

Retaining Medical Office Support Staff

This resource provides practical information for clinicians looking for ways to retain more staff in their practice.

How can I keep staff from leaving?

There are several ways to retain valuable members of your staff. Here's what that might look like in practice:

Case Study

Dr. Owens is a primary care physician who owns and operates a primary care practice in Alexandria, Virginia. He employs three physicians, one nurse practitioner, two nurses, and four administrative staff. His practice has been doing relatively well but recently, he's heard a lot of complaints. For example, a patient recently informed him that he waited for almost half an hour before reaching someone to reschedule his appointment. Further, another patient complained that after she had her blood drawn, she never got a call back from anyone to explain the results. Dr. Owens was concerned, but he began to investigate to get to the root of the problem.



Dr. Owens hypothesized that greater patient volume may be the cause of the issues in his practice. However, patient encounters had remained relatively stable so, this was unlikely. Next, he looked at the electronic systems in the practice (e.g., phone line, EHR), but these didn't appear to have anything wrong with them. Finally, he looked at his staff, even though they'd historically done an excellent job. To his surprise, many of his staff members were new to the practice. In fact, over the last several months his practice had experienced a high turnaround of employees, and after confirming with his supervisors, Dr. Owens determined that this was the cause of the practice's problems.

How would you resolve this staffing situation?

What do you think may have caused the high turnaround in Dr. Owens' practice?

To resolve the staffing issues in his practice, Dr. Owens implemented the following strategies:

- Spoke with his staff members to hear about any outstanding issues that were important to them.
- Reviewed compensation packages for similar practices in his area and reallocated resources to augment his own packages.
- Increased flexibility for how workers could complete their duties in the practice (e.g., remote administrative work, flexible start times, rotation between different assignments, option to use sick leave for medical appointments).
- Scheduled regular "town halls" to discuss issues in the practice and consider new ideas on making the practice better able to care for patients.

What else can I do to improve staff retention?



Hire outside of health care as multiple professions have transferable skills (e.g., customer service, office administration, record keeping, billing)



Maximize the number of staff working at the top of their license/qualifications



Optimize workflows so duplicative or unnecessary tasks can be removed



Distribute workload strategically so no one staff member feels overwhelmed/ unfairly treated



Foster employee engagement with the overall performance of the practice by listening to feedback and encouraging individual ownership over process-improvement activities



Implement recognition and rewards initiatives to acknowledge staff members who go above-and-beyond to help patients, assist team members, and overall put in the extra work to ensure the successful operation of the practice