Conference Season and the Real Cost of Attendance

It's conference season and calendars are filling up fast. Flights are getting booked. Hotels are being reserved. Registration fees are approved. And calenders are blocked off for a few days away from the practice.

If you're like most physicians and practice leaders, there's a mix of emotions. Maybe a little excitement. A little overwhelm. Even a quiet question in the back of your mind.

Is all of this actually worth it? Because when you really step back and look at it, attending a conference is not a small decision. It's not just the registration fee.

it's the travel, the hotel, meals, time away from patients, disruption to your team, mental energy. Welcome to Medical Money Matters, the podcast where you can find experts, answers, and resources so that you achieve mastery over the financial and business aspects of your practice.

Hello everyone, I'm your host Chilarina. I began my career in accounting and finance and I have more than 30 years of experience running medical groups.

I own and operate a national healthcare consulting and revenue cycle company, and I am the author of Physician Heal Thy Financial Self. In 2020, I co-founded the Physicians Leadership Project.

And in 2025, a released Physicians Edge, the first of its kind, CME accredited online business education for physicians. My passion is to increase financial and business literacy for positions.

Episode 179, Stop Wasting Conferences. How to get real value from every event. It's conference season and calendars are filling up fast. Flights are getting booked.

Hotels are being reserved. Registration fees are approved. And calenders are blocked off for a few days away from the practice. If you're like most physicians and practice leaders, there's a mix of emotions.

Setting Clear Goals Before You Go

Maybe a little excitement. A little overwhelm. Even a quiet question in the back of your mind. Is all of this actually worth it? Because, when you really step back and look at it, attending a conference is not a small decision.

It's not just the registration fee. it's the travel, the hotel, meals, time away from patients, disruption to your team, and mental energy. This is NOT a $2,000 decision!

For most people, this is more like a 5, 000 to 10, 00 investment, sometimes more. And yet, what I see over and over again is that people treat conferences almost like a passive experience.

You show up, you sit in sessions, take a few notes, maybe talk to a couple of people, and then you come home. And within a week or two, it's like none of it ever happened.

Nothing really changes. So today, I want to challenge that. Because conferences can be one of the highest return on investments you can make in your practice, your career, and your network.

Or they can one the biggest missed opportunities. And the difference is not just the conference. The difference, is how you show up. If you're going to invest that kind of time and money, it's worth being intentional.

It's worthwhile designing the experience so that you actually get a return. And that starts before you even get on the plane. One of the biggest reasons conferences under-deliver is that people don't go in with a clear goal.

They go with the vague sense of, I should learn something, or I could network. but there's no actual clarity. And when everything is a priority, nothing is.

So before you go, I want you to get very simple and very specific. What are the one to three things that would make this conference worth it for you? Maybe there is specific operational problem in your practice that you've been trying to solve.

Maybe it's around revenue cycle. maybe it staffing. may be it workflows. May be its coding. Whatever it is, name it. Or maybe your goal is connection.

You want to meet other administrators or physicians who are dealing with the same challenges. Or perhaps you're evaluating solutions. You want to explore vendors.

you want understand what's out there.

Choosing Sessions and Making Connections

We want see what could actually move the needle in your organization. All of those are valid goals. But pick one to three, not ten, because that clarity will shape everything else.

It will shake which sessions you attend. it will shaped who you talk to. and it shape how you spend your time. And speaking of sessions, this is another place where a little intention goes a long way.

There's a tendency to try to pack the schedule, to go from session to session because you feel like you should get your money's worth. But the reality is, more is not necessarily better.

In fact, trying to attend everything often leads to cognitive overload. You hear a lot of information, but very little of it sticks. And by the end of the day, you're tired, your brain is full, and you can't really remember what you learned.

So instead of trying to do everything, be selective. Choose the sessions that are most aligned with your goals, choose the speakers who you really want to hear from, and give yourself some space.

Because some of the most valuable moments at a conference don't happen in the session, they happen the hallway. They happen between sessions, at coffee, when you sit down next to someone and just start talking.

Those are the moments where real connection happens, where you hear how someone else solved a problem, when you realize you're not the only one dealing with something, or ideas start to form that are actually applicable to your world.

And this is also where I want to encourage you to be proactive before the conference even starts. Think about who you want to meet. Are there speakers whose work you admire?

Are their colleagues you've connected with online but never met in person? are there people in your network who know are going to be there? Reach out ahead of time.

A simple message, hey, I'm going to be at the conference. I'd love to connect if you have a few minutes. Goes a really long way. And also, look for us at Healthy Practices.

If you see us there, please come and say hello. These conferences are one of the best opportunities to turn virtual connections into real relationships.

The more you lean into that, the more value you'll get. You're listening to Medical Money Matters, a weekly podcast brought to you by Healthy Practices, A healthcare consulting and revenue cycle company dedicated to keeping our clients independent.

If you're looking for more ways to strengthen your business skills, check out Physicians Edge, the first of its kind CME accredited online business education for physicians.

It's a mini MBA online course designed to help you master the financial side of your practice. You can find that and more about how we support practices like yours at healtheps.com.

That's www.healtheps dot com. And don't forget to follow or subscribe so you never miss a new episode. Once you're actually at the conference, the biggest shift you can make is from passive to active.

Networking, Exhibit Halls, and Introvert Strategies

Instead of just listening, start asking yourself, how does this apply to my practice? Instead taking notes, ask, what is the one thing I could actually do with this?

