



[\(https://www.medicalobserver.com.au/\)](https://www.medicalobserver.com.au/)

[Home \(https://www.medicalobserver.com.au/river-of-news\)](https://www.medicalobserver.com.au/river-of-news)

**Professional** | ▼

**Medical** | ▼

[Blogs \(https://www.medicalobserver.com.au/bloggers\)](https://www.medicalobserver.com.au/bloggers)

# 10 lessons practices can take from corporates



[Zilla Efrat \(https://www.medicalobserver.com.au/author/zilla-efrat\)](https://www.medicalobserver.com.au/author/zilla-efrat) 17 February 2017



1 Like

16 Comments (<https://www.medicalobserver.com.au/professional-news/10-lessons-practices-can-take-from-corporates#comments>)

★ Like ([https://www.medicalobserver.com.au/flag/flag/like/29235?](https://www.medicalobserver.com.au/flag/flag/like/29235?destination=node/29235&token=A_KNRTKPCBT1DDdsBP5uT-XlcUSW8hiPLIkQFJc3YsE)

[destination=node/29235&token=A\\_KNRTKPCBT1DDdsBP5uT-XlcUSW8hiPLIkQFJc3YsE](https://www.medicalobserver.com.au/flag/flag/like/29235?destination=node/29235&token=A_KNRTKPCBT1DDdsBP5uT-XlcUSW8hiPLIkQFJc3YsE))

🗨 Comment (<https://www.medicalobserver.com.au/professional-news/10-lessons-practices-can-take-from-corporates#comments>)

★ Read Later ([https://www.medicalobserver.com.au/flag/flag/read\\_later/29235?](https://www.medicalobserver.com.au/flag/flag/read_later/29235?destination=node/29235&token=A_KNRTKPCBT1DDdsBP5uT-XlcUSW8hiPLIkQFJc3YsE)

[destination=node/29235&token=A\\_KNRTKPCBT1DDdsBP5uT-XlcUSW8hiPLIkQFJc3YsE](https://www.medicalobserver.com.au/flag/flag/read_later/29235?destination=node/29235&token=A_KNRTKPCBT1DDdsBP5uT-XlcUSW8hiPLIkQFJc3YsE))

## 1. Profit is a not a dirty word

“Making a profit is part of having a sustainable practice,” says **David Dahm**, CEO of Health & Life, a consultancy for medical practices. “Profits help you provide better access to good healthcare and to reinvest in and diversify your services, and to pay your staff better. They also give you wider choices — for example, whether to bulk bill patients in need.”

---

## 2. GPs are your customers

Independent practice owners should view their doctors as their customers, says Mr Dahm. “At the end of the day, practice owners also act like landlords and provide professional support services to the GPs looking after their patients. Many don’t understand this. They see the patient as the customer, but their revenue comes from the practitioners working in the practice, not the patient.” With the Health Care Homes program, practice nurses will also become their customers.

---

## 3. Communication pays off

“The corporates do a better job at putting doctor profiles on their websites, email marketing, newsletters, SMS and following up,” says Mr Dahm. “They are more focused on engaging patients and marketing. And they have more seasonable programs in place to keep patients’ attention — for example, around flu injections or skin checks. Independents often offer a more personalised service, but they need to better communicate this advantage to their patients.”

---

## 4. Customer experience is key

“Practices might want to consider the efficiency of the waiting room,” says Dr **John Houston**, general manager of Medical Centres, at Primary Health Care. “It’s also always good to get patient feedback, to understand what your patients think about the practice and service.

This can be done simply and cheaply by introducing a simple exit poll for patients. “Also invest in customer service training for receptionists and front office staff. It costs, but it can make a big difference to the patient experience. Even small things, like managing the patient wait time, can make the difference between a good or bad experience.”

The look of a practice also counts. “Our customers have told us that the appearance of the facility is important to them. Many report a close correlation between facility appearances and their perception of the quality of care they receive,” says Dr **Ros Blakley**, general manager at Bupa Medical.

