

Permanent adjustments. Review changes implemented as temporary measures to deal with the crisis and determine which should carry over to become a permanent part of the new better than normal.

For example, the degree to which telehealth and remote interactions become a mainstream part of your practice, including impacts on scheduling, patient interactions, billing and communications, and staff involved in each of those functions. Think through staffing and workflow impacts in the bigger office workflow.

Onboarding new team members. Many practices will need to replace key staff who were let go or left the practice during the shutdown. Getting new staff members up to speed as quickly as possible is essential to moving to the next level of excellence.

In addition to the standard training protocols, be sure to leverage technology to do as much of the heavy lifting as possible. Well-defined workflows and systems that delineate input and interaction points can help new employees quickly learn their role and how the team functions. Also, utilizing reporting and data analysis can help identify trouble spots requiring additional training and attention.

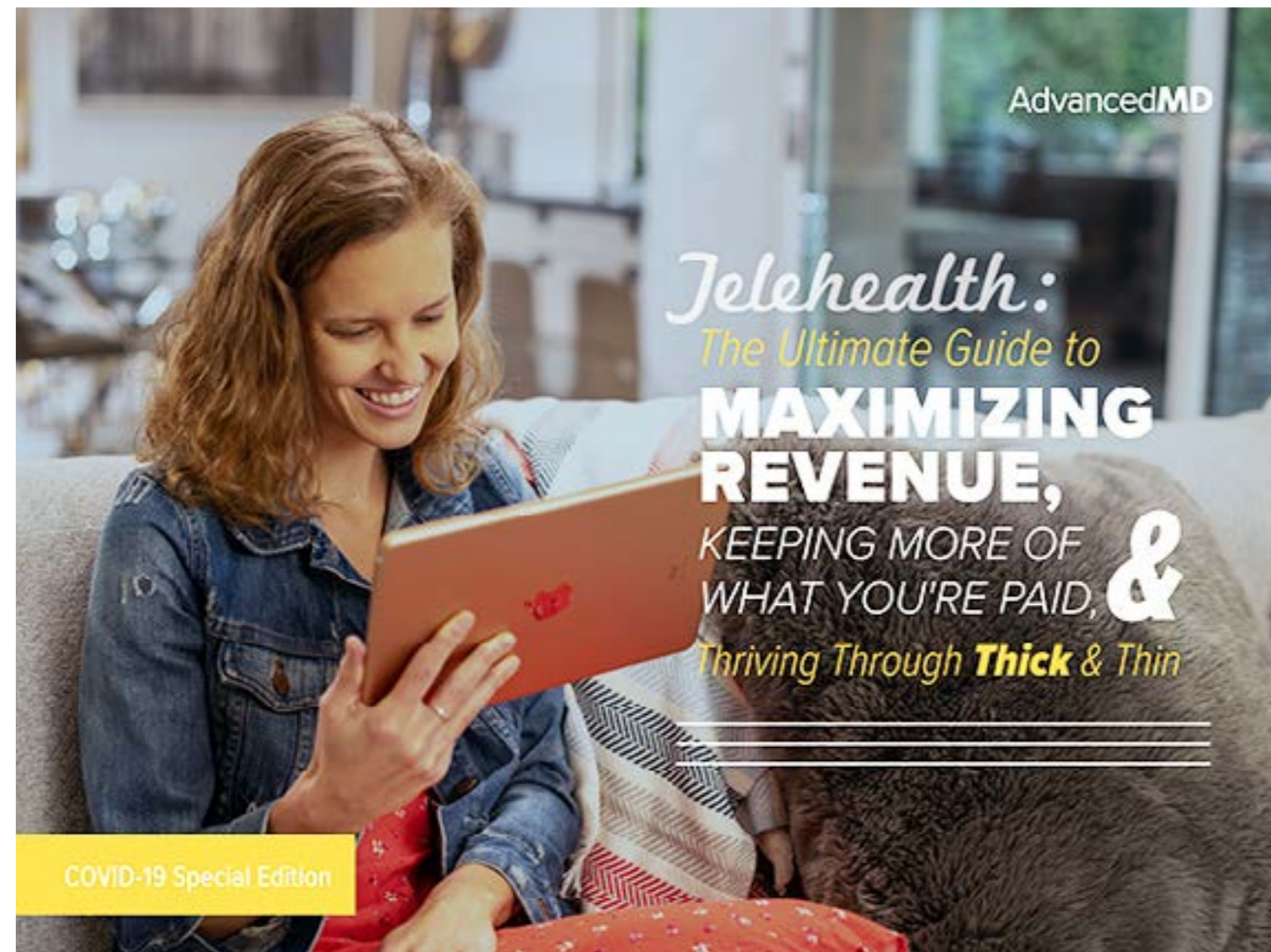
¹ Warren Bennis, *Learning to Lead: A Workbook on Becoming a Leader*.

