Physician office overhead costs are up; reimbursements and collections are down. But don’t despair.

There are ways to save money and tilt your balance sheet in the direction of a healthy bottom line. Here are some cost-saving tips:

**Maximize tax-free benefits for you and your partners.** Don’t forget to deduct payments for malpractice, major medical, disability, life, and liability insurance. Personal expense account charges are deductible as well, including the cost of attending CME meetings; dues and subscriptions; and as much as $45,000 a year for retirement spending.

**Save on purchasing supplies.** Become part of a physician buying group (PBG) for office supplies, medical supplies, and lab supplies, and especially vaccines. Such groups have the potential for saving a practice 10%-25% on “big ticket” items, and thousands of dollars a year on vaccines.

Three PBGs are the National Discount Vaccine Alliance (785-273-4165; http://www.nationaldiscountvaccinealliance.com); Atlantic Health Partners (800-741-2044; www.atlantichealthpartners.com); and Physicians’ Alliance (866-348-9780; https://www.physall.com).

**Negotiate your rent.** Commercial real estate? They’re hurting right now. Any physician or group whose lease is expiring within 2 years should renegotiate now. Some landlords are offering 3-6 months of free rent in exchange for a renewal of an office space lease. Another option, especially in light of the current, dismal commercial real estate market, is to consider buying your own building while prices are low.

**Stretch the use of your office space.** Could you accommodate another provider and expand your business hours from early morning to late evening, with physicians staggering their hours? Could you sublease space during off-hours to a nonphysician provider and expand your business hours while reducing overhead? Could you accommodate another provider and expand your business hours while reducing overhead?

**Reevaluate your ratio of front office to clinical personnel.** A good ratio is 1 physician to 3.5 clinical staff. Better is 1:3.4 if your office has a lab and 1:3.2 if your office has no lab. A ratio that’s too low is 1:2.8 or 1:2.3.

**Charge patients for simple but time-consuming tasks.** Consider charging a fee for filling out forms for camp, for one.

**Irritating a congressman was a great achievement, said Dr. Mark Podwal.**

They’s made his mark in other media as well, serving as executive producer and writer for the documentary “House of Life: The Old Jewish Cemetery in Prague,” narrated by Claire Bloom and broadcast nationwide on public television in the spring of 2009. Dr. Podwal also did illustrations for a book by Harold Bloom and four children’s books by Francine Prose.

One of his most recent books, “Doc-tored Drawings” (Bellevue Literary Press, 2007), is a retrospective of his line drawings, mainly from works on medical subjects that appeared in the New York Times. One image from 1994, called “Mediscare,” portrays Congress as an octopus wielding a surgical instrument in each arm. “It’s perfect for what Congress is doing to health care reform now,” Dr. Podwal said.

Another image from the book pokes fun at the circus of complexity surrounding the then-Clinton health plan. After the drawing first appeared in the New York Times, someone who worked in Dr. Podwal’s office told him she had fielded a phone call at home from Rep. Henry Waxman (D-Calif.), whom she knew and who was extremely upset with the drawing.

“Dr. Podwal said: ‘If I can make a congressman upset by the drawing, I’ve achieved what I was trying to do.’

Dr. Podwal said that he is especially proud of the work he did on the “House of Life” film project. “I’m not religious, but I’m very emotionally attached to Judaism,” he said—so much so that every year, he and his family fly to Prague to mark Rosh Hashanah in the city’s 700-year-old Old-New Synagogue.

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