

Medical Practice Trends Podcast 12:**Why Does a Physician Office Need a Website?**

Dr. Polack: This is Peter J. Polack, M.D. with another Medical Practice Trends podcast and our guest today is Mary Pat Whaley, a practice management consultant who blogs on ManageMyPractice.com. Welcome Mary Pat!

Mary Pat: Thanks so much for inviting me.

Dr. Polack: So today our topic is ‘why does a physician’s office need a website’? I guess to some of us that maybe fairly obvious but other people, and I know I have colleagues who say, “Well, I am plenty busy enough so why do I need a website?”

Mary Pat: Well, you may be plenty busy enough today but we don’t know what tomorrow holds with everything that’s going in healthcare, but we don’t only need a website for marketing purposes or for reaching out to future patients, we need a website to communicate with current patients. We need a way to give them access to resources and links and information that you, as a physician, want them to have.

Dr. Polack: That’s sort of what you refer to as ‘establishing a digital presence’?

Mary Pat: Just like you have a physical presence for your practice, you do need digital presence. As our population ages and as things change technologically, the expectation is that the physicians will have a digital presence so that patients can reach out to them, can communicate with them, can get information and can also do transactions with them, whether it is completing your new patient registration online, paying your bill online, requesting an appointment or a refill, and even now, making virtual office visits possible.

Dr. Polack: That’s true. There are lot of practice management systems and EMR systems that now have some patient portals available that are going to allow for a lot of those types of transactions. Tell me what you mean by ‘establishing medical authority’.

Mary Pat: Because so many patients are looking online for health information. The Pew Internet and American Life Study calculates 70%-80% of people are looking online for health information. You want that health information to come from you for your patients and for future patients. You want to communicate with them about what your thoughts are on health and wellness and disease management.

And by writing, by blogging on your website you have the opportunity to do that. That also will rank your site higher in search engines and it will

also place you in the minds of consumers as a physician who cares about patients, who is authoritative on medical topics, and who is current in the field.

Dr. Polack: And I guess the importance of trying to do it yourself is that it really brands that information more to your practice. I have seen a lot of physician websites that use a sort of head on information service and all of the practices in that specialty use the same thing. So it almost has sort of commoditized information and then it's difficult to stand out if you do it that way.

Mary Pat: Exactly. Ghost bloggers, people who blog for you and who try to achieve your voice are fairly reasonably priced and I consider that a much better way to go than the kind of packaged information that you are referring to, and you might be surprised, you might have people in-house who can help you tweak your blog, your information or who can assist you in getting your voice out there on your website.

Dr. Polack: In particular, the younger patients are sort of expecting this type of relationship with physicians.

Mary Pat: Absolutely, no question about it, and to take it one step further, you want to make sure that your site can be seen on phones. You want to make sure that your site is amenable to Smart Phones because the younger generation, that's really what they want. They want to use the Smart Phones for every aspect of their life.

Dr. Polack: You also mentioned in the previous conversation about this can actually help reduce phone calls. How does that work?

Mary Pat: Well, the majority of phone calls that come into a practice that do not necessarily need a person to facilitate, have to do with information, checking on information, and you can often establish that information your site so that patients can get that information without actually using your staff time.

I love for practices to use their staff time for the patients that are in the practice been seen and to be able to push a lot of information out on their website so patients don't have to ask 'How do I get there? What am I supposed to be bringing? When should I call the doctor?'

A big question that a lot of patients have is 'what's something that I should call the doctor for' and 'what's something that I should proceed to the emergency room for', and every specialty and every practice has its own ideas about that.

So the more information you can make public on your website, the more you are going to reduce those calls that are informational only.

Dr. Polack: So just to summarize, you have a lot of free resources for medical practices, what's the name of your website again?

Mary Pat: My website is at www.ManageMyPractice.com and it has about 500 different articles and library and dictionary entries. So there's a lot of good stuff on there.

Dr. Polack: Thank you very much for your time.

Mary Pat: My pleasure.