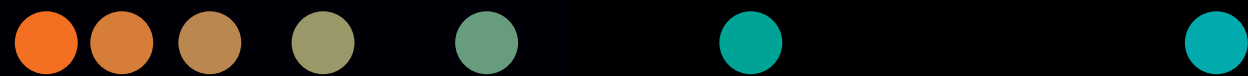


A Values-Based Approach To Outpatient Practice Leadership

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Co-founded and led by Paul Singh, MD, Carolina Spine Center (CSC) is a successful independent pain management practice with a focus on the diagnosis and treatment of musculoskeletal disorders. How they've achieved that success is a testament both to the care they provide patients and the team-oriented approach they take to their work.

Currently, CSC is an affiliate of UNC Health Alliance. "We participate with the UNC practices but as an independent group," says Dr. Singh, who notes that it is definitely possible for independent, physician-led practices to not only thrive but also provide tangible benefits to the healthcare system.

"We're small and nimble, and the research shows that we can save the healthcare system money by being who we are. We can decide something in the morning, tweak it by lunch, and scrap it by the end of the day. It's that kind of quick decision making that works for physician-led practices."

For 10 years, this independent physician-owned practice has cared for patients, expanding from one to now four locations in Richmond and Wake Counties in North Carolina. Often, physician-owned practices focus on external factors as the key to their success—but CSC started by building its practice from the inside out.

To be successful, Dr. Singh believes it's important to pay particular attention to how your team functions as a group, including ways to build trust and cohesion. "Inside our practice, we try to have some established values," he says. "First, the group has to work for the group. Second is service toward others, and third is communication."

Read on for a deep-dive on how Dr. Singh puts these values into action.



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Paul Singh, MD
Carolina Spine Center



1. Build a cohesive team structure

One of CSC's three key values is that the group works for the group, and the co-founders have set up a team structure that reflects that. "For example, we don't do hourly wages. We do salaries. Doctors don't clock in, so why should your front desk staff?" he says. In fact, Dr. Singh does not think a tiered down practice structure works as well as providing everyone a voice when it comes to the group's efficiency and effectiveness.

With 25 staff members, CSC does a full array of interventional spine procedures, transforaminal epidural steroid injections, facet joint injections, SI joints, kyphoplasty, and RF ablations.



"The system definitely exceeded my expectations for image quality and speed of performance."



2. Be of service to patients and staff

At CSC, patient care needs to be timely, medically accurate, technically excellent, and friendly. "If we see a patient and we need to do the injection that day, we take care of it," says Dr. Singh. "As for the authorization part, we may have to hustle to get it. But if we can't get it, we do the injection anyway."

The practice's first priority is to take care of patients, which is why they allot time in the schedule for add-ons. The first 30 minutes at the beginning of the day and the last 30 minutes at the end of the day are kept open for patients who need same-day appointments.

But CSC's approach to service doesn't end with their patients. It's important that the practice also be of service to its team. Dr. Singh notes there are many ways to do this. "We provide health insurance and 401(k). These are the basics. Everyone needs it and works for it, so we need to take care of it. We also provide our staff with bonuses and down payments if they're buying a new home or changing homes," he says.

CSC reserves the first and last 30 minutes of each day for patients who need same-day appointment.

Service to staff can take many forms, including providing the equipment they need to be successful. At CSC, they use the Cios Select mobile c-arm for interventional imaging. "What I like about this system is that it allows the assistant to move from inputting patient information to scouting quick images for the doctor in an expedient manner," says Preston Fisher, Medical Assistant. "The system definitely exceeded my expectations for image quality and speed of performance." Dr. Singh concurs, adding that he has "used other equipment, but the nimbleness and ease of use of the Siemens Healthineers [Cios Select] has led our practice to purchasing only Siemens [Healthineers] C-arms for the last 10 years. The price range is comparatively very cost effective and you're getting a very nice machine that is providing excellent care for the patient."



3. Encourage communication across roles

Communication between a practice and its patients is critical to ensuring patient satisfaction and providing care. Here, the staff at CSC notes it's important to be open to changing communication strategies as new tools become available.

"We use a variety of means to communicate with patients, such as Doximity, Zoom, and Google Duo. We've found that the patient portal through our EMR was cumbersome for some so that remains an area of progress," says Neema Patel, Nurse Practitioner. "Patients have been very receptive to telemedicine. We've been able to see their homes and get to know them better. It's been a positive aspect of our care."

And while many physician-leaders are exploring new ways to communicate with patients, it's also vital to bridge communication gaps within a practice—particularly across roles and responsibilities. As Dr. Singh notes, people who look at the practice from different angles can have incredible insights.

