

## Developing a Business Plan for Your Office



**ASSUMPTION:** At the peak of an influenza pandemic, various factors (e.g., personal and family illness, public transportation difficulties, school closures, fear of exposure) will likely result in staff absenteeism rates of as high as 40%. Periods of active illness are expected to peak in repeated waves, each lasting perhaps six to eight weeks.

### General

- Identify all essential functions of the practice, including the administrative support activities necessary to continue those functions. For example, clinical patient care would include emotional support for family members, as well as for the “worried well.”

*(NOTE: The steps below may be used to outline the management of personnel, space, equipment, supplies, finances and communication required to support patient care.)*

- Develop a plan that takes all those essential functions into consideration. (See CDC’s “Business Pandemic Influenza Planning Checklist” at <http://pandemicflu.gov/plan/pdf/businesschecklist.pdf> for more info.)

### Personnel Management

- Establish nonpunitive policies for compensation related to sick leave during a pandemic.
- Establish guidelines for the use of sick leave during a pandemic, including steps for determining when previously ill employees can be considered no longer infectious and can be allowed to return to work.
- Establish flexible work hours for nonessential and nonpatient-care functions to minimize staff exposure to infection.
- Cross-train personnel in essential business, office and nursing functions.

- Identify and prepare workers who can substitute for absent personnel; consider part-time workers, medical assistants, retirees, family members, students, etc.
- Develop linkages with other primary care providers and practices for cross-coverage. Consider issues of call, emergency room and hospital coverage, public health clinics, consolidating practices, etc.
- Family physicians may consider keeping on hand an adequate supply of antivirals for the prophylaxis of ALL staff during the first pandemic wave of up to eight weeks, until a pandemic-specific vaccine becomes available. This includes vaccinating yourself as well.**

### Management of Space, Equipment and Supplies

*(See the “Checklist to Prepare Doctors’ Offices for Pandemic Influenza” at*

*[http://www.aafp.org/online/etc/medialib/aafp\\_org/documents/clinical/bt/fpfluchecklist.pdf](http://www.aafp.org/online/etc/medialib/aafp_org/documents/clinical/bt/fpfluchecklist.pdf) for more details.)*

- Plan the organization of entrance areas and waiting and examination rooms to maximize infection control capabilities, with a goal of decreasing face-to-face contact between patients and staff in reception areas and offices.
- Contact suppliers of special equipment and supplies to confirm availability and ordering dates.
- Arrange for adequate storage space for additional equipment and supplies.





- Contact cleaning staff and representatives from the practice's dangerous waste disposal service regarding an increased need for cleaning services and a projected increased volume of waste.
- Provide education about correct cleaning techniques for office equipment and common work areas (e.g., phones, computers, desktops, copy and fax machines).
- Cover office keyboards with washable, flexible plastic forms.

### **Management of Finances**

- Review the financial status of the practice and project the impact that a loss of ability to see patients or collect payments would have on the business.
- Initiate discussions with health plans, health insurers and similar organizations regarding the implications of a pandemic, with a goal of forecasting such an event's impact on billing procedures, cash flow and payments and how to diminish any negative effects.
- Contact insurers, banks and other such institutions with which the practice conducts business to discuss their plans for handling transactions during a pandemic and any impact those changes might have on the practice.
- Consider alternative methods of distributing staff salaries during peak pandemic periods.

### **Communication and Community Issues**

- Establish emergency communication protocols among office, medical and nursing personnel.
- Assign cross-trained personnel to keep abreast of public and health professional announcements from local, state and civil defense and to share these with staff.
- Make yourself available to community groups to participate in planning exercises and to help increase public awareness.
- Regularly monitor the AAFP's and CAFP's influenza Web resources:

<http://www.aafp.org/disasterprep/pandemicflu.html>  
<http://www.familydocs.org>

Learn more about pandemic influenza and find tools to help you prepare your office, your patients and your community at AAFP's Pandemic Flu Web page.  
<http://www.aafp.org/disasterprep/pandemicflu.html>