



Risk Management SNAPSHOT

Current issues and trends for
practice managers



Health literacy and COVID-19

One in five Americans struggle with low health literacy and the numbers are even higher among the elderly and those with less education. This can lead to poorer health outcomes in these populations. Health information should be presented in a manner that everyone can understand, especially during a health crisis, such as the pandemic. Misleading claims by public figures and misinformation shared on social media can put lives at risk. Should your providers be taking steps to ensure that your patients are receiving the most accurate information about the virus?

Many people, especially those with low health literacy, may not understand health information that is presented using medical jargon. An article in the Washington Post highlights several examples of how [low health literacy and misinformation about the coronavirus](#) can put lives in danger.

Providing health information to patients in a way they understand is an important aspect of high quality care. Medical Mutual's practice tip [Health Literacy: Delivering the Message Right Improves Patient Safety and Reduces Liability](#) provides useful information and resources on how to present information to your patients in a manner they can understand.

When patients call your office with questions about symptoms they are experiencing, it is critically important that your staff respond appropriately. Our practice tip [Telephone Triage Systems](#) will give your staff guidance on how to direct patient calls.

The Joint Commission: Peer Support

Long hours, struggles for sufficient supplies of personal protective equipment (PPE), and fears of contracting the coronavirus weigh heavily on providers. In addition to the physical risks associated with the virus, healthcare workers must also navigate the emotional world of the pandemic. The Joint Commission has teamed up with other organizations to address the growing concerns about the mental wellbeing of our healthcare workforce during this crisis.

The Joint Commission has always focused on patient safety and while they continue to promote safe patient practices, they also want to focus on healthcare workers' safety. You can access their [Clinician Peer Support Programs](#) for more information and resources that can help to build resiliency in the healthcare workforce.

Is telehealth here to stay?

Telemedicine has become the norm since the start of the pandemic. In order to reduce the spread of the coronavirus, the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) made many changes to rules around telehealth. Both providers and patients have embraced the increased access and convenience of virtual visits, but will these changes still be in place after the pandemic is over?

The New York Times examines the [pros and cons](#) of the increased usage of telehealth (a free account is required to access). Questions remain about whether or not telemedicine will become part of mainstream medicine after the pandemic. A lot will rest on CMS and other insurers and how they plan to reimburse providers for these virtual visits.

How to respond if your patients refuse to wear a mask

Are you concerned about how your practice should respond if a patient or family member refuses to wear a facemask or claim they have a condition that prevents them from wearing a mask? In these polarized times some patients might believe they have a right to refuse to wear a facemask. What are your rights as a healthcare provider?

With some people refusing to wear a facemask, office staff can be put in a difficult position. Patients might threaten a lawsuit or claim that their rights are being violated. Can you be sued for patient abandonment if you refuse to treat a patient who will not wear a mask? A Medscape article points out, [providers have a duty to provide safe care to their patients](#). A breach of that duty could occur if patients are infected as a result of allowing someone in your waiting room without a mask. Read the article for strategies to handle these difficult encounters.

Medical Mutual's practice tip [Strategies for Effective Communication](#) can provide your staff with helpful hints on how to deal with difficult patient encounters.

