

Private Practice Trauma: Lessons Learned from the Early Years
Peter Althausen, MD, MBA

The Basics

- It will be fun
- You will work much harder than you did in residency or fellowship
 - Warn your spouse early
- There will be a lot you still do not know
- You will have no idea how to run the business of orthopedics
- Assimilate yourself into the community

Clinical Practice

- You may be the only trauma guy in town
- Do not be cocky, be confident
- Do not tell guys who have been practicing in the community they don't know what they are doing
- Know the political environment you are entering
 - People may want you there
 - Others may see you as competition
 - Not everyone wants to "teach" the new guy the ropes
 - No one can argue with hard work, good outcomes, and good behaviour
- Use the internet to stay connected to mentors
- Use websites like "traumaconnect" to run cases by peers
- Always ask for help or advice when indicated
- Ask partners how they do things
- Spend quality time with patients in hospital
 - They will love you
 - Office will run smoother
- Train your medical assistant
 - She is your connection to patients
 - A bad one can ruin your practice
- Learn to multitask gracefully
 - You will always be doing 3 things at once
- EMR will help your billing & coding
 - Learn to use it to your advantage
- Negotiate on DME
- Look for opportunities like MRI & PT

Marketing

- Best marketing for you is to be available
- Many local orthopedists do not respond to ER calls in a timely fashion
 - Answer calls ASAP
 - Be pleasant
- Send letter of introduction to regional ERs
- Introduce yourself to local Orthopedic Surgeons
 - Do not just send a letter
- Offer to help general ortho docs on fracture/ trauma cases
 - Once they see how you do it they will refer cases to you
- Best source of patient referrals are hospital personnel
- Set up educational talks or meetings with ER docs and PAs
 - Appropriate splinting techniques
 - Newer treatment recommendations (i.e. clavicle fx)
 - Orthopedic emergencies
 - Reduction techniques

Operating Room

- Most hospitals will not do things like the place you trained
 - Be flexible
 - Get preference cards from your training institution
 - You need to check back table before every case
 - You need to call reps personally to make sure they have what you need
- There are no residents to hold for you
- You will need to arrange for help on difficult cases
 - It is your responsibility, not the hospitals
- You will need to use adjuvants for assistance
 - Fracture tables
 - Femoral Distractors
 - External Fixators
- Once established, ask for what you want
- Try to find out what they don't have before you start
- Make equipment part of your contract negotiation
- Teach flouro techs how you like it done
 - Don't tell them they are idiots
 - They can make or break you
- Befriend the schedulers
 - You will most likely not have block time when you start
- Be nice to OR front desk personnel
- People remember outbursts for a long time

Business

- Coding knowledge is very important
 - Take a coding class
 - Make sure you have a good coder/collector
 - Use Code-x
- Follow your business financials closely
- Follow your practice financials closely
- Use your partners to gain knowledge
- Ask for salary increase if indicated
- Ask a lot of questions
- Look for opportunities
- Trauma can be profitable
 - Our collection rate went from 19% to 31%
 - Other partners revenue increased
 - Elective practices increased
 - Quality of life improves

Education and Research

- Both are possible in private practice
- Unlike academics, they will cost you \$
- Set up a 501C3 for any funds received so that there is no question of authenticity
- If you plan on doing research, it will all be on your own time
- Get involved with the OTA
- Go to at least 1 meeting a year