

How, Why and When To Choose a Practice Management Consultant

By D. Charles Greiner, DPM



AAPP
AMERICAN ACADEMY OF
PODIATRIC PRACTICE MANAGEMENT

10 Maple Street, Suite 301
Middleton, MA 01949

978-646-9091

978-646-9092 fax

office@aappm.org

www.aappm.org

How, Why and When To Choose a Practice Management Consultant

By D. Charles Greiner, DPM, FACFAS

Introduction

Physician owners must wear many hats in addition to being a clinician. They must be a strategist, promoter, manager and coder, to name just a few. Yet podiatrists receive virtually no training in business administration, coding, marketing or human resource management in school nor in residency and so arrive in private practice ill equipped to handle its daily challenges. Running an efficient, expanding organization can be a daunting task even for those with natural business acumen. It is extraordinarily difficult to resolve root causes adversely affecting practice operations while trying to see enough patients to turn a profit and practice good medicine at the same time.

A very few podiatrists have found ways to build their businesses to their satisfaction on their own. These business owners generally have excellent business sense, often have a business background with formal training, are good practitioners producing above average clinical outcomes, are excellent communicators and are driven to succeed. However, most podiatrists who have opened practices in the last decade (or more) just get by or have yet to reach their initial goals for practice success. If you believe the latest surveys, the average podiatry practice grosses about \$300,000 a year, with the average podiatrist earning less than \$150,000 a year pre-tax. Continually decreasing reimbursement, unpredictable contractual arrangements with payers and an increasingly illiterate job pool presents a very challenging practice management environment.

You can't properly manage a business without some sort of training on how to do it. Just because you became a podiatrist doesn't mean you know how to manage the business of podiatry. Knowing how to manage comes from either trying to manage on your own and succeeding, or hiring a consultant to guide you. Management is in itself an entire field of study. Learning how to manage on your own is enormously time consuming and can be an arduous task if the activities of management are not interesting or enjoyable for you.

When do you need a consultant?

There are numerous practice situations for which a consultant's help can be significantly beneficial. Some practice needs are specific and there are many areas of consultant specialization that address these, from coding, to practice valuation, to managed care contract review, to acquisitions and mergers. Sometimes an owner needs specific and limited help with bringing on an associate or partner, relocation, space planning, human resources benefits management, acute crisis management, niche PR or marketing, etc. In these cases, a specialist type consultant could be retained on a project only basis.

Other owners could use help with fast (aggressive) growth, a sub-specialty of the "generalist" type of consultation service. Situations requiring a practice turn-around, increases in efficiency, organization, personnel management, profitability and growth are also typically supported by the "generalist" type of consultant, who addresses practice wide issues in order to help the owner achieve his or her practice goals.

Before you can choose a consultant you need to know what you want them to do for your practice. If you want help with a specific and limited issue, such as a financial review or to evaluate your coding, you can retain someone on a project basis who specializes in that area. If you want re-engineering, benchmarking or have a long laundry list of changes you want to make, you need a generalist.

If your general practice issues aren't obvious and you want to get an idea of the possible extent of need for a consultant it is often helpful to evaluate your operational systems, or processes. Every practice has systems (also called business processes) of some sort to get new patients, appoint patients, handle finances, treat patients, etc. You either have good processes, bad processes or no processes for any given area of your practice.

Many podiatrists turn to management consultants to improve their business processes or to develop and implement missing ones. How do you know you have good or bad practice processes or procedures? Look at the results. Does the particular process give you the results you want? Often processes that have worked in the past do not work today, but may have been overlooked for change or improvement because the physician and staff have become comfortable with them and no longer notice it's decreasing effectiveness. A consultant will see the "elephant in the living room" that you and your staff now walk around without cognition.

