

How Jacqi Dix helped acupuncturist Malik Lawrence build a **profitable and thriving** **practice** treating veterans through the Veterans Affairs Community Care Network



“For most patients, acupuncture is an out-of-pocket expense. As a cash-based business, it’s incredibly hard to make it when you’re competing with every other cash business out there. Because of Jacqi, I have a schedule full of veterans who have medical coverage, a staff that has an efficient and streamlined process for working with Veterans Affairs, and a practice that went from red to black within its first six months.”

-Malik Lawrence

LICENSED ACUPUNCTURIST

When acupuncturist Malik Lawrence decided to open his own practice, it was the spring of 2020 and COVID was in full swing.

As a seasoned practitioner with 20 years of experience, Lawrence was no stranger to the business side of acupuncture. He'd owned his own practice in the past and spent many years working in the practices of other acupuncturists as well.

So, despite the tricky timing of opening a clinic during COVID, Lawrence's vast experience and knowledge of the industry had allowed him to recognize a specific way he could grow his new practice that was highly likely to succeed.

That way was treating veterans.



"I knew there were approximately 750,000 veterans in North Carolina and an estimated 75,000 in Durham County where I'm located," Lawrence said. "There's a real market there. And because I'd already treated veterans in the last clinic I worked in, I knew this is where I wanted to focus my business."

One other thing he knew was that creating a practice heavily focused on veterans was not something he could do alone.

"In order for a Veterans Affairs (VA) community clinic to work, there has to be at least one person — and preferably a small team — to manage the VA process," Lawrence said. "There's an administrative skill set that's needed and also a relationship and communication skill set to be able to get along with what can be a very frustrating bureaucracy."

Fortunately, Lawrence knew the perfect person to partner with: certified online business manager Jacqi Dix.

Lawrence met Jacqi at his last location, where she'd been consulting the practice on its billing procedures. Throughout that work, he'd watched Jacqi become highly

skilled and knowledgeable about the process of handling veteran patients — specifically in confirming authorizations for treatment, communicating with the staff at Veterans Affairs Community Care Network (VACCN), and ensuring that insurance reimbursements came back quickly.

He saw how client-rich and profitable a practice focusing on veterans had the potential to be — and he also recognized that Jacqi was essential to helping him do it.

“Before I even signed a lease I asked Jacqi if she would do this with me, because I knew I couldn’t do it otherwise,” Lawrence said. “I’d seen what Jacqi had done previously and how efficient she’d been at managing the VACCN process, and knew she was critical to my success.”

Luckily, Jacqi was onboard — and quickly and thoroughly set up Lawrence’s new practice so he could focus almost exclusively on veterans and begin receiving patient referrals from the VA.

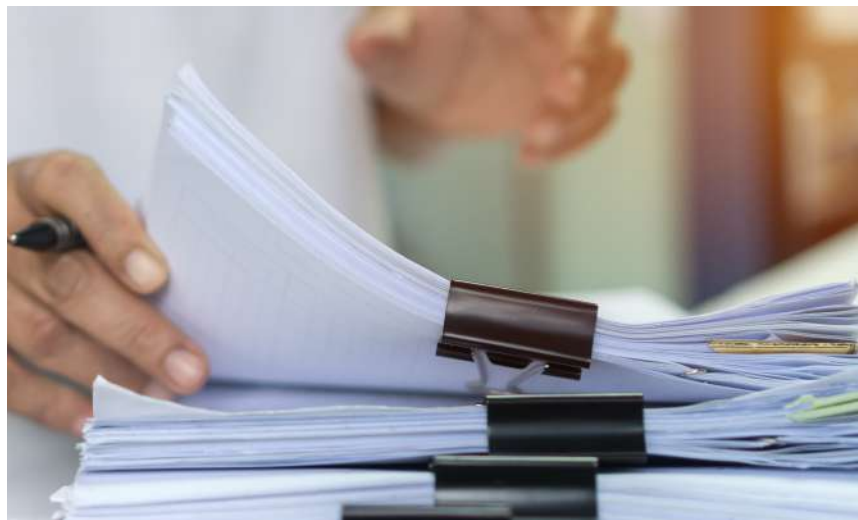
Jacqi did this by establishing five main systems, which include patient authorizations; billing and receiving;

accounting; administrative tasks, and VACCN-specific patient communications and scheduling.

While each of these components requires special understanding, **the VACCN authorization system is absolutely critical to get right** — and one where additional help is necessary to make sure new patients are acquired and their treatment can occur on a consistent schedule.

“If the VA calls and you don’t answer, they just go to another clinic,” Lawrence said. “Thankfully Jacqi set up our whole system for authorizations and re-authorizations, and hired and trained a team member who works exclusively with the VA. She’s on a first-name basis with them and has built a great relationship.

“Because of that, **we are one of the top clinics that the local VACCN prefers to send patients to**. They come to us first if at all possible because we’re efficient, we’re friendly, and we’re easy to work with. The ability to be a clinic that the VA doesn’t just want to work with, but seeks out, is because





our team knows how to make authorizations and re-authorizations work.”

The accounting piece of running a VA Community Care clinic is another component that requires special strategy.

“The VACCN is not health insurance but it kind of mimics Medicare,” Lawrence said. “You have to know how to handle what you’re billing and what you’re getting paid because if not your numbers are going to be very inflated, your income will be overstated, and your taxes are going to be higher. **Jacqi is very good at keeping the books clear** between our billed rate and our reimbursed rate, as well as managing all of the practice’s finances.”

