

The Sky Isn't Falling, But the Economy May Well Be! By Evan Zang

Healthcare and Protocol For Life Balance™ consultant Evan Zang shares some secrets on how today's physician can safely navigate these tough economic times.

I used to firmly believe that the healthcare industry was absolutely recession proof. I viewed it much like the ubiquitous Pet industry, for even in financially challenging times, pet owners don't lay off their pets. Thus, it seemed quite logical to me: People don't stop getting sick, no matter what condition Wall Street happens to be on any given day. However, consumers, feeling the rising squeeze of lost jobs, stale investments, and eroding assets, have made it a challenge for physicians to stay afloat. Indeed, even seasoned health care practitioners across the country are seeing up to 20% less patients than just 2 years ago. Billings are down for many physicians, as much as 50% in some cases, as existing patients elect to stay at home and save money rather than visit their medical providers. It appears today's consumers are definitely watching their medical expenses more closely than ever. The news isn't too positive for graduating medical students either as they face the challenge of a tough and competitive marketplace on top of rigorous student loan payments.

But it isn't all gloom. The encouraging news is that there are several viable tactics that both veteran healthcare practitioners and recent medical school graduates can execute right now.

Like a shipwrecked sailor lost at sea, to survive, you will have to be audacious and execute a few strategic tactics in order to reach your "safe harbor." You may have to make some very tough decisions, but remember, the goal is to get your "raft" safely to shore. Closing the doors of your practice will not help anyone, including you, your staff, and the health of your patients, all of whom rely on your good business judgment and critical thinking skills.

Get Your Costs Under Control Now!

One of the most critical survival steps you can accomplish is to immediately lower your costs. You may think you've already done this. But check again. It pays to be observant. Because of the nature of my work, I often encounter medical office buildings that are virtually deserted. Is the current lack of paying tenants your next opportunity? If so, perhaps the timing is right to have an affable discussion with your landlord about the renegotiation of your current lease, or to inquire about some reasonable tenant improvements! Didn't you always want that extra cabinet in the waiting room?

These days, service and supplies are a bargain as businesses scramble for your patronage. Now is the perfect time to renegotiate your lab fees, office lease, cleaning service, utilities and pretty much any form of payable that mysteriously sneaks onto your desk at the end of each month. Buying your supplies at warehouse operations such as Costco or Sam's Club might make more sense now than ever before in addition to working with the various physician buying groups (listed in the yellow and white pages) that can save you upwards of 60% on supplies. And remember: Everything counts: pencils, pens, paper, even ink cartridges. Every penny you save will dramatically improve your chances of survival!

In this unyielding economy, cash is king. I assume you entered medical school to become a physician, and not a banker, so it's probably a good idea to leave the banking to finance people. Offering credit or "terms" to your patients simply does not make good business sense. Each unpaid bill wastes a tremendous amount of your staff's time (think about all of the letters that must go out in order to merely collect a partial payment of \$10 or \$15). Recommendation: Make it mandatory that all patients pay for services rendered at the time of service. No exceptions. Allow your patients to use their credit cards at checkout if they prefer. And even if you must pay a small percent to the credit card companies, 3 percent, say, on a \$15 bill, this would equal a mere 45 cents (about the cost of a postage stamp), and well worth the investment to save your staff time and energy!

Get Your Staff Under Control Now!

If you did not conduct at least 6 interviews (by this I mean, the in-depth kind of interview, not the 10 minute "how are things going?" kind), then you probably inadvertently hired at least one staff member that is causing you some form of problem. Friends of mine that are physicians tell me these "quick hires" almost always cost them money, time, and grief.

Now would be a perfect time to eloquently "invite" your bad hire to look for another job somewhere else. Don't lay them off. That can sometimes get complicated, and, actually implies you may be hiring them back someday after the economy picks up. Simply let them go, citing that you can no longer afford to keep them. This generally unpleasant duty is yours, and not your office manager's, and as a leader, you must accept this fundamental responsibility. From years of Executive Human Resources experience in matters like these, my rules, when ending someone's employment, are always the same: Be genuine, be professional, and make certain your dismissed employee leaves your employ with their dignity. Be sure you document, in writing, everything that occurs in order to limit potential post-employment problems. *Continued...*

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By the way, when hiring, did I mention that patients often make some of the best physician office employees? Many of your patients already have confidence in you and your practice, and they may even have a general idea how your office works (which, if they are hired, might translate into a shorter learning curve). You will probably see a higher work ethic and integrity from your patients – what patient would want to steal from their physician? I could write an entire book on good hiring practices, but for now, let me say this: Hiring productive and honest people, and removing dead weight, is probably the single most important thing you can do to help yourself survive a tough economy.