For example, if collections are low, you may not need more staff, you may need a better process. To say out of hand that outside lectures and public speaking don't provide new patients may or may not be true. It may be that your system of doing them does not work and so inhibits results. To blame staff as a first action for poor scheduling or chaotic traffic flow in the back may be placing blame incorrectly on personnel when the problem may well be the processes you have (or don't have) for controlling patient flow or even for training staff to carry out your protocols or processes. You need processes (systems) that work. If you can't easily sort out whether or not you have a good system, bad system, no system or personnel issue and repair it quickly, then you probably would derive much benefit from a consultant.

If you think that retaining a consultant might be a good idea, the first step to take is to write down areas needing improvement. Do you want to improve medical care? Financial health? Need a buyout or buy-in plan? Staff issues to contend with? Inefficiencies ruining your productivity? If your situation is a general one, the first place to start may be with a complete list of your practice goals. It's a good idea to specify goals on a short, medium and long-term basis. Often ambiguous goal statements lead to ambiguous attainment so you should be as specific as possible. A specific listing of goals compared to your existing situation can be very revealing. You'll also use this list of goals to discuss feasibility with potential consultants and get their take on your practice situation.

If growth, profitability or exit is part of your goal list short, medium or long term, it will be helpful to assess your current personal financial situation and list your personal financial goals as well as your goals for the practice. It occurs more often than not that an owner has not necessarily taken a clear look at his or her long-term personal financial needs against the current financial situation. Of course, business owners have businesses in order to provide, among other things, a secure financial future. Unless you have a very clear idea of where your personal financial picture is now and where it will be, given usual ups and downs of various investments, setting practice financial goals will often be inadequate to meet personal requirements. Your accountant or a financial advisor can evaluate your portfolio and your needs and provide you with an idea of what your personal income or investment ROI must be to support your intended lifestyle.

With this information, you can garner a better picture of what your practice must provide financially in order to achieve your personal financial goals. This information will provide a consultant with a clear idea of your financial goals. A list from you containing all other goals you might have for the practice – more time off, ancillary projects, etc., will also help a consultant picture how all these goals might be attained and if indeed the combination you list is feasible. For example, if you wanted a million dollar practice in 12 months from your current \$300,000 a year gross revenue level, but do not want any associates and only want to work 3 days a week from 9 AM until 2 PM, with the majority of your clientele currently coming from managed care contracts, you will have some difficulty finding a consultant who will tell you that your goal is

attainable. If you did find one that said it could be done easily, you probably shouldn't retain them. A good consultant will be up front and honest with you in their initial discussions and will evaluate whether or not they can help you with a realistic eye. Consultants who promise the moon should be avoided.

Types of Services Provided by Management Consultants

The scope of services provided by management consultants is broad. Some firms specialize in one service, e.g. coding, practice valuations or merger and acquisitions. Other firms provide general services that span the org chart. The following is a list of some of the more commonly requested services provided by consultants:

- Information Services Management
- Associate Employment and Partnership Contracts
- Practice Valuation
- Practice Start-up
- Mergers and Acquisitions
- Coding and Reimbursement Systems
- Human Resource Issues
- Operations Management
- Employment and Job Manual Generation
- Outsourcing Management
- Growth
- Profitability
- Efficiency
- Staff Training
- Process Development
- Benchmarking
- Re-engineering
- Strategic Planning and Execution
- Marketing Strategy and Execution
- Ancillary Facilities and Activities
- Facility workflow design and modification

In summary, the short list to consider when deciding what type of consultant you need follows, providing you do not have the knowledge and / or time to address these issues yourself, have tried and failed, or just do not have the interest in doing it yourself:

- Personal and practice financial difficulties - Generalist
- Practice Sale - Specialist, (also requires Accountant and Attorney)
- You are considering purchasing an EMR – Specialist or Generalist
- You are considering changing your billing software - Specialist or Generalist
- Productivity is low - Generalist
- Your associate wants to become a partner – Attorney, Specialist or Generalist with experience
- You want to employ/contract with an associate – Specialist, some Generalists with experience in this area

