

POST COVID-19: Your Recovery Roadmap





How to Rebound Your Practice Post COVID-19: Your Recovery Roadmap

As states grapple with timelines for reopening their economies, healthcare practices that have closed or contracted now face the challenge of how and when to bring employees back safely. Several factors make this task challenging to navigate. Safety guidelines differ from state to state. There are several steps that you can take to protect health and safety of your practice team and your patients as you increase your patient volume and recall your practice team to a post-COVID level of employment.

BE THOUGHTFUL ABOUT TEMPERATURE-TAKING

- Taking employees' temperatures sounds like a smart safety measure until you consider the logistical challenges involved.
- One big area of concern is keeping that biometric data private once you collect it.
- One option to avoid the data privacy problem is to use an instant-read thermometer that you simply show to the employee after you've taken their temperature.
- Temperatures taken on patients must be documented in the healthcare record.

PRACTICE HYGIENE REQUIRES A PLAN

- Some state orders may require you to supply your team with masks and gloves.
- It's a good practice to provide them whether it's a requirement or not.
- This will require you to conduct employee awareness training.
- Develop a plan for maintaining a sufficient supply, keeping them clean and training employees on how to wear them properly.
- Develop procedures requiring the issuance and use of personal protective equipment (PPE) (e.g., masks, gloves) to prevent infection and transmission.



SOCIAL DISTANCING REQUIRES THINKING AHEAD

- While social distancing seems simple in theory, it's much more difficult to execute.
- To maintain social distancing within your facility, require that patients sit at least six feet or more apart.
- Even if you have the space so that everyone is six feet apart, you also need to consider break rooms and bathrooms.
- If you can, make communal restrooms into one-person bathrooms.
- Consider public-facing positions such as front desk receptionists and how you'll keep them from exposure.
- Don't forget hallways—when possible, make corridors one-way traffic only.
- You need to think about stopping face-to-face exchanges even in places like hallways.
- Remove magazines and toys from the waiting room.
- Make hand sanitizer available at multiple locations throughout your practice.
- Routinely disinfect the waiting room throughout the day.

DON'T FORGET TO COME UP WITH A PLAN FOR HOW TO HANDLE VISITORS TO YOUR OFFICE

- All of the careful precautions you take to keep your staff safe will be for naught if you don't also think about how to handle third-party visitors to your office, whether it's package delivery people or friends and relatives of patients.
- Post front door signage advising patients and visitors not to enter if they've had COVID-19 symptoms recently or been in contact with someone who has been infected.
- Allow adequate spacing between patient appointments to limit exposure in the office. Try to limit individuals to patient-only appointments, or a maximum of one visitor to accompany a patient if necessary.
- Patients should be asked to wait in their car if that option is available.
- Stipulate that delivery people must call the receptionist instead of walking right in.



NOT ALL TEAM MEMBERS WANT TO RETURN TO WORK

- Even if you take all necessary safety precautions, it's possible that you will have some employees who won't want to return to work because they feel unsafe.
- Employees may only refuse to work if they believe they are in imminent danger.
- Section 13(a) of the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) defines "imminent danger" to include "any conditions or practices in any place of employment which are such that a danger exists which can reasonably be expected to cause death or serious physical harm immediately or before the imminence of such danger can be eliminated through the enforcement procedures otherwise provided by this Act."
- OSHA describes imminent danger as where there is "threat of death or serious physical harm," or "a reasonable expectation that toxic substances or other health hazards are present, and exposure to them will shorten life or cause a substantial reduction in physical or mental efficiency."
- The threat must be immediate or imminent.
- Most work conditions including COVID-19 in the United States, however, do not meet the elements required for an employee to refuse to work.

ONE MAJOR LIMITATION ON ANY REOPENING WILL BE CHILDCARE

- Parents can't go back to work if schools and day cares aren't open.
- Many educational facilities have already proactively canceled through the end of the school year.
- With all schools making independent decisions on reopening, it's nearly impossible to have a coordinated effort in the near term that's not on a case-by-case, employee-by-employee basis.

