When taking on an entrepreneurial challenge, it can be exciting to experience both the pleasure and the fear involved in such an adventure. However, unlike starting a small business in your own home or garage, establishing a sleep disorders center requires a full commitment from the very beginning, encompassing everything from leasing or buying the bricks and mortar to choosing equipment and hiring staff. The prospect of having to address these wide-ranging issues and the fear of missing an important detail can be overwhelming. Fortunately, help is out there, most recently in the form of a book entitled How to Start a Sleep Lab or Center. In this new volume, Dr. Michael J. Breus has done an outstanding job in meticulously crafting a detailed guide to the challenging process of establishing a sleep lab or center from scratch.

The very first chapter presents “The Timeline for Starting a Sleep Lab”, which consists of a very thorough and sequential outline of what tasks will need to be done. The reader will find direct references in this timeline to the relevant chapter later in the text that provides (in exquisite detail) the information needed to accomplish each task. The chapters that follow include examples of the types of centers that may be established, accreditation requirements for the build out, choosing the equipment, and listing the supplies that will be needed; all of this information is complete with estimated costs. Chapters 7 and 9 are particularly valuable: Chapter 7 takes the reader through multiple scenarios that help identify costs in relation to the number of beds being considered, and Chapter 9 nicely outlines the process of designing fee schedules and how to identify potentially beneficial third party payer contracts.

Other chapters give detailed information on the development of a business plan and the related financial pro forma that most sponsoring institutions or lenders will require, as well as techniques for monitoring the center’s “bottom line.” The important issue of marketing is not neglected; there are instructions for performing a market analysis and a list of the many venues through which the community can be made aware of the center. The chapters related to personnel and all that is involved in managing employees struck me as particularly helpful. Covered are tasks such as interviewing, hiring, writing job descriptions, training, innovative methods for scheduling work shifts, employment records, periodic employee evaluations, and crafting both personnel and technical policies and procedures. These are all matters that may cost an inexperienced manager time, money, and effort including much trial and error. Doctor Breus’ approach to providing this information is commendably thorough, and in many cases complete with useful templates. There are also chapters related to requirements of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, quality assurance, and accreditation. A glossary and a very thorough appendix, including examples of job descriptions, contracts and agreements, lists of schools with sleep programs, and vendors conclude the text.

On the other hand, some aspects of the book might have been handled differently. It would have been helpful to have the subsequent chapters follow the first chapter’s timeline in strict sequential order. Most sleep physicians I know would take great exception to the statement “don’t bother with collodion” found in chapter 5, but I suppose this issue will end up being the personal choice of the medical director. While I agree that the center’s appearance is very important when working to obtain referrals, the marketing materials received prior to even visiting the center also make an important statement about the business and the quality of care that can be expected. Because of this, I would strongly disagree with using personnel without marketing skills (Dr. Breus suggests using one of the center’s polysomnographic technologists) for the important task of developing these materials, particularly at the outset when it is critical to present a quality image. Certainly, if cost is the issue, checking with a local college to identify a graphic arts student in need of a class project might be preferable.

In summary, How to Start a Sleep Lab or Center helps take the mystery out of starting a sleep practice and provides a head start that can lead to success. Any manager or physician seeking to establish or more fully develop a sleep lab or center will appreciate this exceedingly comprehensive tool kit.