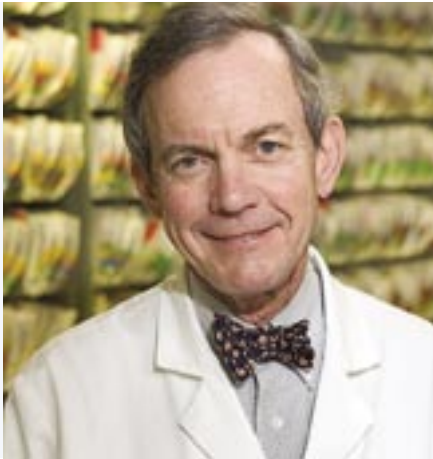


# Making time to manage risks



## THE TOP 3 ISSUES

While MAG Mutual uses an exhaustive checklist to assess risks to practices, these problems currently pose the greatest threats:

- 1 | **Missed diagnostic tests:** Results are not received or are filed before a doctor reviewed them.
- 2 | **Patient:** Sometimes noncompliant with treatment plan and need follow-up and referrals.
- 3 | **Documentation:** Fails to reflect the physician's findings, thought process and actual care rendered.

*Above:* Dr. Charles Geer of Island Internal Medicine in Charleston is a model for "excellent documentation." *Opposite page:* MAG Mutual's Bettye Scrutchin (blue coat) helps Island Internal Medicine and Low Country Medical Associates assess and manage risks.

## HOW A SOUTH CAROLINA PRACTICE BENEFITED FROM A MAG MUTUAL REVIEW OF ITS OPERATIONS

**Inside every physician and practice manager, there lives a gnawing concern: Is my practice doing everything possible to prevent a serious mistake?**

The rigors of running a medical practice feed this fear. "Practices run so hard and fast, day in and day out, that it's tough to find time to think about risk management," says Julie Radabaugh, physician services coordinator for Low Country Medical Associates, a Charleston, S.C., practice of 22 clinics, eight lab draw stations, a diagnostic imaging center and newly opened physical medicine and pain management center.

But just as prevention is key to good personal health, identifying areas of vulnerability is crucial to maintaining a healthy practice.

That's why MAG Mutual has developed a thorough process to help practices assess and manage risks. This process examines every aspect of operations – from hiring doctors and staff to calling patients for follow-up appointments – then offers suggestions on avoiding missteps.

"The recommendations we make are based on our analyses of past claims filed against medical practices," says Dan Wright, MAG Mutual's Director of Risk Management. "By understanding what's led to litigation in the past, we're able to identify ways to avoid litigation in the future, and at the same time, improve the quality of patient care."

When Low Country president Dr. Strait Fairey saw a copy of *Healthcare Risk Manager*, MAG Mutual's newsletter on risk management, he invited Bettye Scrutchin to Charleston to speak to all 60 physicians in the practice. In her presentation, Scrutchin, a senior risk management consultant for



MAG Mutual, opened the eyes of her audience to the many ways in which a practice could reduce its risk.

“It was fascinating,” Radabaugh remembers. “She advised us on how to respond to our risk management issues and how malpractice suits are handled. We would have loved for her to stay another three hours to answer questions.”

Low Country then invited Scrutchin back to talk to the practice managers. Again, the response was enthusiastic: Seven of Low Country’s offices asked for Scrutchin to conduct a site visit and review.

Island Internal Medicine in Charleston was one of the clinics that welcomed Scrutchin’s inspection. Scrutchin spent most of a day with Island, reviewing charts, studying processes and talking with physicians and staff. Her findings were highly positive: Island had implemented a new system for tracking lab results, and she commended Dr. Charles Geer for his “excellent documentation.” Scrutchin’s suggestions for improvement included taking more frequent inventories of pharmaceutical samples, implementing a patient satisfaction program and taking additional steps to follow up with patients.

MAG Mutual’s collaborative, low-key approach drew praise from both Island Internal Medicine and its parent, Low Country Medical Associates.

“Bettye was very helpful,” Dr. Geer says. “Her presence was unobtrusive, but she was clearly doing her job and doing it well.”

“Frankly, I was surprised Bettye was able to conduct this assessment with our clinics without putting them on the defensive,” says Greg Robinson, Low Country’s chief executive officer. “It can be a bit intimidating to have someone on the outside come in and ask probing questions.”

The fear factor may be a major reason why more practices forgo risk assessment. What helps practices like Low Country overcome that apprehension is an abiding commitment to provide the best patient care, as well as the recognition that MAG Mutual is a partner, not a policeman.

“What’s impressed us so much about MAG Mutual are the tools they have in place that can really benefit a practice,” says Julie Radabaugh. “Our office managers want to see this continue, and we would like to see Bettye visit all of our locations.”