



Risk Management SNAPSHOT

Current issues and trends for
practice managers



Study finds increase in mental health and substance abuse related to the pandemic.

In their Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) reported on the results of a survey of adults in June 2020. The survey found large increases in rates of mental health issues, substance abuse, and suicide ideation related to the coronavirus pandemic.

The increases seen were attributed not only to concerns about the virus, but also due to prevention measures such as social distancing and stay-at-home orders. These rates were highest among young adults, minorities, unpaid caregivers, and essential workers. [The report recommended prevention efforts communities could take to address the growing concerns.](#)

Pandemic poses new challenges for rural doctors.

Physicians have varied reasons for choosing to practice in rural areas. Many enjoy working in close-knit communities, where they know their patients and their families. Others might chose rural practice for greater work-life balance. There are of course trade-offs, such as lack of access to resources and specialists for their patients. The pandemic has added new challenges for these physicians.

An article in Family Practice News [outlines new difficulties faced by rural physicians during the pandemic.](#) The article points out that rural practices generally operate with thin margins and when the pandemic first arrived in the spring, most saw their visits plummet along with their revenue. While many saw telehealth as a solution to reduce the risk of spreading the virus during in-person visits, this was more difficult in rural areas where internet access is often lacking. Many providers in rural areas however have found innovative ways to meet their patients' healthcare needs.

Revised colonoscopy recommendations.

For the first time the U.S. Preventive Service Task Force is recommending that individuals begin screening for colorectal cancer at the age of 45 rather than the previously recommended age of 50.

This [revised recommendation](#) is based on new science around colorectal cancer. The Task Force hopes that earlier screening will help to lower the risks of dying from this disease.

Missed care due to COVID-19.

The COVID-19 pandemic not only shut down non-essential businesses but also reduced or eliminated non-essential healthcare visits. These non-essential visits included preventive care vital to patients' long-term health. Many hoped that the initial drop in non-urgent care would rebound after practices began to open up again, however this hasn't happened, especially around preventive care. Missed preventive care could lead to delays in diagnoses, but could it also lead to claims against providers?

The New York Times published an article, [which looks at the type of care many people put off during the pandemic](#). The majority of the care was preventive care meant to identify and reduce future health issues, like vaccines, colonoscopies, and mammograms. There are concerns among healthcare researchers that this might lead to the spread of communicable diseases or an increase in cancers when patients are not screened appropriately.

Missed or delayed diagnoses can also lead to malpractice claims. Your office should have a strong system of tracking diagnostic tests and missed appointments in order to reduce this risk. Your process can be used to identify patients who missed important vaccines or screening during the pandemic. The practice should remind patients of the care they missed and encourage them to schedule their preventive care. Medical Mutual's practice tips [Appointment Management: Missed and canceled appointments, referrals not completed](#) and [Results Management: Tracking Diagnostic Tests and Referrals](#) gives your practice helpful information on setting up systems. To access these tips and others, go to our [Practice Tips](#) page.

Is the Food and Drug Administration too easy on opioid drug manufacturers?

Despite the ongoing opioid epidemic, a new cross-sectional study finds that the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) continues to make it too easy for drug companies to obtain approval for new opioids. The study found that the FDA approved new drugs without rigorous data on safety around overdose, misuse, or diversion.

An article in Family Practice News reviewed [a study published online in the Annals of Internal Medicine](#). Providers and the public put their trust in the FDA's approval process and yet the study found that the FDA approved new opioids even though the drug manufacturers' trials were not designed to produce important information on safety and efficacy.

Medical Mutual's Practice Tip [Opioids: Avoiding Risks When Prescribing](#) provides information on safely prescribing opioids to your patients.