- The practice is facing a Medicare audit - Specialist and Attorney
- There is continual conflict in the practice between staff or physicians - Generalist
- There is high staff turnover - Generalist
- You (or partners or associates) have been denied privileges or access to panels – Specialist (or Attorney)
- You need to assess managed care contracts - Specialist
- You want to carve out procedures with payers- Specialist
- You want aggressive growth – Generalist or Sub-specialist
- Practice is inefficient or unorganized – Generalist
- You want to take the practice to the “next level” – Generalist
- You want a valuation – Specialist or Accountant
- Overhead is too high – Generalist
- You are considering relocation – Specialist, some Generalists if experienced
- You are considering opening a satellite office - Generalist
- You want to acquire another practice – Specialist, Accountant, Attorney
- You’d rather hire someone to fix your practice for you, without your involvement – you’re not ready yet!

Are You Ready for a Generalist Consultant?

When a practice owner cannot not achieve his or her practice goals despite various attempts, resignation sets in and over time results in a chronic lack of motivation. This lack of motivation then keeps the practice status quo and often ill managed. Lack of management knowledge and (more importantly) follow-through is the root of most practice management problems. Compounding the issue is the lack of time a physician/owner usually has to acquire the breadth of management knowledge and skill required to turn the practice around. Add to that the need to follow through with changes in a short enough time period to re-energize the owner’s commitment to success, while receiving resistance to change from staff and it is easy to see why many owners who were once hopeful that goal attainment was within reach fall into an apathetic state. This scenario is typically one in which a seasoned generalist management consultant’s guidance would be beneficial.

However, a practitioner/owner cannot, nor should not, rely on a consultant to provide motivation he himself does not possess. Although a consultant can keep the owner’s eye on the ball and help push through difficult issues, consultants cannot change you for you. You must first change yourself in this way: you must decide that your current situation is completely untenable and that all the hard work, effort and commitment you will need to expend in order to reach your goals is welcomed. This decision must occur before any consulting relationship begins, lest the relationship be doomed before it starts. All the good ideas in the world are worthless if you refuse to use them.

Ask yourself these questions: “Am I happy in practice? Am I always looking for better ways to do things? Do I like going to the office?”

If the answer to any of the above is no, you have a problem. Good management consultants not only address your business, but the business of success. However, you first must recognize you need help, be willing to do what it takes to get to the goal, get the help you need and stick it out until you reach your goals. Your personal and complete commitment is the key to your success.

Where to Find a Consultant

There are many sources available to help you locate management consultants and attorneys.

- Referrals from colleagues is probably your best resource
- State and County Medical Societies is a good source for local resources.
- Professional Journals. Some consultants write or are contributing editors to practice management articles that are published in such professional journals as Podiatry Management.
- Professional Associations :
 - American Academy of Podiatry Practice Management
 - American Podiatric Medical Association
 - Your State Podiatric Medical Association

How to Find the Right Consultant for you

Consultants have strengths and weaknesses, types of consultation they particularly enjoy or types of projects that they are interested in doing for you. You want someone who will be a good fit personally and professionally based on your practice goals and situation.

Best way to start? Pick up the phone. Do you know any colleagues who have used a consultant? Call them. Often they are the best sources of potential consultants. Find out who they chose, how happy they are, what results they got and why they picked that person. As with any job reference, a key question is always, "Would you hire them again?" Find out if they felt that the results were worth the fee.

When you've narrowed your search, call those consultants and talk with them about what they provide, their fees and their philosophies. Note how they treat you on the first contact. Are they interested? Distracted? If you called and left a message, did they return your call promptly? Were they open with their information or did they seem to have restrictions on what they would speak to?

You can also meet and greet many of these professionals at meetings. They are usually happy to talk with you. You want to choose someone you will feel comfortable with. Don't be intimidated or embarrassed when you tell them about your practice or your goals. They want to help you to improve your practice - that's what they do. They aren't there to judge you.

