



Magnolia Minutes

A Publication of MGMA of Mississippi

March 2009

A Message From the President

John Moore



On a rather dreary day in February, the headlines in Philadelphia, MS, should have read, "MGMA of Mississippi is turning up the heat on Practice Management."

That's right! MGMA of MS held its annual Winter meeting and spent the day learning new processes, techniques, actions and activities that will assist practice managers, administrations and staff to attack the negatives in the environment. Thanks to the outstanding program presented by Bobbie Beard, 2009 President-Elect, attitudes were changed and additional opportunities for growth were explored.

Starting with Kent Rader, a former hospital CEO and CFO, everyone was treated to a stress reduction lesson, called "Let it Go, Just Let It Go." His presentation was designed to show how laughter matters in reducing stress. It combined humor with informative ideas to make life in our practices more enjoyable, hey, we do spend a large portion of our day there, and productive. Incorporating his "stand up comedy" routine with extensive first hand knowledge, Kent was able to demonstrate ways to make the workplace a better place.

E-Prescribing is the talk of the day. We all hear daily how e-prescribing is coming and that we better get aboard the train. Well, that train is just around the bend. Kate Berry reviewed the basics to electronic prescribing and explained, in simpler terms that the government can, how this new procedure will work, what the benefits can be, and there are many, and where the state and nation stand on adoption of this process. And, of course, as with most things the

government starts, what the current incentives are and how they work and how eventually, those incentives will drop.

Finally, practice growth with minimal increase in expense will always catch the eye of the physician. How can we get more business when I am just one person! The answer is to expand services through the use of a mid-level provider. Enter into the practice, the Nurse Practitioner. Jackie Williams led the group in a discussion of the value a nurse practitioner can add to the practice and how it can benefit from their expertise. There are over 180 nurse practitioners in Mississippi that number is growing. These providers collaborate with more than 50% of the physicians in our state. Take it from someone that has used nurse practitioners, they can be highly effective in providing coverage in areas that cannot financially support a physician and drive additional business to the practice.

To shift gears, many of you have expressed concerns over where we have met for the summer meeting the last two years. We have heard and we certainly understand your feelings. Finally, this year, we will be able to once again move back to the Biloxi area. The Imperial Palace is a magnificent hotel that will house the MGMA of MS Summer Meeting in June. Located on the bay side, you can see the gulf waters from the upper levels. There are plenty of things to both see and do (especially the SPA, I hear). The program will be outstanding and the fellowship unmatched. I truly hope everyone will make a special effort to take the time to come and expand your knowledge in our profession and enjoy a few days with friends and peers.



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WEBINAR: Economic Stimulus and other Critical Issues to Medical Practice

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National MGMA is hosting a complimentary member benefit webinar for national MGMA members on the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. The Webinar will be presented by William F. Jesse, MD, FACMPE. MGMA has opened up this educational opportunity to state members at a significantly reduced cost (\$49). To view the flier for this Webinar, please go to www.mgmams.com or to register online go to www.mgma.com/education.

The MGMA of MS Board of Directors and the Education and Scholarship Committee are proud to announce an MGMA of MS Scholarship

The MGMA (Medical Group Management Association) of Mississippi Scholarship Program is designed to financially assist qualified applicants in obtaining degrees from accredited academic institutions of higher learning, *located in Mississippi*, in the field of medical management or any field with any relation to medical management. The program is open to any student preparing to enter or already attending an accredited degree-granting *Mississippi* college or university and pursuing a bachelor, master's or doctoral degree.

The scholarships are awarded based on merit as measured by academic performance and extracurricular activities. The applicant's intended field of study is also considered in the evaluation process with preference given to those candidates pursuing a degree in medical management or a directly related field of study.

To retrieve more information or to print an application, please go to www.mgmams.com!

Creating the Ideal Workplace: Maintenance

By: Harold Ingram

Continuing the comparison of the workplace to a garden, after preparing the area and putting the proper plants or people in place, the area must be maintained. Growing plants in an area that is well prepared and where the proper plants have been selected is a rewarding experience. Developing the workplace can provide the same sense of satisfaction. However, left unattended, both the garden and the workplace will grow out of control.