You don't need 20 takeaways from a session, you need one. One idea that you can bring back and implement. One insight that changes how you think about something.

one connection that opens a door. That's where the ROI comes from. And when it comes to networking, I want you to simplify this, because I know for a lot of people, this is the part that feels uncomfortable.

You don't have to work the room. You do not have be the most outgoing person there. It can be as simple as turning to the person next to you and saying, what brought you to this session?

Or, What are you hoping to get out of the conference? People are there for a reason. They're thinking about their practices, their challenges, and their goals.

And most people are actually very open to having a conversation. So, focus on curiosity. Ask questions, listen, share a little bit about what you're working on.

And if you have three to five meaningful conversations over the course of a conference, that can be more valuable than anything you hear on stage. Now, let's talk about something that often gets overlooked, which is everything that happens around the conference.

The agenda is important. Sessions are important, but the edges of the conferences, the dinners, receptions, informal meetups, that's where a lot of real value lives.

Those are the environments where people are more relaxed, where conversations go deeper, relationships start to form. So if there are events surrounding the conference, consider going.

Even if it's just one, even if you only stay for an hour, because again, this is where connection happens. And if know people who are attending, reach out and make a plan.

Let's grab coffee, let's meet for dinner, lets connect between sessions. Be intentional about it. Another area where I see people miss opportunity is the exhibit hall.

There's a tendency to either avoid it entirely or to walk through it quickly without really engaging. But the Exhibit Hall is actually a really valuable part of the conference.

It's market research. It is exposure to what's new. What's evolving? What is possible? And even if you're not actively looking to buy something, it's an opportunity to learn.

But the key is to approach it strategically. Instead of just collecting brochures or doing quick demos, ask better questions. Ask, what type of practices benefit most from this?

Ask where does this not work well? Ask, what does implementation actually look like? Because the goal is not to be

sold to, the go is to understand. Now, I want to pause for a moment and talk specifically to the introverts listening, because this environment can be a lot.

Conferences are high energy. There's a LOT of noise. A lot of people. So here's the reframe. You don't have to be on all the time. It just have be intentional with your energy.

Give yourself permission to take breaks. Step outside. Go for a walk. Have a quiet meal by yourself if you need to reset. Set small realistic goals. Maybe it's, I'm going to have three meaningful conversations today.

not 30, three. And redefine networking. It's not about volume, it's about depth.

Capturing Takeaways and Implementing After the Event

it is about connecting with a few people in a real way. and that is absolutely doable even if you're not naturally outgoing. Now let's talk about what happens after the conference because this is where most of the ROI is either realized or lost.

The reality is most people forget the majority of what they learned within days. So if you don't have a system to capture and retain what you've gained, it fades quickly.

A simple approach is to take a few minutes at the end of each day of conference and write down your top three insights. Not everything, just the top 3. and then identify one action that you might take based on those insights.

That's it. Keep it simple. Then, when you get back, give yourself a short window, ideally within 72 hours, to review your notes. Look at those Insights again.

Ask yourself, what actually matters here? What is worth acting on? And then pick one to three things. Not ten. One to Three. And bring those back to your team.

Share what you learned. Share why it matters. But also be clear about what you're not doing, because one of the fastest ways to overwhelm a team is to come back from a conference with a long list of ideas and try to implement everything at once.

That's not how change happens. Change happens through focus, through testing one idea, piloting one change, seeing what works, adjusting. And over time, those small changes add up.

That's where the ROI comes from. Not from attendance, from implementation. So when you think about whether a conference was worth it, don't just ask, did I enjoy it or did learn something?

Also ask did i do something differently because of it? Did I solve a problem? Did make a connection that matters? did I avoid a mistake because of something I learned?

Because sometimes the ROI is not immediate. Sometimes it's something you implement months later. sometimes it is a relationship that turns into an opportunity down the line.

But there should be a throughline. There should a be connection between the investment you made and the outcomes you see over time. And when you approach conferences this way as leverage points, as intentional investments, you start to see them differently.

They're not just events, they're opportunities to compress learning, exposure, and connection into a very short period of time. And that's powerful, but only if you use it that way.

So, as you head into conference season, take a few minutes and decide what success looks like for you. Be selective about how you spend your time. be present in the moments that matter.

Look for the people you already know and be open to meeting new ones. Look for us, too.

Closing Thoughts and Healthy Practices Services

We love those in-person conversations that start with, I've been listening, and turn into something much more meaningful. And most importantly, follow through, because that's where everything changes.

Until next time. Before we wrap up, if you're listening to this and thinking, it's not just one thing, there are multiple parts of my practice that could be running better, I want you to know that you are not alone.

Most physicians were never taught how to run the business side of medicine, and yet you were expected to lead complex, multi-million dollar organizations.

That's no a personal failing, its a systems gap. At Healthy Practices, our operational and strategic consulting is designed to help you close that gap.

We work alongside physicians and leadership teams to bring clarity to the business. Everything from workflow and staffing models to financial performance, growth strategy and long-term planning.

The goal is to move you from reactive and overwhelmed to structured, intentional and in control. For some practices, that means solving immediate operational pain points.

For others, it's about stepping back and building a clear strategy for sustainable growth, profitability and leadership development. And often, its both.

Because when your systems, your people and your financial performance are aligned, everything gets easier. Decisions become clearer, teams function better, and the day-to-day stress starts to come down.

So if you're ready to take a more intentional look at how your practice is operating and where it could go next, I'd encourage you to reach out and start the conversation.

You can find more information in the show notes or at healtheps.com.