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How to Avoid Employee Turnover

There is no way any medical practice can entirely eliminate employee turnover. There is nothing you can do when people move, change careers, retire, or die. However, as the manager of a medical practice, there are certain steps you can and should take to minimize employee turnover. Focus on factors that *are* in your control.

Salary, Benefits, Raises

Make sure you are paying your employees a competitive wage and benefits package, but not an exorbitant one.

If you underpay your employees, you will be able to attract only those who are not very competent, those you probably will let go, and/or those just starting out, who will learn all they can from you, gain some experience, and move on to better-paying jobs. Either way, your salary policy will generate turnover rather than prevent it.

On the other hand, if you are overly generous with salary and benefits, your employees will expect your largess to extend to their annual raises and performance may suffer if you cannot fulfill their expectations. At any rate, you probably will not get much more work out of them than you would have if you paid a competitive salary, and your budget will suffer.

In a related area, base your raises on merit, not only to encourage those who work hard and learn well, but also to show others what they are missing by not performing well.

When establishing employee wages and benefits, consider using a resource that provides you with industry ranges and other helpful information. One such source is the *Staff Salary Survey* published annually by The Health Care Group®.

Job Descriptions

Formulate your job descriptions based on the work that needs to be done including yours as Practice Manager.

Medical practices tend to grow and expand. A typical solo family practice, in time, may become a multispecialty practice with several physicians. It may offer ancillary services, open a clinic, add a laboratory, contract with multiple managed care companies, expand its range of services, open a satellite office, expand its hours, computerize, etc.

If your practice changes significantly, so must your staffing. You likely will need to add personnel and also adjust your job descriptions to ensure that everyone is doing work that must be done and no one is doing work that has become irrelevant.

If a medical practice has too few employees, they tend to become exasperated. If many of your employees are doing irrelevant work and no one has been assigned to do work that has become relevant (or if you assign the wrong employee to perform new tasks) your employees will become confused and frustrated, and you may resort to managerial tactics that do more harm than good.

Work Environment

Establish a congenial, comfortable working environment, centered on a convenient and functional office with compatible coworkers. Develop each employee's sense of worth and self-esteem. Reward good work publicly, but point out errors behind closed doors.

Schedule regular staff meetings. Let your employees know what is going on with the practice, if there are any changes of which they should be aware, and what you expect of them. Listen to your employees. Do not tolerate griping, but if an employee sincerely believes there is a problem in the office, quietly investigate the situation and make any necessary adjustments.

For example, if you recently joined three new health plans, your receptionist and appointments secretary may now be helping your billing clerk with the work load, which suddenly tripled. Now, each of these formerly capable and willing employees is overworked, confused, and error prone. Consider hiring more help.

Summary

Hire self-motivated, pleasant, hard-working employees and reward them with a competitive salary, adequate benefits, and merit raises. Communicate effectively with them. Provide a cordial working environment. Make sure everyone is doing the right job the right way. Make staff adjustments as necessary. Following these simple suggestions should keep your employee turnover to a minimum.

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