Eight Traits Shared by Successful Physicians

We asked physicians, "What is the most important trait for today's doctors to possess?"
Here's what they said.
Flexibility and Open-Mindedness

"There are a lot of changes and being willing to be flexible to best meet the patients' needs is important. If you are not willing to change and grow, the system may break you."

- Melinda Rathkopf, an Alaska-based allergist-immunologist
Physicians must be able to "pay attention to the trend lines and not the headlines. Just because people repeat a lie often enough doesn't make it true (e.g., technology will ruin the doctor-patient relationship, doctors will go out of business because of the Affordable Care Act, etc.)."

- Terence R. McAllister, a Massachusetts-based primary-care physician, and Leann DiDomenico McAllister, a practice administrator
Business Skills

"If you lack business skills, you will not last very long in medicine both financially and professionally."

- Elizabeth Seymour, a Texas-based family physician
Flexibility and Resilience

"We are experiencing change in every aspect of medicine, from the increasing pace of medical discoveries and new treatment guidelines; to the way we provide care moving from an office visit to virtual visits; to payment reform. Additionally, our patients are at various levels of change and expectation, so we need to be able to be the 'old-school' paternalistic physician for patients who are most comfortable with that traditional model, and be able to turn around and do more coaching and shared decision making with younger patients."

- Jennifer Frank, a Wisconsin-based family physician
Patience

Physicians need to have "patience that whatever frustrations the insurance companies or government toss out will work themselves out — or that we will find a work-around solution. We must have patience with our staff, as they are only human; and patience with our patients, as they too are incredibly frustrated and burdened by this dysfunctional medical ecosystem we all live in. Lastly, we must have patience with ourselves — no one gets it right every time."

- Michael Freedman, a Maryland-based internist
"... The landscape of medicine changes so rapidly now. From social media to [EHR] systems, new tools and technologies make it difficult for inflexible physicians to adapt. Furthermore, the rate of change is accelerating and if a physician is unwilling to be flexible it'll be easy for him or her to be blindsided by these innovations."

- Brian Harmych, an Ohio-based facial plastic and reconstructive surgeon
"Often patients are seen as 'noncompliant' when the problem is that they do not understand what they are supposed to do and why. They don't take their cholesterol meds because they don't feel any better taking them — well, that's not their purpose. They stop taking a pill because it upsets their stomach, but no one told them not to take it on an empty stomach. They can't understand why they can't lose weight when they don't even eat breakfast or lunch, because they don't know that a large caramel mocha iced coffee is 230 calories and that four White Castle sliders are [more than] 600 calories and therefore do so constitute breakfast and lunch."

- Melissa Young, a New Jersey-based endocrinologist
Flexibility and Leadership

"The most important information that physicians need today in order to be successful and satisfied is the ability to accept change. Healthcare has never provided a static system for patients or physicians, and physicians need to accept that things will change, and accept the responsibility to lead that change."

- Kyle Bradford Jones, a Utah-based family physician