² <https://www.mgma.com/resources/business-strategy/preparing-for-healthcare%E2%80%99s-new-normal%E2%80%9D-%E2%80%94-managing>

³ <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/sg/Documents/risk/risk-sea-healthcare-3.0-healthcare-for-the-new-normal.pdf>

⁴ <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2765699>

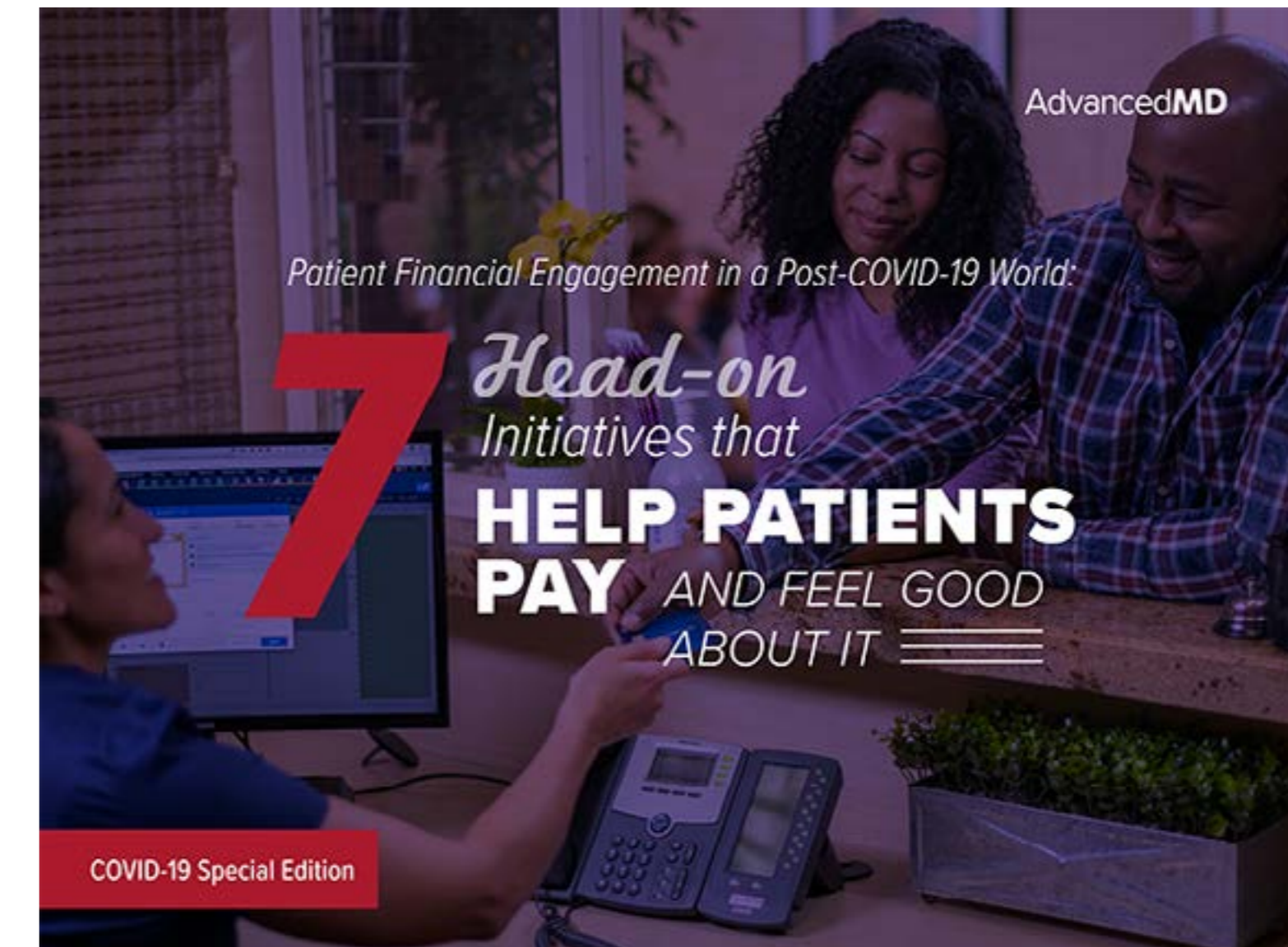
Check out the other eBooks in our COVID-19 Special Edition series:



Telehealth Maximizing Revenue Through Thick and Thin



7 Crucial Steps to Reboot Your Practice



Patient Financial Engagement in a Post-COVID-19 World



Hitchhikers Guide to Managing a Sustainable Patient Mix



The Human Side 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

© 2020 AdvancedMD, Inc. All rights reserved.

Visit advancedmd.com
Call (800) 825-0224