**Louise McCann**, manager NSW/ACT at Medfin, says: “Like any business, if you are customer-centric and give your patients a better experience, they will be loyal to you.” But with the healthcare system designed to get patients in and out quickly, this is a challenge.

---

## 5. Professional development is vital

“Corporates can do this well, having a large peer network of GPs that share knowledge and best practice,” says Primary Health Care’s Dr Houston. “Independent GPs in solo practice can often feel professionally isolated, so building a support network can be beneficial both professionally as well as personally.

“Corporates regularly hold peer-to-peer events where GPs share the latest learnings across the network. Independent practices should consider facilitating similar sessions in their clinics or among their independent networks.

“At Primary Health Care, we have a lead doctor in each medical centre who is responsible for clinical standards as well as facilitating peer learning and professional development at a local level. This level of engagement and investment helps to retain the best doctors and ensure the highest standard of clinical outcomes.”

---

## 6. Efficiencies cut costs

Practices need to look at ways to maintain high levels of operational efficiency,” says Dr Houston. “This can be achieved by standardising operating procedures — for instance, creating standardised documents for clinic governance. This ensures everyone is on the same page and clear on their roles in different situations.

“It is also important to invest in good clinic software that can automate administrative tasks — for example, software that is able to recall data for the Red Book and facilitate automatic follow-ups and clinical plans for patients.”

Mr Dahm says this doesn’t need to be a big investment. “The software is there. You just need to speak to the right people.”

---

## 7. Corporates embrace expert input

Medfin's Ms McCann says independents can easily get good advice — for example, by having specialist accountants and financiers who understand what they do. "When you are not a business person and you are running a business, having the right people advising you can really help, as can investing in your business knowledge."

Mr Dahm adds: "There are lots of great consultants and lots of free stuff on YouTube. It doesn't have to cost a lot of money. Anything the corporates do can be replicated, and probably far cheaper and quicker. Smaller practices are far more agile and able to adapt than larger organisations."

---

## 8. Corporates have big purchasing power

"Independents can mimic this by teaming up with other small practices to find cost savings by ordering supplies and services as a group," says Dr Houston.

---

## 9. Ease the burden

Dr Houston says corporates invest in nursing support, administrative and other practice staff who can take on some of the GPs' administrative and non-clinical tasks.

"This allows GPs to focus their energy on being doctors and providing patient care. Nurses can also undertake simple procedures such as wound dressings, again allowing GPs to focus on more pressing patient issues.

"Qualified practice managers are also a worthwhile investment. They offer a practice owner protection and security around clinical governance and can bring to the table strong HR skills as well as financial acumen.

"At Primary Health Care, we continually consider the number of nursing and support staff, weighing up costs against GP satisfaction, time re-gained for additional presentations and focus on quality patient care, particularly in an increasingly competitive environment."

---

## 10. Measurements count

"Corporates have a vision, develop strategies and then KPIs to ensure they meet their objectives," says Mr Dahm.

“They embrace real-time monitoring and ask questions like how much are they billing, are patients coming back and are they acting on feedback? They have performance appraisals and provide feedback to staff.”

For example, Dr Blakley says Bupa Medical has RACGP accreditation standards for customer surveys and has embedded net promoter system methodologies into its practices. “This allows us to obtain feedback from most of our customers on both the things they like and the things we can improve on. We take the time to personally contact customers considered to be detractors to listen to their concerns and learn from their experience. For a low investment, this approach has been a key pillar in our attraction and retention of patients.”

Tags: **General Practice** (<https://www.medicalobserver.com.au/tags/general-practice>), **Practice Management** (<https://www.medicalobserver.com.au/tags/practice-management>)

---

## Author: Zilla Efrat



Zilla Efrat is a Sydney-based freelance journalist who has been covering business and finance topics for over 25 years. She's also edited well-known publications, including Company Director magazine, AB+F (Australian Banking & Finance) and Super Review.

[More articles by this author >](#)

<https://www.medicalobserver.com.au/author/zilla-efrat>

---

## Join The Conversation

There are 16 comments about this story