Check out your journals, online e-zines and association lecturers for contributing consultants. Keep in mind that not every consultant writes for the journals or lecture and not all will be names you recognize. Big name consultants tend to cost more than people you've not heard of. That doesn't always mean they will do a better job for you.

Important Note: Don't contract with someone you aren't able to talk to easily. This is one of the most important qualities your consultant must possess, along of course, with a track record of success and demonstrated competence. You will need to divulge a lot of personal information to this person, such as your salary, your assets, personal or family issues affecting or potentially affecting the practice, your hopes, fears, etc. An honest, completely open relationship with your consultant will be critical to successful goal achievement. You must have a high level of trust in your consultant and he or she must be worthy of that trust. Your consultant is your advocate and your devil's advocate, part coach, part friend, part drill sergeant, part advisor. Make sure you are comfortable with all aspects of the particular relationship with your consultant.

Large Consulting Firm or Boutique Consulting Practice?

Consultancies tend to be either large, high volume firms or small, even solo boutique practices. The type of consulting firm that is best for you depends, of course, on your goals and how you prefer to work. Bigger is not always necessarily better and there are pros and cons to working with both large and small firms. A large firm may have specialty departments that address such issues as coding, contract law, etc. One disadvantage is that you might not work with the same consultant over a period of time. Your job may be assigned to a consulting “team.” A smaller firm may be able to provide a more “personal” touch to the relationship with the practice, but may fall short on the range of services it is capable of providing.

Practitioners with small offices, few staff or new in practice can often benefit from an association with a large consulting firm. These firms often provide basic management training, cookie-cutter employee manuals and other management aids and projects. They tend to have a variety of relatively lower cost programs that a smaller practice could afford. Large consulting firms have worked out their own business processes and run fairly efficient operations, with most basic successful activities needed within an industry defined and converted to an easy to use template, which is applicable to many average practices dealing with issues common to offices of that size.

Boutique consulting practices also may offer inexpensive and somewhat templated consulting packages, though some only work with large, sophisticated practices and are highly customized and also high ticket. All boutique practices tend to offer more personal service and general availability than large firms. Large consulting firms are not often able to cater to the extensive needs of larger, more sophisticated practices if only because the large consulting firms run a volume business and so the firm’s consultants tend to have a large client base. Therefore they do not have the time to devote intensive hours to one client, often required in large podiatry practices. A large firm’s consultants are not normally available nights and weekends. Many boutique practices will provide for after hours consultation and some are even “on-call” for client phone consultation.

A boutique practice tends to provide a higher level of personal service than a large firm and most work is custom, with cookie cutter forms, handbooks and such sometimes available. The caveat is that in a boutique practice if you aren’t satisfied with your consultant, there may not be another consultant to choose from – in a large firm, there is a stable of consultants and a corporate ladder to scale if you aren’t satisfied with services, though not all consultants in the firm typically have a working knowledge of podiatry. Boutique practices tend to specialize in one or a few industries or medical specialties, which allows them to stay current with changes in the profession, particularly important in podiatry.

If you are a new practice or a small practice with few systems in place, a large consulting firm may be more suited to your needs than a boutique practice. For sophisticated and/or customized work, a boutique may be better suited.

Narrowing The Field: What To Find Out About Your Potential Consultant

- **Availability.** When you initially contacted the firm were you able to speak to someone right away? If not, was your phone call returned promptly? How potential clients are treated during initial encounters can serve as a barometer for the rest of the professional relationship. If the consultant wasn’t helpful at the initial call or you didn’t “click”, then that consultant is probably not for you. Will the consultant have sufficient time for you as a client? Find out what their contact policy is. Can you reach the consultant after hours? On weekends? Do they come to your office when you need them? Do you have to go to them? Some consultants may be too busy to personally give your practice the attention it deserves. Find out if the consultant with whom you originally spoke will be the person assigned to work with you, or if you will be assigned to someone else within the firm (for example, a less-

experienced associate.) It is not necessarily a bad thing if the majority of work on a short-term project is handled by someone else. However, long-term relationships with a consultant should be with the consultant, not an underling.

