



PRACTICE GROWTH

What's the Best-Paying Segment of Your Practice?

SPOILER ALERT: IT SHOULD INCLUDE PERSONAL-INJURY (PI) CARE. HERE'S WHY.

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If you are not actively growing the personal-injury segment of your acupuncture practice, you are likely leaving money on the table. This might sound shocking, but personal injury (PI) can be among the best-paying segments for at least three reasons:

1. PI serves as an entry point to acupuncture as part of a patient's long-term wellness program. PI patients often have better outcomes because ongoing acupuncture treatment is essential to the care plan, supporting the pain and suffering damages their attorney will advocate for.
2. Providing good care with reasonable billing endears you to attorneys, who are on the hunt for good medical providers who will provide the type of care necessary to stand up to court scrutiny.
3. PI pays far better than both cash and insurance.

Introducing ... Acupuncture Care

Most people walk through life suffering little ailments: headaches, fatigue, back pain, and stress. When the pain isn't extreme, they endure. When the pain is extreme, they generally still turn to Western medicine for medication or in some cases, surgery.

A select handful might seek alternative methods of pain management, but some people continue to doubt Eastern medicine. They roll their eyes and continue to take the nightly regimen of pills their medical doctor prescribed to treat ailments that are not being effectively managed. They do not consider acupuncture when suffering from headaches, muscular pain, anxiety, or the myriad other ailments acupuncture successfully addresses.



Yet acupuncture is a viable and regularly accessed treatment option for PI patients, who often are exposed to acupuncture for the first time through their case. PI patients show up as scheduled and they show up over an extended period of time, complying with your full treatment plan. After all, if they fail to comply with your treatment plan, their PI recovery can be negatively impacted!

Patients who follow treatment plans have a significantly higher percentage of positive health outcomes. As a result, your patient will walk away from acupuncture with the positive impression that your treatment made them healthier – perhaps significantly so. That creates loyal patients; and raving fans who refer you to others.

In other words, PI gives you an opportunity to educate a consumer base you might not have otherwise reached, thereby expanding the number of people who understand acupuncture as a highly effective non-medication, non-surgical approach.

Acupuncturists Are in High Demand

In PI cases, attorneys want to prove the severity of a patient's pain and suffering. Liability policies, health insurance, disability, unemployment, life insurance benefits, and claims against governmental entities may all help cover the attorney's and medical provider's bills, but the jackpot in PI is when a judge or jury decides to award a patient with pain and suffering.

PI attorneys are paid on contingency, receiving a percentage of a successful outcome, but nothing if the patient loses. When a case results in high pain and suffering, the patient and the attorney walk away with significantly more money; sometimes to the tune of hundreds of thousands – or even millions – of dollars.

The deciding factor in whether to award pain and suffering damages is often the medical providers – including the acupuncturist, if one was used.

Your treatment, evaluations and records provide third-party credibility to the attorney and patient's claims. Your bill is part of the metric by which adjusters, judges and juries determine injury compensation. Your ability to provide high quality of care and proper documentation, and refer out to specialists when medically necessary, is often the difference maker.

So, high-quality acupuncturists are in high demand. If you understand the in's and out's of PI, you will be the "someone" attorneys are clamoring to send their patients to.

Why PI Can Be the Best-Paying Segment of Your Acupuncture Practice

When you understand the best practices for personal injury, PI pays far better than cash or insurance patients. Part of the "best practices" is understanding that you are paid no matter the outcome of the case.

Although many attorneys would like you to believe otherwise, medical providers who take PI cases on a medical lien ("on lien") or via a letter of protection (LOP) are not agreeing to a discount. Rather, taking patients on lien or LOP is like extending credit to a patient. You are agreeing to wait for the conclusion of a court case to be paid, but you are owed the full amount of the bill, no matter the outcome of the case.

And that's why PI is much better paying than cash or health insurance. After all, many acupuncturists offer a cash discount, which makes cash far less profitable. And many health insurance plans deny reimbursement or coverage of all or a considerable amount of acupuncture treatment, which in turn lowers your profit on insured cases.

But in PI, if the attorney drops the patient, if the patient loses at trial, or if not enough is recovered in a settlement or court verdict – the patient still owes that bill. Let me repeat: *Patients in almost all states owe the full amount of a medical lien or LOP bill, regardless of the outcome of the case.*

The good attorneys generally do all they can to make sure their trusted acupuncturists get paid in full. If you are trained properly in PI, you will support the current and future injury treatment, and provide value that may increase the amount of damages awarded in settlement, or by the jury or judge.

Becoming the Sought-After Acupuncturist

So, how do you position yourself to get high-quality referrals from high-quality attorneys who want you to be paid in full? Here are a few ideas:

- Document the patient's story before the injury and after the injury. Ask questions that draw information about both how the patient's quality of life changed due to the PI incident and the return journey to that "life before."
- Contact the attorney immediately if the patient misses appointments or otherwise stops following the treatment plan.
- Be willing to hand the ball to someone else and refer the patient to imaging and other specialists.
- Provide third-party credibility, in the form of medically necessary treatment, proper coding and billing, reasonable medical bills, and supportive documentation, necessary to support the PI case.

Acupuncturists provide quality, effective care for personal-injury patients, and can be one of the early stops on a patient's personal-injury recovery. PI represents an opportunity to grow your practice and augment the reputation of acupuncture along the way.

Author's Note: Still aren't convinced? Read Part 2 of this series in the February issue to learn more about why (and how) to expand your practice to include personal-injury care.

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