

FIVE LESSONS FROM THE FRONT LINES

A first-hand experience of starting a new practice.

BY JENNIFER LOH, MD



Almost exactly 1 year ago, I heard William Christian, MD, speak at the 2015 ME Live meeting about starting his own practice.¹ While the idea of having my own practice had never before seemed realistic, Dr. Christian's description of his experience made me realize that it could, and should, be a goal within my reach. After a bit of

research and many long discussions with friends and family, I began the process of starting my own practice. Although I am essentially still in the beginning stages, here are five lessons I have already learned.



CHECK YOUR LOCAL GOVERNMENT RULES AND REGULATIONS

I had designed my practice to operate from a subleased space in an existing medical office. This idea was not only cost-effective, but it was also commonplace, as I knew of other doctors doing the same thing. After months of negotiating and planning, everything looked to be in order—until I went to obtain my occupancy license and learned that subleasing in that location was not allowed per fire code and parking laws. Eventually, I was able to work with the city planning commission to be in compliance with the law, but being unprepared and unaware of these laws caused me great anxiety and could have disrupted the entire project.



GET A FUNCTIONING PHONE LINE AND PHONE NUMBER IMMEDIATELY

This rule comes from David Goldman, MD. He gave me this advice at the beginning of my journey, but I chose to ignore it. I then had to quickly obtain a phone number in order to get credentialed with the insurance companies. I chose a company that, unfortunately, did not have reliable service, so I had to switch companies and my phone number. I have been paying the price ever since with phone calls and faxes going to the old number. I still wonder how many potential patients' calls I have missed because of this mistake.



DO NOT UNDERESTIMATE HOW QUICKLY YOUR PRACTICE WILL GROW

While preparing to open my practice, I envisioned having many empty hours in the office to strategize my practice's organization, to market it to other doctors, and to train my employee(s). After just a few weeks, however, my office time began to fill with patients' care, and all this administrative time never happened. This is a wonderful problem to have, but it has left me feeling that I am always a bit behind in terms of office management, which leads me to my next lesson.



LAY THE FOUNDATION EARLY

For a practice to function, there are so many basic items to complete prior to opening the doors. These include insurance credentialing, getting staff privileges at the surgery centers, finding an employee, creating a website, organizing the appointment templates, and buying office equipment. The list can seem endless. Anything a doctor can do in advance will help decrease his or her stress level and ensure a smoother transition.



STAY POSITIVE

I am sure each and every reader who has started his or her own practice has learned from early mistakes and can point to many decisions (both good and bad) that have led to the present day. I have faced challenges along the way, but I am very happy that I decided to start my own practice. My final tip is to keep a positive attitude! The early challenges will lead to a rewarding business. ■

1. Christian W. If I could do it again. Paper presented at: Millennial Eye Live; September 26, 2016; Los Angeles, CA.

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