- **Evaluation.** Describe your situation and see what the consultant asks you. Do the consultant's questions indicate they have an intimate knowledge of podiatry practices? Are the questions they ask specific and probing? Did they grasp your situation clearly? Did they provide you with any insight? Did they help you to understand what might be at the core of practice issues you presented?
- **Experience.** Does the individual or firm have experience working with podiatrists? If so, what specifically have they done? Do they work primarily with large or small practices? Multi-physician or single doctor offices? Multiple locations? How long have they consulted in the podiatric field? What do they think their strengths and weaknesses are? A good consultant will know and freely tell you.
- What is the consultant's background? Are they trained in management or did they rise through the ranks of an office without formal management training? Management is a field, just as podiatry is, or coding will soon become. "Consultants" whose background is internal "on the job training" as an Office Manager, for example, can bring specific knowledge of certain processes that some generalist consultants, especially those who work for large, high volume firms, do not know, such as the intricacies of the billing process. However, they often lack the business background and conceptual understanding of management principles that only training in the field of management and experiences in other offices can provide. Your list of needs should help define what type of consultant would be of most benefit.
- **Fees.** How does the consulting firm charge for its services? Some firms bill by the hour, others quote clients a flat rate for a particular service (e.g. contract review or practice valuation). How does the firm expect to be paid? On retainer? In one lump sum? Are payment plans available? Do they have a guarantee of performance or return on investment? Don't hire one consultant over another just because you want to save a few dollars. As with most things, you get what you pay for. Pay enough to retain a consultant with a good track record.
- **Expectations.** What will the consultant actually do for you? How do they work? Are they hands on? Most consultants need an on-site implementer, typically assigned by the physician, to work on operational issues. How much personal contact can you expect, either on site or by phone and email? You and the consultant must agree on expected results prior to the consultant being retained and clearly spell out your and the consultant's obligations to goal attainment. For example, expect to spend more time solving practice issues with the consultant. Personal time and effort spent by the client is a typical requirement by most consulting firms.
- **Additional Expenses.** Find out what other expenses you might incur before you retain a consultant. If the consultant is going to travel to your practice, what expenses will be billed to you? For example, if airfare is covered, does this mean coach or first class? Though uncommon with generalists, some specialty and computer consulting firms charge "portal to portal" consulting time, which means that the consultant is on the clock even when traveling. Do not accept consulting contracts that charge portal to portal if you can help it. In all cases where the consultant travels to the practice, you can expect to be billed for lodging, meals, ground transportation, incidentals such as long-distance phone calls or a per diem for incidental expenses. You also need to have the firm clarify what follow-up services are billable. For example, if a computer consultant is required to return to the practice for additional staff training after the initial set-up, is it an additional charge or is it covered in the initial fee?

- **Conflict of Interest.** Does the consultant currently work with any of your competitors? Ask what the consultant's policy is regarding consulting other podiatrists in your immediate area while you are a client? Does the consulting firm have a financial interest in a particular product or vendor service, such as a software program? If it does, ask that it provide you with names of other comparable products so you can make an informed choice.
- **Reputation.** Longevity in the field does not always reflect quality, but a minimum of two years in podiatry management with a verifiable record of success is considered a minimum requirement. When you check references, get statistical data that reflected the results they received and any ROI. Each firm should be asked to provide references that will support claims of results. When speaking to the consultant, observe their manner. Are they truly interested in you or do you get the feeling they are just trying to "sell" you. How do they market and sell their services? Their marketing and sales tactics often reflect their consulting style. Go with a style with which you are comfortable.
- **Location.** Most consulting firms require the client to pay the consultant's travel expenses to the practice. Therefore, some clients prefer to work with local firms. Don't limit your search to local talent if you can get superior results with a national firm and you can recoup the expenses along with the retainer. On the other hand, if a local consultant can get the job done it can be less expensive and allow for more on-site time.

