The first wave of COVID-19 came in like a lion, took more than 140,000 lives and counting in the US, and forced many businesses to shutter for months. Now as the process of reopening begins, fears of a second wave or even a continuation of the first wave are forcing many practices to develop contingency plans. Our practice management pros share their tips for what to do now to best prepare for what’s to come.

**LIVE IN THE NOW**

This summer your best strategy is to get back to work and make back some of the money you lost while your practice was closed. See patients and do as many procedures and surgeries as you can while you can. Hold on to your cash due to the possibility of a second or third wave. The situation is so volatile that it is hard to predict what the rest of 2020 is going to look like on your balance sheet.

I still hear some aesthetic patients make comments like, “I am trying to cut back on every activity that is non-essential, and having my lips injected right now falls into that category.” Some people are still not even comfortable leaving their homes for routine tasks. It will take time, and the daily threat of more infections is unnerving.

Taking the stance of minimizing the impact of COVID-19 may backfire, as it has affected so many people’s livelihoods, loved ones, and lifestyle.

Demonstrate to patients that you are taking COVID-19 seriously and are committed to protecting them. Instead of manually cleaning surfaces and spending extra time cleaning after every patient, look into automated systems that can be moved easily from room to room to keep costs down.

While we are still in this crisis, it may be harder to get more leads and bring in new patients. Focus on maximizing your bread and butter patients by delivering the information, reassurance, and quality care they need to move forward with coming back.

Be understanding and caring with patients to overcome their concerns about having aesthetic treatments done by giving them more for their money. Resist the temptation to slash prices; rather keep your fees stable and offer patients add-ons instead so they can try a new treatment or product.

If you have old devices and equipment gathering dust and taking up valuable space in your practice, trade up for something new and fresh that patients want now. Take advantage of the great offers in the marketplace from medical device companies, software vendors, and equipment manufacturers for deferred payment. Now is the best time to get a favorable deal and upgrade your technology. If you are not yet dispensing skincare and other products, get on it. For many practices, the only revenue they had coming in for three months while they were shut down was from online skincare sales.

Lastly, get the whole staff up to speed on telemedicine so your practice can thrive moving forward. Virtual consults, follow-ups, and check-ins are the new normal, and patients have grown accustomed to this. The more office procedures that can be converted to digital platforms, the more staff time will be freed up to take care of patients and sell more services and products.

**GET YOUR DUCKS IN A ROW**

One year ago, the thought of preparing for the unexpected in our medical practices referred to individual illness, disability, premature demise, fire, hurricanes, or any known acts of God, but never a pandemic.

Not knowing how long this pandemic will last, or whether or not government and health agencies will require you to reshape the way you conduct your business protocols means that a good solid business/contingency plan should be created and put into place now.

**On the operational side:** Ensure that you have an adequate supply of personal protective equipment at all times. Consistently exceed your inventory level so supply shortages don’t prohibit reopening. It’s also important to have a proper and HIPAA-compliant virtual consult program, online store, and lead-generation response mechanism set up.

**On the administrative side:** Make sure you are staffed up and that all employees know and understand what their responsibilities will be during a future wave or possible shutdown.

**On the financial side:** There are no guarantees of any state
or federal assistance similar to Paycheck Protection Program and Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) next time around, so having a reserve for financial obligations is paramount.

On the marketing side. Continuous digital marketing, social media, and website updates should be planned so current and prospective patients are always informed with the most up-to-date status of your practice.

MARA SHORR, BS, CAC XIV
- Serves as a partner, as well as the Vice President of Marketing and Business Development for Shorr Solutions, assisting medical practices with the operational, financial and administrative health of their business.
- Level II - XIV Certified Aesthetic Consultant and program advisor, utilizing knowledge and experience to help clients achieve their potential.
- marashorr@shorrsolutions.com.

JAY A. SHORR, BA, MBM-C, CAC XIV
- Founder and managing partner of Shorr Solutions and a professional motivational speaker, an advisor to the Certified Aesthetic Consultant program and a certified medical business manager from Florida Atlantic University.
- More information on the practice management consulting company Shorr Solutions can be found at www.ShorrSolutions.com.

INSIST ON A FORCE MAJEURE CLAUSE
For any practice with a lease agreement terminating within the next few months or renegotiating their lease or looking to lease new space, a Force Majeure clause is essential.

This clause should state that, “in the event that either party is delayed, hindered in, or prevented from the performance of any act required under the lease by reason of strike, lockouts, labor trouble, pandemics, inability to procure materials, failure of power, restrictive governmental laws or regulations, riots, insurrection, war, or another reason of a like nature, not the fault of the party delayed in performing work or doing acts required under the terms of the lease, then performance of such act shall be excused for the period of such delay, including the payment of rent.”

Numerous practices were unable to pay their rent due to the inability to see patients/clients during the COVID-19 pandemic, but were still obligated to do so because the lease agreement did not include any exclusions relating to government shutdowns or pandemics. It is imperative to hire a competent lawyer to negotiate any lease agreement to make sure that the practice is adequately protected. This force majeure clause should also be added to any contracts with vendors.

Another material item of concern is to make sure that your practice has adequate reserves to keep afloat should it be shut down again. Typically at least six months worth of expenses should be set aside. During the last closure, many practices went out of business because they did not have an emergency fund. Although it will be difficult to save six months worth of expenses before a potential second wave hits, conserve as much as you possibly can now. This may mean not purchasing expensive equipment and being leaner on the amount of staff needed to operate.

Finally, many practices relied upon Business Interruption Insurance believing that it would cover them for any time they were out of business due to a governmental closure. However, this is not the case. Business Interruption Insurance requires that the business/location has actual property damage that prevents the practice from opening. Ask your insurance broker what type of coverage you would be able to obtain and the price to best protect your practice during another shutdown.

ALLYSON AVILA, JD
- Contract attorney and litigator for Gordon & Rees Scully Mansukani, a 50-state law firm.
- aavila@grsm.com

We are pleased to introduce Allyson Avila, the Assistant Office Managing Partner at Gordon & Rees Scully Mansukani, as a member of the Three Ways expert panel. She is an expert in medical malpractice, nursing home litigation, premises liability, employment claims, contract disputes, and product liability.