Adding nutrients, weeding, and spraying pesticides are necessary for the garden to grow and prosper. The ongoing attention of the gardener is essential. The garden environment will face changes with which the gardener must deal. Insects may attack the plants. There may be drought conditions. Perhaps there will be a late freeze. As the environment changes the gardener must adapt to counter adverse impacts on his garden.

Vigilance and flexibility are also qualities required for the maintenance of a good workplace. As with the gardener, the leader must be watchful for changes that have adverse effects and adapt accordingly.

Employees work best in environments that provide encouragement and growth opportunities. As the workplace evolves, employee training is usually part of the nurturing process to get the employee well rooted. The placing of employees in the right positions may require the development of new skill sets before real growth occurs.

It requires time for a garden to mature and become fruitful. Maintenance is the key ingredient in allowing the plants to produce at their full potential. Maintenance in the office, unfortunately, often becomes routine and takes a backseat to other office activities. As a leader, it is imperative to stay in touch with what is happening. The first step is to walk through the garden. A number of years ago a management philosophy of MBWA emerged. MBWA was an acronym derived from the term Management By Walking Around. It lent credence to the fact that a manager or leader cannot be successful without understanding what is happening in the workplace. And, a key aspect of developing this understanding was being in the workplace. Leadership is not successful in the clinic if the leader remains cloistered in his office and is not aware of what is happening among staff.

As the gardener walks through his garden, he may notice a leaf turning yellow or a plant that appears wilted. These are signals that the plant is under stress. Ignoring it will not improve the plant's health. If a fungus is the cause of the plant's condition, it may be an indication of the beginning of a problem that will spread throughout the rest of the garden if left unattended. The leader must not ignore symptoms of problems within the workplace. The formation of cliques, changes in employees' attitudes, conversations that cease as the leader walks by, and attendance issues are all symptoms of a workplace under stress.

Sometimes the gardener can use a fungicide to eliminate the problem.

Likewise, counseling and information exchange within an office can often keep a rumor or problem situation from spreading. Many times problems are perceptual in nature. In these situations providing information can frequently diffuse such issues. If the problem persists primarily with a single individual, for example, one-on-one counseling may be a solution.

Unfortunately, the gardener at times must remove a plant if it cannot be salvaged. In taking a branch from a tree with fire blight to a nursery for help in correcting the problem, I noticed a look of horror on the face of the nursery worker. The worker recognized the problem immediately and knew the danger to his plants if the blight were introduced there. The only solution to the fire blight problem was to remove the infected branches and dispose of them. In the office, there may be an employee that is unhappy causing an infection of dissatisfaction among others in the workplace. Such employees must be removed. As difficult as it may be, there are times when the termination of an employee is the only solution. The sooner the leader addresses issues with a problem employee, the less the likelihood of problems spreading.

As the garden matures, the gardener frequently has to prune some of the plants to get them to grow and produce the desired results. Removing "suckers", for example, from tomato plants allow more nutrients to be utilized to produce fruit rather than foliage. It is the job of the leader to attend to the needs of the people under his care. This means that at times

he must redirect the path of an employee or even employ disciplinary action to improve performance. Removing and pruning, although vital to the development of a healthy workplace, is difficult and frequently delayed far too long. When a problem with an employee is recognized, address it quickly.

There is excitement in the soil preparation and planting process in a garden. Intermediate goals are achieved at the end of each stage and results are immediately recognized. However, it is the daily involvement of the gardener that achieves the ultimate goal. It will take time to see the final results. Many times office projects are started and new policies and procedures established. Then leaders walk away assuming the initiated processes will continue. They will not. Like gardens, workplaces have natural tendencies for growth and development that are usually only marginally productive. Left unattended, the natural tendencies within the workplace will take it in a direction inconsistent with the objectives of the leadership.

Maintaining the workplace is difficult. It is a daily activity. It requires the leader to deal with people. Technical issues are far easier to handle than personnel issues. The leader must be disciplined about getting involved. Keep the pruning shears sharp. Frequently walk through the workplace garden clipping those that need to be trimmed and training those that need directing. Vigilance and consistency will keep the garden of the workplace thriving.