Checking References:

Never underestimate the importance of checking references. It is time-consuming but will be well worth your time if you ask the right questions. Make sure that you speak with the person who worked most closely with the consultant. In many cases, this will be the practice manager or administrator, not the physician.

The following are some sample questions to ask references:

- What did the consultant do for the practice?
- Did the practice get the expected result?
- Was the project (or goal attainment strategy) completed within the estimated timeframe?
- Did the firm adhere to the estimated costs?
- How accessible was the consultant? Was it easy to get answers to questions?
- Did the results warrant the costs incurred?
- Did the consultant help implement recommendations?
- Was the consultant willing to provide occasional follow-up assistance once the service was completed? If so, was there an additional charge to the practice?
- Would the practice work with the consultant again?
- Would the practice recommend the consultant to a colleague?

Finalizing Your Decision

Once you feel comfortable with two or three firms, it is time to ask the consultant to provide you with the following information:

- A detailed description of the process to be undertaken for your practice.
- Description of desired outcome.
- Anticipated timeframe for completion of the project. Clearly spell out expectations if it is discovered that the project will not be completed within the proposed timeframe.
- Estimated billable hours

- Estimated fee. Clearly spell out expectations if it is discovered that the project is going to go over-budget.
- Provisions on what will be done if the client is not satisfied with the final results.

Forging a Successful Professional Relationship

A consultant often works with senior management as well as with employees at all levels. The consultant must assemble and analyze all of the available data, ensuring that he or she understands the nature of the problems and then consider the range of possible options. A number of specific recommendations should then be developed, each one quantified and properly thought through before being submitted to the client.

The professional consultant makes a clear distinction between conclusions and recommendations. Conclusions should be objective, logical and based on facts that have been carefully collated and verified. Recommendations, however, are subjective and based on the consultant's background and experience. An important part of a consultant's work is to extract information by asking relevant questions to ensure that important facts are not overlooked. Issues can then be clarified and priorities established, which can then be reviewed as the assignment progresses.

Implementing new procedures and processes is hard work and almost always stressful for the client. It requires you to step outside your comfort zone and do things in ways that may seem difficult or uncomfortable. The key to success is commitment. You must commit completely to the attainment of the goal. This is much, much easier said than done. Fortunately, the implementation process has a light at the end of the tunnel. During the first 2 –3 months of the consulting process, what is being done in the practice is new and can be exciting (or terrifying). The following 6 months are composed mainly of hard work, discomfort and stress. About month 9 or 10, changes made in the practice start to show results and in what seems to be an overnight shift, the practice is transformed. That is, of course, only true if the consultant is competent, you are compliant and committed, communication is excellent and no one is sabotaging the process. But given the typical practice situations consultants see, this timeline is considered routine.

The following are some tips to help you make the most of your experience with a management consultant:

- Have some type of contract signed before you start, that specifies goals, terms, etc.
- Prepare the staff and other physicians for the arrival of the consultant(s) if the project involves working on-site. Staff are sometimes unaware that problems exist in the practice. In addition, it is often rumored that consultants are retained to “clean house” as a typical function of their job description, so staff may be anxious about the consultant’s intentions. Unless that is indeed the reason that the consultant is being retained, the practice owner should assure the staff that the consultant is only retained to help the practice owner(s) and staff achieve goals (or complete a project, whichever the case may be). There is no reason for them to be concerned for their jobs, if they are doing their jobs to the best of their ability.
- Assign a key staff person to be the consultant’s contact for information retrieval. Generalist consultants usually require a plethora of information, from profit & loss statements to accounts receivable aging, to frequency of code use, routing slips (Superbills) and attendant progress notes in order to evaluate the practice. They will also require information on a regular basis during the consulting process. When the consultant provides advice and you have agreed to its implementation, follow through in a timely manner. Results only occur if the client implements advice given
- Request written progress reports if you feel that you are not in the loop personally on daily operational changes or project progress. The consultant should be keeping you posted

about how things are going. Communication is critical to consultation success. Ensure that you and the consultant speak often, even if you also communicate via email. Nothing supplants live communication.