Lawrence said that not only did Jacqi do a fantastic job of setting up his practice to run as a mostly VACCN clinic, she also excels at directing and managing the staff who follow the systems she creates.

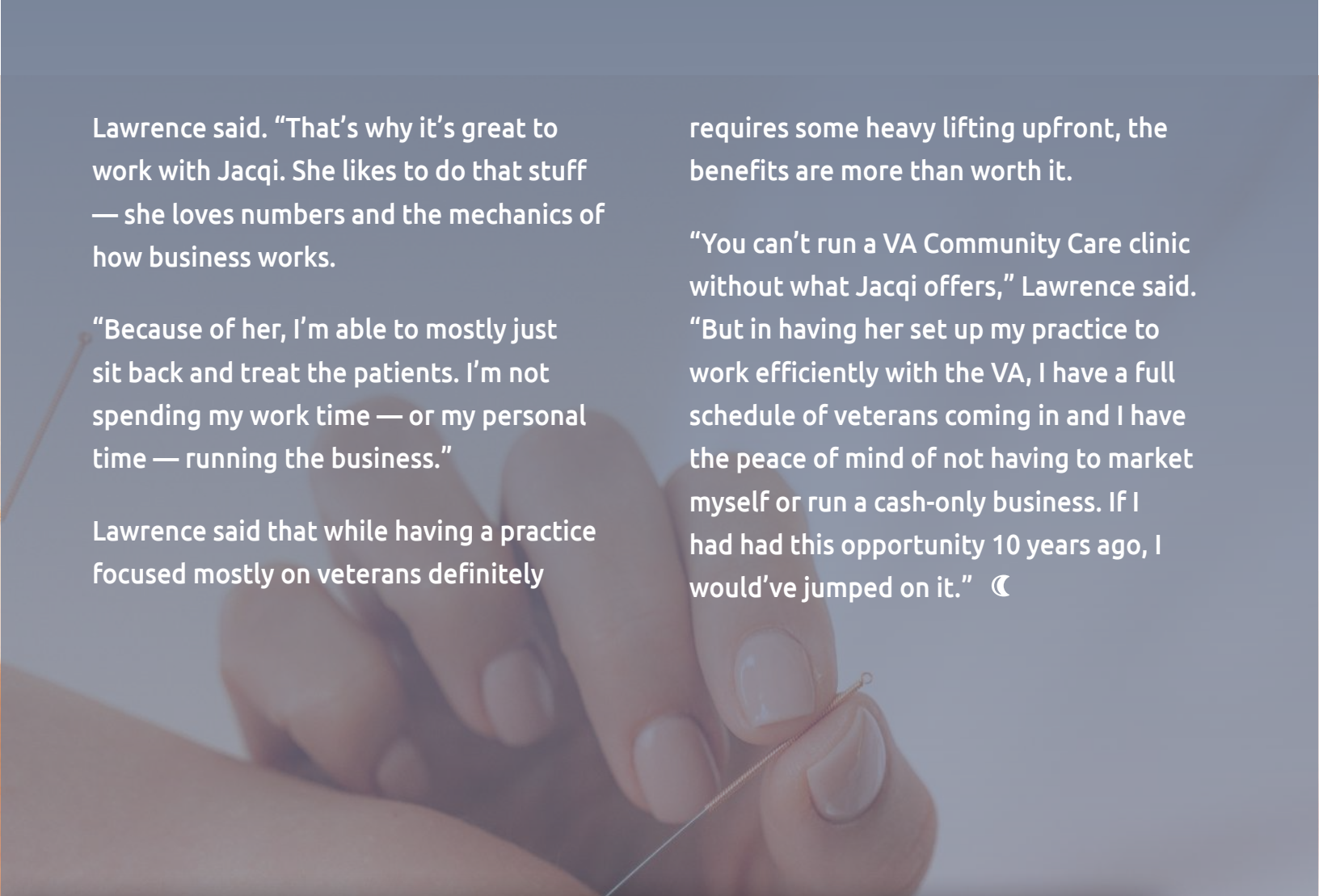
“One of Jacqi’s greatest strengths is managing people,” Lawrence said. “She sees people’s strengths and weaknesses and figures out who’s best suited for specific tasks. She identifies where there are problems, finds solutions, and puts the right people in the right places to create the most efficient and effective team. She’s a true business manager.”

Becoming a top referral clinic for the local VA Community Care Network has allowed Lawrence to experience some notable results — the biggest being his full patient load and the profitability of his practice.

“My practice went from red to black in only 6 months,” Lawrence said. “We went from zero patients to a schedule full of veterans every week. There are two parts to that success: one part is the clinical results which is me, and the other part is the efficient business systems which is Jacqi.”

In addition, Lawrence is able to run a practice where he spends the vast majority of his time doing what he loves most: treating patients.

“For many practitioners, running a business is not why we got into the profession,”



Lawrence said. “That’s why it’s great to work with Jacqi. She likes to do that stuff — she loves numbers and the mechanics of how business works.

“Because of her, I’m able to mostly just sit back and treat the patients. I’m not spending my work time — or my personal time — running the business.”

Lawrence said that while having a practice focused mostly on veterans definitely

requires some heavy lifting upfront, the benefits are more than worth it.

“You can’t run a VA Community Care clinic without what Jacqi offers,” Lawrence said. “But in having her set up my practice to work efficiently with the VA, I have a full schedule of veterans coming in and I have the peace of mind of not having to market myself or run a cash-only business. If I had had this opportunity 10 years ago, I would’ve jumped on it.” ☾

Interested in seeing if a VA Community Care clinic could work in your practice? Take the **free** assessment [here](#).