



By Fred Davis, MD

How Physicians Can Maintain Independence Alongside the ACA

It's time for independent physicians to embrace the new and creative.

That's the takeaway from the "2015 Independent Physician Outlook & Sentiment Survey" conducted by ProCare Systems, a Michigan-based consultancy that advises independent physician groups across the country.

As the healthcare industry adjusts to the Affordable Care Act, market dynamics continue to shift with alarming speed. This has left 75% of the independent physicians surveyed thinking they will be forced to sell their practices to larger health systems within 10 years.

The combined pressures of rising costs, tumbling reimbursement rates and increasing regulations have put independent physicians at odds with the autonomous manner in which most of them would like to practice. As they look to future consolidation, however, many are searching for ways to maintain their independence. Ninety-four percent of those surveyed believe market dynamics ought to give rise to new practice models that foster physician independence. To capitalize, physicians will need to remain open to new ideas.

Given the staggering majority of physicians that desire continued independence, the findings in this survey indicate that independent specialists can no longer take a "business as usual" approach to their future. Physicians can thrive in their practices, rather than becoming employed by larger healthcare institutions,

by embracing innovative practice models designed to meet the increasing complexity of today's healthcare environment while keeping their practices sustainable and profitable.

As the survey points out, where there are gaps between the way doctors want to practice and the current environment, there are opportunities. Most of those surveyed enjoy owning their own practice, and the majority understands that innovative business models will enable them and their peers to reassert the autonomy they're losing. To accomplish this goal, independent specialists must adopt new clinical and administrative systems that allow for seamless integration with emerging organized systems of care.

Nearly all the doctors surveyed recognize the emphasis the Affordable Care Act has placed on preventative care and wellness management. For those physicians to thrive in the new market, they will need to reorganize elements of their practice to deliver on this paradigm.

Politically speaking, the future of the Affordable Care Act might be hazy. There is no doubt, however, that the healthcare market will remain in flux for the time being — keeping doctors on their toes. Ei

Dr. Fred Davis is the co-founder of Michigan Pain Consultants in Grand Rapids and of ProCare Systems, a company that develops tools to access disease risk, capture clinical outcomes and provide outcomes analysis.

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