THE FAMILIES FIRST CORONAVIRUS RESPONSE ACT (FFCRA)

- Under the FFCRA, employers of healthcare providers or emergency responders may elect to exclude such employees from eligibility for the leave.
- As healthcare providers, it is at the practice's discretion whether to provide employees paid leave under the Act.
- There is no waiver or any required action necessary to effectuate this exclusion.
- Post a notice explaining this exclusion to employees.



HOW TO REHIRE FURLOUGHED EMPLOYEES

- Furloughed employees agreed to take an unpaid leave of absence in an effort to help their employer cut costs temporarily.
- From the employer's point of view, this helps them survive an unprecedented economic downturn but still retain the talent their practice needs to come back, hopefully better and stronger than ever.
- If you're considering ending a furlough, here's what you need to know:
 - Asking furloughed employees to return to work is cause for celebration, but don't let that get in the way of following proper procedure.
 - Just as you confirmed an employee's furlough with an official letter, you should also send a furlough recall letter to all returning employees.

WHAT A FURLOUGH RECALL LETTER SHOULD INCLUDE

- Returning employees are likely to have a lot of questions.
- As well as stating all the necessary facts, take this opportunity to reassure them about what's changed (and what hasn't) when it comes to their place in the practice, their salary and benefits packages, and how you will be ensuring workplace safety.

AN EMPLOYMENT OFFER

- Here's the most important thing for employers to know—this is an offer letter, not just a set of instructions.
- Employees may have found alternative employment while furloughed or simply not wish to return to work at this time.
- So, employees should be given a choice whether to accept the offer to return or reject it and have their employment terminated.

RETURN TO WORK DATE

- Don't forget to include the exact date when an employee is invited to return to work.



TERMS OF EMPLOYMENT

- This letter will now supersede any previous terms of employment, so it's important to get all the important details right:
 - Position
 - Supervisor
 - Responsibilities / Job Description
 - Salary
 - Hours
 - Exempt/Non-Exempt Status

WHAT'S CHANGED—AND WHAT HASN'T

- Lay out whether any of an employee's terms of employment have changed.
- Even if there are only small changes, not disclosing them clearly will only lead to resentment.
- If salaries or hours have been reduced, be clear about this.

BENEFITS STATUS

- Employees will naturally want to know how the recall from furlough affects their company seniority, benefits, and any accrued PTO and sick leave.

NEW SAFETY PROCEDURES

- The furlough is over, but the crisis isn't.
- It's an employer's responsibility to create a safe work environment and work to promote social distancing.
- Your letter is a chance to lay out what your business will be doing to keep the workplace safe
- Possible measures include:
 - Scheduled handwashing
 - Regular disinfection of surfaces
 - Enforced social distancing
 - Reduced patient volume
 - Staggered shifts
 - Industry-specific requirements



REASSURANCE

- This is a time of high anxiety and you can't be expected to predict every question a returning employee may have.
- Offer employees a chance to reach out privately with any questions and concerns.

REVISIT JOB DESCRIPTIONS

- Returning your practice team to work post-COVID may require employees to perform tasks that do not fall within their original job description.
- Flexibility and cross-training will be key in this all-hands-on-deck return to normal.
- Those employees who are willing to pitch in and do what is necessary to get the practice back on track will be on the top of the return to work list.
- The willingness to make patient calls from home or the practice will be a sought-after skill.

OVERCOMMUNICATE TO PATIENTS

- With a situation as dynamic and unprecedented as this, constant and clear communication with patients is crucial.
- When you are ready to increase your patient volume, you must overcommunicate to be effective and get the word out.
- There are multiple ways to communicate to keep patients informed, including email, text messaging, social media and patient portals.
- One email or text message to the patient population can help direct them to the appropriate streams of information.
- Helping direct patients to updated information is critical.
- In contrast, having the Front Desk field multitudes of calls from concerned patients ties up precious resources.



