

- ▶ Involving end users, especially clinicians, as you implement the system
- ▶ Devoting significant resources to staff training, addressing not only how to use an electronic record system, but the new roles of staff members, work flow, and how staff members can ensure data integrity
- ▶ Making sure your record system's hardware and software work properly to avoid frustration
- ▶ Recording coded observations and quantitative results rather than just free-text narratives
- ▶ Using standards for data entry
- ▶ Technical support or consulting from software vendors
- ▶ Hardware, such as new computers, or upgrades to your existing hardware
- ▶ Internet and/or internal network connectivity

### Building efficiency through work flow

Although electronic records can help you improve efficiency at your practice, be aware that they won't help therapists write a patient note faster than they could on paper, Lane says.

The efficiency in electronic records usually comes from the system's work flow.

"You'll be more efficient because all of the parts will be interconnected," Lane says.

In addition to the benefits of electronic records, another force might lead more therapists to adopt them: paper records may soon no longer be an option.

"I do think that electronic record systems will eventually replace paper record systems, and given all of the national attention and initiatives, probably sooner than most physical therapists would think," Vreeman says.

"This is not to say that healthcare will get rid of paper. As the old adage goes, 'My office will be paperless when your bathroom is.' " ■

### Electronic records and your bottom line

Cost is still one of the biggest barriers to implementing electronic record systems in therapy.

The cost of implementing an electronic record system will depend on the size of your practice and what kind of system you buy. The price of electronic record systems ranges from several thousand dollars for a decent lower-end system to hundreds of thousands of dollars for higher-end models, Lane says.

In addition to the system's software, you may also need to pay for:

- ▶ Licensing fees, depending on the applications you purchase with your electronic record system

## Fitness and wellness programs: Make your practice more fiscally fit

Declining reimbursement rates and physicians who only refer patients to PT clinics they own have been longtime gripes of therapists.

**Paul Gaspar, PT, DPT, CCS**, president and founder of Doctors of Physical Therapy in Encinitas, CA, developed an innovative way to address those problems when he introduced the GRAVITY program at his practice in 2007. The fitness program uses GRAVITY machines, workout machines manufactured by efi Sports Medicine, which many PTs already use in their practices.

Clients pay cash to participate in group fitness classes using the GRAVITY machines offered at Doctors of Physical Therapy about five times per week. The practice also offers classes for couples and individual personal training sessions. Gaspar says Doctors of Physical Therapy doesn't aim to make the GRAVITY program the mainstay of its practice, but the program is a viable one for rehab clinics that want to bring in cash, and it provides a service clients enjoy.

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## Fitness and wellness

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“Providing a service makes us less reliant on physician referral sources,” he says. “It has helped us to keep people in the loop a little bit. If we keep someone as a lifelong customer, they’re probably more likely to see us [for rehab] than going to one of our competitors.”

### Bringing fitness to your practice

In an atmosphere of declining reimbursements, more rehab managers are considering adding fitness and well-

**“Providing a service ... has helped us to keep people in the loop a little bit. If we keep someone as a lifelong customer, they’re probably more likely to see us [for rehab] than going to one of our competitors.”**

—Paul Gaspar, PT, DPT, CCS

ness programs to their practices as a way to bolster revenues. Earlier this year, PTPN, a national network of private practice rehabilitation professionals based in Calabasas, CA, unveiled its Physiquality brand,

which it calls an umbrella brand for cash-pay services and products offered by PTPN members.

PTPN introduced Physiquality because factors such as shrinking reimbursements and rising health and business insurance costs mean therapists have to work more for less, a PTPN press release stated.

At the same time, consumers are making more decisions about their healthcare spending with health savings accounts and healthcare reimbursement accounts, the press release stated.

PTPN members need to diversify to improve the fiscal health of their practices, says **Michael Weinper, PT, MPH**, president and CEO of PTPN. Therapists can diversify their practices by offering cash-based fitness and wellness programs that would not be covered by insurers, according to PTPN.

One program endorsed under the Physiquality brand is the GRAVITY program, the fitness program used at

Doctors of Physical Therapy. PTPN investigates fitness and wellness programs to ensure that they are reasonably priced and benefit consumers before endorsing them, Weinper says.

### Introducing new clients to your clinic

Fitness and wellness programs do not necessarily have to be cash-based. Therapists may be able to incorporate fitness programs that are covered by insurers to introduce a new population of patients to their practices. Insurers may pay for MetabolicRx Therapy, an exercise and nutrition program that PTs oversee in their practices, for qualifying patients who are diabetic, obese, or have other metabolic disorders, says **Christine L. Watkins, ES, CPT**, founder of MetabolicRx Therapy in Newport Beach, CA.

Although many therapists who participate in the MetabolicRx Therapy program provide billable services that could be covered by insurers, the program opens the door for therapists to develop cash-based fitness and wellness programs for clients who want to develop muscle tone or enter a fitness or athletic competition, Watkins says.

The therapy practices that participate in the program are “really looking for ways to generate new [client] populations and increase reimbursements,” she says.

### Paying cash for fitness

Attracting clients who have to pay for fitness and wellness programs out of their own pocket may be more difficult. “Cash programs can be very challenging in cer-

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tain demographics," Watkins says. "The interest is there, but a lot of [therapists] are seeing it's challenging to get people to pay out-of-pocket."