Do you have a member of your staff that routinely collects overtime? If you do, it's time to put a stop to it. Overtime is costly and generally not necessary in a well managed office. If you have hired a staff that works as a team, there should not be a need for overtime except on a few rare instances. In addition to cutting back on overtime, you may also want to reduce a few employee benefits, such

as company paid health insurance, paid time off (PTO), and so on.

Lastly, instead of paying your staff an hourly wage or a flat salary, you may want to consider changing your compensation system to one that is built around productivity and performance. Productivity can be easily measured in the number of phone calls one makes or receives, forms completed, and so on. Performance can be measured in the number of tardy days, missed days, incomplete or incorrect administrative tasks, etc. Providing bonuses are a good idea, especially if your bonus program is shared by the entire office team. For example, if you reach a patient count of "X" patients per week, each staff member will receive an extra \$50 on their next regular paycheck. Oh, yes, I suppose you can bring cookies to work too, or throw a nice pizza party at the end of the week to celebrate the goal being met. But nothing, absolutely nothing, speaks louder than cash, especially in this scary economic climate.

I know, I know, it must break your heart to have to think about trying some of these ideas. But remember: You're in the "raft" and your mission is to safely get to terra firma!

Get Your Marketing Plan Under Control Now!

Now is the time to pull out all stops when it comes to marketing your practice. This isn't the time to be conservative, but instead, it is a time to be creative, gutsy, and begin doing all the things your competitors are not doing. You don't have to break the bank either. It might actually be the little things that ultimately count. For example, try calling the patient you saw that morning around dinner time. Your call should be short, such as, "How are you feeling?" Or, "Did you have any questions about today's visit?" The level of service you create with this marketing/customer service activity may far exceed the benefits of that costly remodel you were considering before the economy began to collapse around you.

It's also a great idea to always ask your patients for referrals. Most physicians I know will readily tell you that patient referrals continue to provide some of the most economically feasible results for building your practice quickly. The patients whom you've successfully healed trust you, and may even subconsciously feel somewhat obligated to thank you. It would be a small matter for a happy patient to refer a friend to you. Referrals are FREE, unless of course

you wish to provide an incentive program for this purpose.

Get Your Dispensary Operations Under Control Now!

The nutritional supplement industry is a multi-billion dollar business. Let me say it again: A multi-billion dollar business! But it's more than a business. Indeed, it's an event! Your patients are already purchasing nutritional supplements, if not from you, then from someone else. Where? Well, to be blunt, from practically everywhere.

In a 1997 study published in The Journal of the Medical Association, it was found that:

1. 42 percent of Americans used at least one of 16 complementary and alternative therapies.
2. There were over 628 million visits to alternative medicine providers (an increase from 427 million in 1990).
3. Americans spent more than \$27 billion out of pocket on complementary and alternative therapies in 1997.

It has often been said that 50% of patients learn about nutritional supplements from their physician, yet less than half actually purchase them from their providers. Patients are consumers, and like all consumers, they constantly look for bargains. Many simply surf the Internet for their supplements. But a greater number purchase them from grocery stores, convenience stores, warehouses, and even at gas stations (It always unnerves me that a consumers can buy cigarettes and Ginseng, sometimes right next to each other on the same shelf!).

Setting up a small supplement dispensary in your office may well be your best financial strategy for surviving these intimidating, fearful tough times. You don't need to stock everything (leave the ice packs and thermometers for your local drug store). Instead, you may want to carry only the supplements you need to support your type of practice and to help treat your acute care patients. You may also wish to always have a good supply of men's and women's multivitamins, plus, some effective immune enhancing products (like a great Vitamin C), and perhaps some joint support products. Lastly, many Americans have some thoughts towards "weight loss" on their minds. So perhaps a good meal replacement/detoxification product might also fit into your operation. *Continued...*

The real key to a successful supplement business is in patient education. If you're reading this article, then you already know by now that not all supplements are created equal. The Protocol brand, for example, is actually the manufacturer too, something that is becoming more and more rare with each passing year of failed businesses. Companies that manufacture their own nutritional supplements have the ability to provide their customers exceptional quality control and consistent performance.

As part of your new and improved marketing strategy, it would be extremely valuable to have your patients understand the vast differences between the myriad of "vitamin companies." They range from tiny start-up companies, some of which, manufacture their products in the basement of their own home, to larger, mass market, MLM type companies, whose cost of goods are stratospheric in spite of consumer concerns over pricing. A subtle primer on how supplements are made, what goes in

them, and how they work, will help your patients better understand not only what they are taking, but the care and concern you've shown by selecting a proper brand for them.

In the end, it's all about improving the quality of life for your patients. And if you have a successful practice, you will have given yourself a fighting chance to survive these challenging times, and accomplish all of the above.

