



## **Dr. Clive Fields of VillageMD + Village Medical: 5 Things You Need To Know To Create a Highly Successful Private Practice**

By Luke Kervin, 4/27/2021

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Recognize that success should be measured on outcomes and not on volume. Understand that the healthcare reimbursement model is moving to value — or outcomes. Start the journey to a proactive and risk-stratified approach to your patients. Create disease registries that allow for proactive outreach, making sure that patients who you see are those who need to be seen. What happens between visits is as important as what happens in the exam room, so find ways to take in data that help you understand your patients more completely.

*As a part of our interview series with prominent medical professionals called “5 Things You Need To Know To Create a Highly Successful Private Practice”, I had the pleasure of interviewing Dr. Clive Fields, Chief Medical Officer and Co-Founder of VillageMD and Village Medical.*

**Thank you so much for joining us in this interview series! Before we dive in, our readers would love to “get to know you” a bit better. Can you tell us a bit about your ‘backstory’ and how you ended up where you are?**

I’d be happy to — I’m the Chief Medical Officer and co-founder of [VillageMD](#) and I’ve been a practicing primary care physician for more than 30 years. VillageMD was founded in 2013 with my co-founders, Tim Barry and Paul Martino. Our vision focuses on a reorganization of our healthcare system to a primary care-led, team-based clinical model focused on outcomes not volume to meet the needs of communities across the country. Recently, I was honored and humbled to be named by *Modern Healthcare* as one of the Top 50 Most Influential Clinical Executives and by the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP) as the Physician Executive of the Year. Recognition aside, my greatest achievement has been my clinical work and through VillageMD, having the ability to share those experiences and learnings with physicians and communities across the country.

**On mentorship, none of us can achieve success without some help along the way. Who has been your biggest mentor? What was the most valuable lesson you learned from them?**

My father is by far my biggest inspiration and mentor. He founded Village Family Practice in Houston in 1975 and he recognized the value of a primary care patient relationship as a physician for 40 years. That set an example for me and the colleagues who I worked alongside. I’m able to carry out that vision and our shared passion for providing quality health care through my work with VillageMD and Village Medical. He never forgot that the patient always comes first — a core element of the VillageMD clinical model.

**What made you want to start your own practice? Can you tell us the story of how you started it?**

When I started as a physician there were very few options, simply join a small practice or hang your own shingle. Hospital or payor employment did not exist and most of the larger groups were specialty specific or specialist dominated. That small practice I joined in 1991 has now grown exponentially and includes experienced physicians through VillageMD and Village Medical and they are responsible for more than 600,000 lives and manage \$4 billion in total medical spend in value-based contracts. We strive to keep the personal nature of our beginnings with the added tools and technology that allow that care to reach larger patient populations.

**Can you share the most interesting story that happened to you since you began your career?**

One thing about primary care is that every day, every patient is unique. Just when you think you've seen it all, you haven't. One day, I saw three award-winning athletes in my clinic as patients. At the end of the day, what really mattered was not their personal experiences, but rather, how their lives could be made better by having a trusted relationship with their primary care doctor.

**Because it is a “helping profession”, some healthcare providers struggle with the idea of running a business. How do you balance a business and a medical practice? Can you share a story or example?**

First and foremost, good clinical outcomes lead to sound economic outcomes — for patients, payers and physicians alike. Physicians struggle with the business side of medicine, not because they can't be successful, but because they don't have the training or the proclivity for it. Recognizing your own limitations, bringing in experts in areas such as HR, revenue cycle and practice management, is not a sign of failure but one of success. The most important lesson...do what's right for your patients, and the business will take care of itself.

