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company to administer their "self-insured" program. *ERISA,* by the way, discriminates more against the chiropractic patient than probably any other law on the books.

Others have simply cut benefits or organized their own insurance divisions through what are known in the insurance world as "captive" companies.[2] The ripple effect is also showing itself in personal injury and other state-influenced programs with new legislative proposals to alter personal injury claim procedures and limits.

Understand the changes and know how to adapt

The good news is that consumer confidence and personal resources, including personal income, remain high. Indeed, the United States is wealthier and that wealth is more widely distributed than ever before. According to a recent U.S. Department of Commerce news release, personal income grew by $57 billion in June 2002, up 0.6 percent from the previous month.[3] So far, the financial status of the individual consumer remains strong, but even here, perception is everything and the daily economic bad news will hit home sooner or later.

We all know the rule of thumb that says when hard times hit; doctor and dental visits are among the first items to be cut from family budgets. What this means for the private practitioner is clear. What you thought you could count on is very likely to slip right out from under you. The longer the economic bad news continues, and the national security situation is also a factor, the greater the likelihood of a major shift in the volume of your revenue, and where your revenue comes from.

How to track your revenue source

What you can do now to insure that you have anticipated and corrected your own economic direction starts with knowing exactly where you are. Every private practitioner needs to know exactly where his or her practice revenue comes from. It is time to become far more savvy and sophisticated in the business of chiropractic.

If you do not regularly track your revenue by source, now is definitely the time to start.

- Work with your staff to determine how much you collect from Medicare, Medicaid, personal injury, workers' compensation, private pay and from private insurance. Take the past three months and determine, by month, where you received your revenue, taking time to determine how much was billed and how much was collected. It is important to track the difference between these two key figures. Establish a by-percentage chart that will give you a baseline to measure the direction of your revenue.
- Next, alert your staff to watch for and inform you of any insurance procedure changes, deductible and co-payment changes that will identify problem carriers. Be prepared to respond to and comply with any changes that, if unheeded, might delay or disqualify your claim submission.
- Develop a web of chiropractic colleagues through which information can be shared and collective strategies for responding to any specific insurance change can be developed. There is always strength in numbers. This is an example of the famous and effective "Mastermind Alliance" that Napoleon Hill documented for us.
- Be prepared to dispute claim rejections and/or reductions when the facts are on the patient's side. We have an obligation as professionals to serve and support the patient in getting what they have contracted for with all insurance carriers. Also, what you do has value and you are entitled to fair and equitable compensation for your services. Your peer network can help in this aspect of your effort. So can your state and national chiropractic organizations.
- Most important of all, educate and empower your patients. Expand your patient communications to begin to educate those most important people of any possible changes in insurance and the likelihood that their personal financial responsibility for paying for your care might be growing. No one likes surprises, so sharing what you know about coverage changes, reductions or limitations with patients can help in any transition to private pay that may follow. In addition, educate your patients on the value of chiropractic care. It is essential to shift the patient's understanding that chiropractic care is not a luxury; it is a necessity.

Let us remember that the greatest advance in health care in our lifetime has not been transplants or new pharmaceuticals. It has been the rise of the informed consumer.

Conclusion

These are the first practical steps you can take to know where your practice is going, to identify troubled spots and to help you plan ahead to avoid a practice crisis.

In the next segment, the path to enhancing the non-insurance dependent side of your practice will be presented in a logical, practical series of steps that can help you be ahead of the powerful market place wave that is sure to hit us all. You will learn how to shift your practice away from the allopathic model of patient finances and discover the health care financial plan of today.

In the final segment, we will discuss in detail the common denominators that all successful chiropractors consistently demonstrate to ensure their success and to insulate them from the never-ending changes in the economy. There has never been a better time to be a chiropractor, but only if you are dialed into the changes in society and take action to create the practice of your dreams.

References

1. *Michigan Chiropractic Association E-News*, July 17, 2002.

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