Top Selling Protocol Products

Code	Products	Size			
P0105	5-HTP 100 mg	90 Vcaps®			
P1811	A - Biotic™ Enteric Coated, Potent	60 Gels			
P3344	Adrenal Cortisol Support™	90 Vcaps®			
P1228	Bone Strength™	180 Caps			
P3308	C.Away™ (Candida)	90 Vcaps®			
P3019	Celadrin® Joint Liposome Lotion	4 oz			
P9470	Celadrin® Lotion Display	12 Bottles			
P3208	CoQ10 100 mg Softgels	90 Gels			
P3186	CoQ10 Liquid 100 mg/tsp	4 oz			
P4638	Curcumin 665 mg 95% Extract	60 Vcaps®			
P3121	D-Flame™ Cox-2 Formula	90 Vcaps®			
P0495	Methyl B-12 1,000 mcg	100 Loz			
P0496	Methyl B-12 5,000 mcg	60 Loz			
P3140	Nattokinase 100 mg/2000 FU units	60 Vcaps®			
P1659	Omega-3 Lemon Liquid /Molecularly Distilled	7 oz			

P1661	Ultra Omega-3 500/250/Molecularly Distilled	90 Gels			
P2912	Ortho Dophilus™ 8 Strains, 4 Billion	60 Vcaps®			
P3772	Ortho Liquid Multi™ - Iron Free/Xylitol	16 oz			
P3816	Ortho Multi™ Softgel w/ Flax 400 mg	90 Gels			
P3368	Ortho Thyroid™	90 Vcaps®			
P3338	Progesterone Cream Pump -20 mg	3 oz			
P5955	ProtoClear™ Berry Flavor NEW!	2.55 lbs			
P5957	ProtoClear™ Orange Flavor NEW!	2.55 lbs			
P6957	Stevia Complete Packets	100/box			
P6955	Stevia Non-Bitter Liquid, Sweet	2 fl oz			
P0166	l-Tryptophan 500 mg NEW!	60 Vcaps®			
P0452	Vitamin B-12 Liquid Tri-Formula 5,000 mcg	4 oz			
P0690	Vitamin C-1000 Cap+100 Bioflavonoids	120 Caps			
P0365	Vitamin D-3 1,000 IU, Natural	120 Gels			
P0367	Vitamin D-3 2,000 IU, Natural	120 Gels			
P0372	Vitamin D-3 5000 IU, Natural NEW!	120 Gels			

10 Reasons to Grow Your Practice with the Protocols Brochure Suite

1. **Informative** Protocol for Life Balance™ brochures contain the information you need in order to recommend the right nutritional product to your patients, every time.
2. **Progress** Protocol brochures allow you to monitor your patients' progress over time. This allows you to properly adjust their nutrition in accordance with their prognosis.
3. **Accuracy** We hold our Protocol brochures to the same high standards as we do our products, and are committed to providing you straightforward, unbiased information.
4. **Up-to-Date** By closely following the natural product industry's growth and trends, Protocol brochures keep you up-to-date on the latest nutritional innovations.
5. **Science-Based** Everything we do is founded on the latest research. Protocol brochures make it easy to stay on top of the most important scientific advances.
6. **Qualifications** Our medical advisory board and consultants are among the most respected in their fields, and dedicated to bringing you information you can trust.
7. **Detail** Protocol brochures offer detailed, condition-specific product recommendations, allowing you to better serve the total health needs of your patients.
8. **Solutions, Simplified** With so many supplements available today, Protocol brochures cross reference a wide range of factors to help you make the best decision possible.
9. **Long Term** Protocol brochures make it easy to review a patient's nutrition history, in order to provide them with the most complete health care program possible.
10. **Expansive** As the Protocol for Life Balance™ product line expands, we will continue to provide you with Protocol brochures that inform, educate, and improve lives.



Liquid D-3 5,000 IU per Dropper

- Pleasant Neutral Taste
- 5,000 IU per full dropper
- 400 IU per 4 drops
- MCT Oil Base
- Helps Maintain Strong Bones*



Code P0370 Size 2 oz

Tryptophan 500 mg *New Size* (Tested for Peak E every batch)

- 100% Natural Amino Acid
- Supports Mood and Sleep Patterns*
- Precursor to 5-HTP and Serotonin
- Essential in Normal Protein Synthesis*
- Vegetarian/Vegan Friendly formula



Code P0167 Size 120 Vcaps®

Neptune Krill Oil 500 mg

- 100% Pure, Patented Neptune Krill Oil
- Supports Cardiovascular and Joint Health*
- With Phospholipids, Choline, and Astaxanthin
- Potent EFA/Antioxidant Formula
- Tested for Purity and Potency



Code P1625 Size 60 Gels

*These statements have not been evaluated by the FDA. These products are not intended to diagnose, treat, cure or prevent any disease.

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