**From completing your degree to opening a practice and becoming a business owner, your path was most likely challenging. Can you share a story about one of your greatest struggles? Can you share what you did to overcome it?**

The physician journey is certainly different from your non-medical friends and colleagues. Most of us don't complete our medical education until our early 30s, leading to a different timeline for lifecycle events. Receiving your first paycheck, getting married and starting a family are typically delayed compared to your peers who started in that direction right after undergrad. It is challenging to learn to live with delayed gratification and understand that your investment will eventually pay off. Interestingly, the work that we do with patients and the management of chronic disease also involves delayed gratification. Lifestyle changes and medication compliance are critical for disease management, but the results may not be seen for years. As physicians and patients, we all have to learn that good things don't come quickly and require long-term investments for lasting and important results.

**What are the 5 things you need to know to create a thriving practice, and why?**

1. **The patient is a consumer.** *Think about the patient the same way as other service providers think about their customers.* Meet them where they are — consider not only what they need, but what they want. Put yourself in the position of a patient when you think about how they access your services, your hours of availability and your response times. Success requires

affability, availability, and ability. I'll let you place them in order of importance. At Village Medical, we offer accessible healthcare through in-person, tele-health and via primary care in the home — meeting our patients however we can, to deliver care at the right place, and the right time.

2. **Align with like-minded colleagues.** Recognize that healthcare is team-based and that no one provider can meet the needs of all patients. Find medical specialists, ancillary providers and hospitals that treat patients the way you want them to be treated. Share the type of access, communication and coordination you would want for your own family. Most specialists want to be the best consultants they can be, but don't know your expectations.
3. **Recognize that success should be measured on outcomes and not on volume.** Understand that the healthcare reimbursement model is moving to value — or outcomes. Start the journey to a proactive and risk-stratified approach to your patients. Create disease registries that allow for proactive outreach, making sure that patients who you see are those who need to be seen. What happens between visits is as important as what happens in the exam room, so find ways to take in data that help you understand your patients more completely.
4. **Check your personal privilege at the exam room door.** Recognize that you don't have all the answers and what we know today is radically different than what we learned in medical school. Remember your experiences are not the same as your patients. Be open to non-traditional solutions for traditional problems as long as you "do no harm." Identify experts in exercise, diet and non-traditional interventions, read what your patients are reading, and don't underestimate the power of the internet and social media.
5. **Provide education and guidance.** Always remember that a patient's clinical presentation is likely only the tip of the iceberg. Solving their presenting problem is important, but not as important as the influence you can have on their long-term health outcomes, as a trusted healthcare provider. Be a source of evidence-based advice and guidance, and never underestimate your influence.

**When and how do you shift to working ON your practice? (Marketing, upgrading systems, growing your practice, etc.) How much time do you spend on the business elements?**

Most physicians spend time running their practice before 8 a.m. and after 5p.m., which can be a ticket to physician burnout. I recommend you find time during regular hours to meet with business professionals who can help you succeed, take the leap and bring experience and talent into your organization. It seems costly but I can't think of a time that overpaying for great talent didn't have a great return on investment.

**I understand that the healthcare industry has unique stresses and hazards that other industries don't have. What specific practices would you recommend to other healthcare leaders to improve their physical or mental wellness? Can you share a story or example?**

Physician burnout seems to be dominating the headlines, and for good reason. Increasing administrative demands, more detailed documentation, challenging payer relationships and yes, EMRs that were clearly not designed by physicians, are all contributing factors. As I have previously said, delegate what can be delegated to others, band together with likeminded providers and stay focused on what you do best and what you enjoy most, patient care. The system seems designed to stifle clinical innovation and excellence, but it's not. I honestly believe people in healthcare, regardless of position, want to do what's best, they just don't have all the answers. Complaining is rarely a good strategy, take the time to engage

and explain, you will be surprised by the outcomes. Most importantly, take care of your own physical and mental wellbeing — treat yourself to the same advice you give to your patients.

**Can you please give us your favorite “Life Lesson Quote”?**

*“How better man can die than facing fearful odds, for the ashes of his father’s or the house of his Gods.”  
— Horatius*

I love how this quote is ultimately talking about how you live, not how you die. It’s all about living for others about loyalty and living life with a mission.

**Thank you for these great insights! We wish you continued success and good health!**