Do you know what your practice’s strengths and weaknesses are? Do you know what families like or dislike about your practice? Sometimes gaining perspective from people who aren’t involved in your daily operations can provide valuable insight into the service and care that you provide.

And using that insight to make improvements not only enhances the delivery and quality of patient care, it can also make your practice a sought after provider of quality care.
Many primary care practices have formed family advisory groups to learn what aspects of the practice work for families, what barriers to quality care may exist for families, and what can be done to make patient visits a productive experience.

A family advisory group is a gathering of parents and caregivers who have agreed to work with the staff and clinicians in a practice to enhance the care and services that the practice provides. It consists of parents and caregivers whose children are patients in the practice, as well as some members of the practice team who serve as facilitators of the group.

Establishing a family advisory group in a practice is a very useful strategy that can strengthen a patient- and family-centered medical home.

A medical home uses a team-based approach to care. It is led by pediatricians or family physicians and will likely include nurses, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, medical assistants, office staff, parents and caregivers, among others.
A pediatric medical home works with families to enhance their child’s well-being, including physical and mental health. Families are essential members of the medical home team.

A family advisory group is an example of one way to embrace true partnership between parents and caregivers and a practice team. Parents and caregivers are respected as the core members of the advisory group. Their opinions are valued as much as those of the practice team members who are facilitating the group.

Family advisory groups give parents and caregivers an opportunity to share their experiences with the practice and offer their perspective on what it’s like to visit your office. They can voice concerns, make recommendations and offer valuable insight on how best to improve the practice from the family point of view. They can also share positive experiences with the practice and express their support for the practice’s commitment to providing quality care to the patients and families it serves.
This can help ensure that children who visit the practice receive the best possible care and experience optimal outcomes. It also helps parents to feel empowered and more in control of their child’s health care.

Family advisory groups usually meet on a regular basis to share experiences, identify specific issues and discuss projects that can make the practice more patient- and family-centered.

For example, advisory groups can provide input on clinic operations, the practice facilities, any issues patients and families have with services offered via the practice as well as communication between the practice staff and clinicians and the patients’ families.

Members of a family advisory group can also offer valuable input concerning a young patient’s transition to adult medical care or raise awareness among the practice team about peer support resources for families whose children share the same chronic conditions.
### 17 TALENT ON GREEN SCREEN
Some family advisory groups have even created educational materials that are displayed in the practice or on the practice website.

### 18 SHOW EXAMPLES OF QUESTIONNAIRE, RECEPTIONIST, SIGNAGE
Other groups have helped with the development of useful tools, such as a pre-visit questionnaire, or suggested replacing an automated phone system with a live person and posting signage in the waiting room to protect sick children.

### 19 SHOW INTERACTION BETWEEN PROVIDER AND PARENT IN AN EXAM ROOM
Family advisory groups can help improve the relationship between the pediatric care team and families by creating open communication. Advisory groups also serve as a forum for family leaders in the practice to learn more about how they can contribute to the experience other families and the practice care teams have.

Families who are members of a practice advisory group can also be a great asset to other families in the practice because of their practical knowledge of local services and resources, and key contacts in the community for health and other information.
In these groups, families learn about practice management and the practice learns about family perspectives ... In other words, both sides benefit from the information shared and gleaned during the advisory group meetings.

If you are considering starting a family advisory group in your practice, the first step is to gain support from others in your practice and then, be an advocate for the plan. Discuss the potential benefits and risks to the practice and decide how you want the family advisory group to operate.

Then, identify a member of the practice team to take the lead on establishing the group. This person should also serve on the group and help to facilitate meetings or other work that results from the group’s discussions and conversations.

Next, establish criteria for selecting parents to participate. For example, you will want to look for parents who have been with the practice for at least one year and who feel comfortable being vocal without being confrontational.
You may also want to consider parents who are proactive in their child’s care, have suggested changes in the past, or those who expressed an interest in improving the quality of care delivered in the practice. You will want to ensure that group membership reflects the diversity of your patient population, including cultural, ethnic and socioeconomic diversity. You might even consider inviting an adolescent to participate.

When recruiting members, you should provide a brief outline of the group’s purpose and what will be expected from members in terms of a time commitment and responsibilities.

As the group begins, you may want to hold meetings as often as two times a month. Over time, you can decrease this frequency to once a month or every other month.

Only your practice can determine what frequency of meetings is appropriate and meaningful.

Next, set a time limit for the meeting such as 60 to 90 minutes. This is usually adequate in the beginning and may decrease over time.
Meetings should be held either before or after patient hours at a time that is convenient for families, and an agenda should be provided to each attendee in advance so they can come prepared. Meetings can be held face-to-face, as a conference call or as a webinar. Some practices pay stipends to parents, offer child care reimbursement for the meeting time, or budget for meeting refreshments.

At the initial meeting, the entire group should work together to develop clear goals and expectations for the group. It may take more than one meeting to finish the development of the advisory group’s goals and expectations since time will be needed for the group members to get to know each other. Remember, though, that all members have equal standing in the family advisory group.

Designate a member in the group to take notes and distribute them to all members of the advisory group after each meeting. You might even consider sharing the meeting notes with others in your practice.
If you decide to make any changes in your practice as a result of family advisory group recommendations or suggestions, they can be done incrementally. You shouldn’t feel like you have to do them all at once.

It may seem like a lot of work to form a family advisory group and respond to its recommendations or act on its suggestions, but in the end, it is a win, win in terms of patient and family satisfaction, improved care quality, and your practice’s efficiency.

For additional information, access the resources and tools available from the National Center for Medical Home Implementation.

National Center staff is available to support you and your practice in working to ensure that every child and youth, including those with special health care needs, has access to a medical home.

Music up and out