- If you don't agree with something the consultant recommends, Speak up so that you and the consultant can come to a solution that will accomplish the objective and is acceptable to both of you. Be willing to compromise. At least some of what you were doing before you retained a consultant wasn't working. Remember that you will be required to operate or think outside your comfort zone so ensure that your objection is not just a knee-jerk reaction to something new.
- Your consultant can point you to solutions based on expertise and experience you may not possess. However, be prepared to defend your position and provide enough information to support it if the consultant is determined to change something that you are certain would not be in the practice's best interest. No matter what the consultant recommends, ultimately you are responsible for all outcomes in your practice. You'll need to walk that fine line between accepting advice and working outside your comfort zone with defending those processes or policies that you feel very strongly must be maintained without change. Again, communication is key. Talk things through until both of you are satisfied. Objective, logical discourse and even debate with your consultant should result in optimum decision-making.
- Implement recommendations with a positive attitude. Change is often uncomfortable and intimidating. An optimistic outlook conveyed by the practice's leadership can go a long way in motivating the rest of the staff towards making progress and accepting change. Do not allow your and the consultant's progress be impeded or sabotaged by staff disagreements. Instead, communicate with staff and involve them in the process. Help them understand that they too will have to leave their comfort zone behind and learn new techniques, new ways of thinking and new tasks. Involve them as much as is feasible but do not let them run your practice without you.
- Strive for clear, honest and open communication with the consultant. Be blunt and forthcoming. If you are unhappy with the way your consultant is performing, speak up. Resolve these issues quickly and completely. Poor communication is the most frequently-cited cause of a deteriorating relationship and poor results.
- Ensure that the consultant is committed to you and your practice. Their actions as to follow-up, planning beyond their initial contract, references to future strategies all are indicative of a consultant that has your long-term interests at heart, not just their own short-term profit.
- Consultants want to do a good job for their clients and should be willing to work with you. In the rare circumstances where this may not be the case, the client has some recourse, though consultants are not a regulated body.
- If you have an irresolvable problem with your consultant and the consultant works for a large firm, you can ask to speak with the firm manager or whoever has supervisory authority over the consultant. Obviously, you will not have that option when dealing with a very small or solo organization. Your best protection is to have everything clearly spelled out in writing before hiring the consultant. Podiatry is a relatively small community, so the consultant's reputation will likely proceed him. Podiatric practice management consultants usually work hard to ensure their clients are happy, as word of poor performance circulates quickly in the relatively small podiatric community.

In conclusion, because many podiatric physicians are ill equipped to run a business they may want to seek professional guidance in the form of a practice management consultant. First, they must decide when and why they need help and they must decide on the type of consultant that would be best for their particular situation. Then, they need to locate and interview prospective consultants and after hiring the right firm they must forge a successful professional relationship. This is only accomplished through complete commitment to the attainment of the goal.

References:

Management Consulting: A Guide to the Profession. M. Kohr. 1976

Management: Tasks, Responsibilities and Practices. Peter F. Drucker . 1973

A Guide to Small Business Management. Hollingsworth and Hand. 1979

"The Consulting Process". P. Thompson, Thompson & Associates. 1999.

"How To Work With A Management Consultant" AAFP, 2002

The Consulting Process in Action. G. Lippitt and R. Lippitt. 1978

"When To Hire A Management Consultant" P. Thompson. 1993

Charley Greiner, DPM is a diplomate, American Board of Podiatric Surgery and Fellow, American College of Foot and Ankle Surgeons. He is a Fellow of the American Academy of Podiatric Practice Management. Dr. Greiner is a third generation podiatrist and is the directing physician of a group practice with offices in Columbus, Waverly, and Portsmouth, Ohio. He can be contacted at cgreiner@aappm.com