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MGMA of MS 2009 Summer Meeting

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November 13, 2009

**Hilton Hotel
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Bankruptcy Proof of Claim Issue

We are informed that a new type of lawsuit is being filed in Mississippi against physicians and clinics. As clinic managers, you should be aware of this development.

When a patient files bankruptcy, a physician or clinic must file a Proof of Claim with the Bankruptcy Court in order to get paid for any amounts owed by the patient. The Proof of Claim usually contains information about how much is owed by the patient and documents supporting the claim are often attached. The documents attached to the Proof of Claim sometimes include billing and coding information, as well as personal information about the patient. Recently, complaints (i.e., lawsuits) have been filed in Bankruptcy Court against physicians and clinics wherein the patient claims that the physician or clinic breached the patient's privacy by including Protected Health Information and other

personal data about the patient in the Proof of Claim filed in Bankruptcy Court. Apparently, word of this new type of lawsuit has spread among bankruptcy attorneys across the state.

While we are not intending to give legal advice to you, we recommend that you never include Protected Health Information or other personal data about the patient in a Proof of Claim filed in Bankruptcy Court. You should not include Social Security Numbers, procedure codes, treatment, diagnosis, telephone numbers, or similar information in the Proof of Claim or documents attached thereto. In order to avoid this problem, you may need to redact personal information from the documents attached to the Proof of Claim.

You may want to contact your own clinic's attorney in order to discuss this matter further.

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New Fair Pay Act

By Stephanie Constantine, PHR, Constantine Human Resource Consulting, LLC
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President Obama signed his first law approved by Congress - The Ledbetter Fair Pay Act. The Act will require employers to intensify efforts to ensure that pay practices are non-discriminatory and to make certain that records are kept to prove the fairness of pay decisions.

The new law allows individuals to file charges of alleged pay discrimination under Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the Age Discrimination in Employment Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and the Rehabilitation Act without regard to the normal 180/300-day statutory charge filing period. The law declares that an unlawful employment practice occurs when: (1) a discriminatory compensation decision or other practice is adopted; (2) an individual becomes subject to the decision or practice; or (3) an individual is affected by application of the decision or practice, including each time there is a payment of compensation.

In addition, by eliminating the normal 180/300-day charge filing period for pay discrimination claims, the statute allows the filing of charges alleging pay discrimination with the issuance of each paycheck tainted by alleged past discrimination. Thus, each new paycheck or post-retirement benefits check serves as a potentially unlawful employment practice for which an employee may timely file a

charge, even if the allegedly discriminatory pay decision occurred years, perhaps even decades, before.

So – what does this mean for you? Because current and former employees can now challenge pay decisions made in the distant past, employers need to do the following:

- Revise your current Compensation Policy;
- Modify your record retention policies and begin retaining records surrounding pay decisions indefinitely;
- Conduct an immediate self-audit of your pay practices to ensure that pay discrimination and discrepancies are not an issue;
- Develop a written pay practices plan with starting pay rates, promotional pay increases and merit raises;
- Update job descriptions for each position to show differences in the experience requirements, skill levels and knowledge for each position.

Now more than ever – it is important to have consistency in your pay practice and to be able to prove that all pay decisions are based on the employee's performance and experience.

MGMA Calls for Electronic Patient ID Cards by 2010

The Medical Group Management Association has launched a campaign to push for the widespread use of machine-readable patient identification cards by Jan. 1, 2010, Health Data Management reports. The campaign calls for following the card implementation guide prepared by the Workgroup on Electronic Data Interchange in November 2007. The guide supported the widespread use of cards with either a magnetic strip or bar code to store data.

MGMA said the adoption of standard ID cards could save \$1 billion annually by preventing unnecessary administrative efforts and denied claims. MGMA said the cards would cost about 50 cents each, "just a fraction more" than the cost of traditional paper or plastic health insurance cards. In a statement, MGMA said, "The savings that insurers will see from reduced provider inquiries, claims reprocessing and labor will far exceed this expense" (Anderson, Health Data Management, 1/12).

MGMA of Mississippi

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Magnolia Minutes is published quarterly by The Medical Group Management Association of Mississippi and addresses both issues facing medical group managers practicing in Mississippi and broader issues facing medical practices nationwide.

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Submission of articles for publication is encouraged. Views of contributing authors do not necessarily represent the position of MGMA of MS.

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