"It's important to ask people's opinions and get their perspectives. You work with these folks to provide patient care so it's important to have a direct chain of communication," he says. "For example, we periodically meet in small groups to get people's opinions and ideas. Then, we present an idea to the larger group. At times, we have our own tensions, and we do fight, but ultimately we pull along and get the work done."

There are, of course, different ways to achieve success in an independent physician-led practice. CSC has found that keeping both patient and staff care as their true north helps to empower the team and build success. "I think if you can impact the lives of others, then you can impact the lives of the group you do it with too," says Dr. Singh. "To me, physician-led practices are a positive. It is very fulfilling to see the friendships and trust we have as a group that enable us to provide excellent care."

"Insurances have been overwhelmingly supportive in accepting telemedicine care, which I think has been greatly appreciated by the medical community. And it's our impression that an increase in telemedicine is going to be prevalent in our practice, and likely in the landscape of medicine."

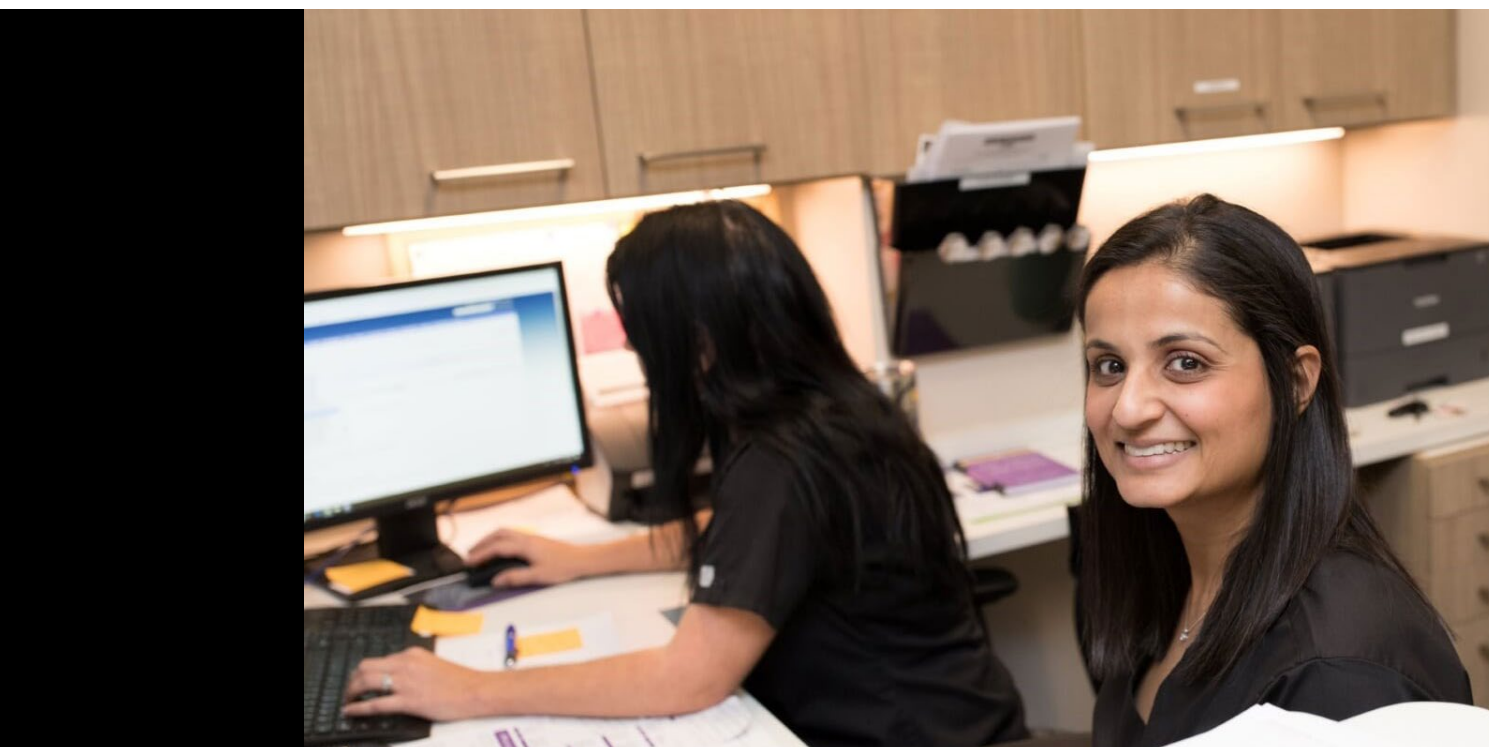
Paul Singh, MD
Carolina Spine Center

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