PTs have to evaluate whether it is worth their time to run a cash-based program, Watkins says, adding that people are more willing to pay for weight-loss programs.

"If people believe they will get results, they'll pay," she says. "Weight loss is a \$60 billion industry."

The U.S. health club industry revenues totaled \$15.9 billion in 2006, according to a PTPN press release about the Physiquality brand. However, the release stresses that Physiquality will not target the same consumers that health club chains look for.

Rather, Physiquality aims to attract customers who want to get fit under the supervision of a qualified rehab professional.

PTPN hired a marketing firm to conduct consum-

er research before launching the Physiquality brand, according to information provided by the company.

Weinper says the research identified the following key findings:

- ▶ Focusing on niche markets is necessary for therapists to broaden their customer base
- ▶ Many consumers would prefer to participate in health and wellness programs supervised by trained professionals such as therapists
- ▶ Women were more likely than men to pay for a fitness program
- ▶ Parents with children involved in competitive sports were willing to pay to improve their child's athletic performance
- ▶ Baby boomers (the population of adults born between 1946 and 1964) who want to stay fit and active are likely to pay for wellness programs

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### Tips for bringing fitness to your practice

Starting a fitness or wellness program at your practice can bring a new population of clients to your practice, add cash-based services, and build loyalty with clients who may return for rehab.

But starting a new program at your clinic may require you to spend time researching and marketing new programs and to spend money on new equipment or a membership to a network or fitness program.

**Christine L. Watkins, ES, CPT**, founder of MetabolicRx Therapy in Newport Beach, CA, and **Paul Gaspar, PT, DPT, CCS**, president and founder of Doctors of Physical Therapy in Encinitas, CA, offer the following tips for getting a fitness program up and running at your practice:

- ▶ **Do your research.** Evaluate whether running a cash-based program is feasible in your area, Watkins says. If a cash-based program isn't an option for you, you may be able to offer services covered by insurance, such as a weight-loss program for people with diabetes or obesity.
- ▶ **Look for support.** Companies that run fitness and wellness programs may include support in the fee to

participate in their program. MetabolicRx Therapy gives participating clinics an 80-page manual on wellness and weight management, as well as training for staff members, information about weight loss and how to work with different client populations, software for the fitness program, and marketing materials, Watkins says.

- ▶ **Find the right time.** Offering fitness classes early in the morning, in the evening, or during lunchtime—times when people are not at work—has been successful at Doctors of Physical Therapy, Gaspar says.
- ▶ **Make fitness fun.** At Doctors of Physical Therapy, music and camaraderie are an important part of the GRAVITY program. That makes the program fun and exciting for participants, Gaspar says.
- ▶ **Show participants what they get.** Weight loss and increased fitness are benefits of fitness programs, but giving clients something tangible is a good idea, Watkins says. Clients of the MetabolicRx Therapy program get computer printouts with nutrition and exercise information to take home.

## Fitness and wellness < continued from p. 9

PTPN's research did not show geography as a factor in determining whether a population would pay cash for a fitness program, Weinper says.

### Creating a healthy customer base

In addition to introducing a new population of clients to your practice or bringing in revenue, adding a fitness or wellness program can help bring people back to your clinic, whether to attend a group fitness class or for rehab for future injuries. Most of the clients who attend GRAVITY classes at Doctors of Physical Therapy were previously rehab patients, Gaspar says. Some came back because they had a positive experience using the GRAVITY equipment; others were attracted to the fun and camaraderie of group classes, he says.

Cash-based fitness and wellness programs at therapy clinics also give patients who have been receiving treatment or rehab at a clinic the opportunity to continue an exercise program after their insurance has stopped covering rehab, Weinper says.

### Emphasizing the value of PT in fitness

Focusing on the expertise and knowledge a PT brings to a fitness or wellness program is a key part of Physiquality and MetabolicRx Therapy's approach to promoting successful programs at rehab clinics. MetabolicRx Therapy is currently working on a book that emphasizes the value of having a PT in wellness programs, Watkins says.

PTPN has also focused on targeting consumers who want to become more fit under the instruction of a qualified therapist, rather than buying a membership at a large health club chain, according to a PTPN press release.

The experience level of staff members at Doctors of Physical Therapy was one of the reasons Gaspar decided to offer the GRAVITY program there. With 12 PTs on staff, Gaspar says he thought his staff was more qualified than many of the groups already running fitness programs. Staff members who run GRAVITY classes still practice as PTs but may lead a class in the evening, Gaspar says.

Weinper says many therapists are interested in providing new services but are reluctant to sell anything.

"I think PTs are intrigued by the opportunity to diversify out of the medical model," he says. "A lot of them feel the stress of declining reimbursements. However, many are hesitant to start a program because they have a resistance to the idea of selling services."

Other medical professionals such as dermatologists, who sell skin care products or offer injections to eliminate wrinkles, sell services that may not be covered by insurance, Weinper says. It is important for therapists to provide legitimate health and wellness services, which is why PTPN conducts a thorough vetting process before approving a program under the Physiquality brand, he adds.

"We want [PTPN members] to be able to offer the full spectrum of services," Weinper says. "We're trying to help our therapy practices to see people as clients for life to improve the quality of their lives." ■

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