

workstations or laptops so that every provider can access the Internet, and therefore many of the resources mentioned above, quickly and easily. The workstations should be replaced on a three-year schedule, and this investment should be incorporated into annual budgeting," explains Dr. Reider. "As a practicing physician, the most common error that I see in small practices is that they underspend on their hardware. Buying a faster computer or putting a printer in or near every exam room will more than pay for itself in improving workflow within the practice and saving the providers' valuable time."

Gabriela Corá, MD, MBA, president of The Executive Health & Wealth Institute, Inc., Miami Shores, Fla., and author of *Leading Under Pressure: Strategies to Maximize Peak Performance & Productivity While Maximizing Health & Wellbeing* (Xlibris Corporation, 2007), is a great believer in using technology to its utmost to run an efficient medical practice.

"Our ability to 'take care of business' has drastically increased since we have improved our computer skills and effectively applied these to our work," she says. "The amount of work we now encounter has geometrically increased since we have fully implemented Internet practices. Remember the days in which we received occasional faxes and regular mail? Remember how we used to wait for days or weeks for a response? Our expectations for instant communication have exponentially increased as wireless Internet or handheld devices can reach us anytime, anyplace. We must use technology in our favor, maximize its applied benefits, and set helpful boundaries so as not to become its slave."

Dr. Corá recommends maximizing the benefit from technology by learning specific computer programs that will help run the practice (finances, work/personal schedules, etc.) more efficiently. If you don't know how to use various programs or even a computer, hire someone who does.

In addition to making medicine's more traditional business elements easier, advances in technology are opening up new business opportunities that can offset shrinking reimbursement, according to Dr. Doerr, who provides this example: "New advances in medication-dispensing software are enabling practices to dispense safety-sealed, unit-of-use, generic medications to patients directly at the point of care. This technology enables

the process to safely occur in a matter of seconds for which the doctor can earn a profit of \$5 to \$15 per prescription dispensed. Not only is this a convenient service that patients greatly appreciate, it also serves as a great means to augment small practice revenues," he states.

The following is an A-to-Z guide to the alphabet soup of technology available to small medical practices:

Application Service Provider

An **Application Service Provider** (ASP) solution is an organization with whom customers contract on a subscription basis to deliver an application and provide the associated services to support it. An ASP either hosts applications at its own facility or contracts with a third-party data center to provide hosting services.

The major difference between traditional software and an ASP solution is that the application is not hosted at the practice, but remotely. The practice must have a PC workstation and reliable Internet connection to access the application. The practice in effect "rents" the ASP through monthly payments during the specified contract period (typically three years). The physician practice owns its data.

The benefits of this arrangement are that full support is provided for troubleshooting, product upgrades, security, data backups, and server maintenance. A monthly fee to the ASP vendor covers all of these services except implementation and training costs. The California Healthcare Foundation reports in its article, "Physician practice: Are ASPs right for you?" that physician practices that don't receive any support or networking from other area healthcare organizations or entities may benefit most from an ASP solution.

Not all markets provide ASP options, so a physician practice

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