TAKE ADVANTAGE OF TELEHEALTH

- Even if your practice has had little experience in this arena, various vendors exist that can get secure, HIPAA-compliant technologies up and running quickly.
- Some of the rules about HIPAA compliance in telehealth have been temporarily eased for this emergency, but telehealth is here to stay.
- Be prepared to convert to a HIPAA compliant channel.
- It's crunch time for applying telehealth as an ongoing component of your post-COVID practice.
- You can offer free virtual screenings to potential patients.
- Making a short, free telehealth visit to potential patients prior to their first visit decreases no-show rates and increases new patient conversion.
- A brief telehealth session after a patient's first chiropractic adjustment allays patient concerns and increases retention.

BE PREPARED FOR PATIENT RECALL

- When patients phone to cancel an appointment, or you are required to reschedule their visit to ensure proper patient flow, be sure that they have an appointment on the schedule for a future date.
- Run a report from your EHR to create a list of patients who haven't been seen since the pandemic began.
- As soon as you know that you are ready to pump up the volume, have staff begin phoning patients to let them know that you are open and ready to schedule their appointment.
- Remember that after a lapse in regularly scheduled care, many patients will require a re-exam and an increase in the frequency of their visits to get back on track.



EIGHT STEPS TO PREDICTABLY REACTIVATE YOUR PATIENTS

REVIEW THE PATIENT'S CHART

- Most reactivation phone calls fail simply because the patient does not feel a connection with the caller.
- This is no surprise, since the caller is typically unfamiliar with the patient she is calling.
- This dilemma can be easily overcome by reviewing the patient's health record prior to making the phone call.
- In reviewing the patient's chart, look for four types of information:
 - Personal information: Kids, hobbies, special upcoming events, etc.
 - Chiropractic information: Previous condition, services rendered, services not completed, etc.
 - Medical information: Any significant medical information that could have chiropractic significance.
 - Financial information: Has the patient been responsible financially in our practice?

GET IN TOUCH WITH YOUR COMMITMENT TO SERVE

- This step is simply a momentary pause prior to picking up the telephone.
- It is important to remind yourself that you are calling to serve the patient, not to serve the appointment book.
- Patients pick up these subtle little distinctions.

INTRODUCTION AND RE-CREATION OF RAPPORT

- Most reactivation calls start with an introduction and move directly into the purpose of the phone call.
- This is why most reactivation calls do not work.
- Your introduction must lead directly into a personal conversation designed to reestablish rapport with the patient.
- This personal conversation is directed and driven by the information you learned when reviewing the patient's record.
- It only takes 30-60 seconds to create rapport, and without it, your chances of success are greatly reduced.



STATE THE PURPOSE OF THE CALL

- “Mrs. Jones, the purpose of my calling you today is that we haven’t seen you since the coronavirus situation began. I want to let you know that Dr. Smith is seeing patients and that we are taking extra precautions to ensure your safety in our office.”
- “We are all concerned about your chiropractic health, and Dr. Smith asked me to call and get you scheduled back in, so that we can keep you healthy.”

LISTEN EFFECTIVELY

- Your role in this step is not to debate any objection, not to argue a point, and not to try to “fix it.”
- You simply need to “get it.”
- You could say something like, “I see how that could have kept you from coming in, and...”

GIVE THEM AGREEMENT

- “I can appreciate that because I would have been concerned about coming in as well during these times” or “I can appreciate that because my budget has been tighter lately as well.” (money objection).
- What has just happened is that you have just bonded further with that patient, rather than being in an adversarial position in the conversation.
- They feel comfortable with you because you are just like them!

STATE YOUR COMMITMENT

- “And, what we are really committed to is your chiropractic health, and what we have noticed consistently is that patients who are under regular care spend far less time (or money) in our office.”
- “So, what I would like to do is...”



SCHEDULE THE APPOINTMENT

- “Schedule your next appointment so that we can save you time (or money) and keep you healthy simultaneously.”
- Use the Two Choices method to steer the patient to a mutually convenient appointment.
- When you follow this procedure without skipping a step, most patients will enthusiastically schedule their appointment.

Source: Breakthrough Coaching