

Recruiting and Training Clinical Staff

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I am often asked how to find the right person for a clinical position. We are all aware of the shortage of trained allied health personnel in ophthalmology and the increasing need for qualified staff. If you hope to discover the silver bullet, stop reading now: There isn't one.

The profile of each practice is as unique as the individuals who comprise the physician leadership, management team, and their staff. Some value customer service; others believe that efficiency is most important. Some value attention to detail; others value the ability to multi-task. Prior to recruiting the ideal candidate, it is necessary to recognize those characteristics most important to your practice.

Reread the job description and if necessary, edit it to represent the current needs of the practice, including requisite skill areas. For example, if your practice is using, or planning to convert to, an electronic medical record, it is necessary to assess computer skills in addition to communication abilities, customer focus, and attention to detail.

Read on for making an appropriate match between the clinical opening you have and the person you hire.

Watch Them Interact with Staff and Patients

When screening candidates by phone, and later in person, recognize that they are on their best behavior. If you have doubts that the candidate is the right fit, she probably is not. We have all felt we could mold someone to do the job and have compromised on the quality of the person to fill the position. Experience has taught me that "no body is often better than a warm body." (Existing staff have been known to work more efficiently when one or more members of the team is/are missing.)

Invite potential hires to shadow someone in that position. If they respond enthusiastically to the opportunity, they are more interested than someone who feels that is the right thing to do. Observe their body lan-

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guage when you extend the offer: Are their palms up, or are their arms crossed? The former indicates a genuine interest, the latter indicates they are closed to the idea.

Observe them with your staff and patients. Are they interested and personable? Some may even offer to call in a patient or retrieve a file. Others may simply shadow the staff person and remain quiet. Still others may share too much personal information with staff and patients alike. Any of these are good indicators as to how they will behave, if hired.

Examine Your In-House Training Program

Before recruiting clinical staff, recognize that you may have to train someone to work up the patients who visit your practice. This is the time to examine your in-house training program. In the event your practice is among those that have not yet developed one, now is the time. It should not take months to build the framework; in fact it can be developed while you recruit the "ideal" candidate. The key components include the following:

A single mentor: There should be one trainer in the practice. This should be an experienced technician, one who is familiar with the practice's protocols and who understands the diagnostic implications of abnormal findings of each skill test s/he performs. This person should be able to explain abnormal findings as well as normal ones. One trainer will help reduce the inconsistencies often found when training occurs without a leader.

A timeline: Determine a realistic training schedule. For most general ophthalmology practices, three months is a reasonable time frame to evaluate a new tech's competencies. If

previous training sessions have been delayed, factor in multiple interruptions into your timeline.

An assessment tool: It is not enough to instruct a new technician as to the mechanics of the skills, but rather it is necessary to monitor her progress. Periodic shadowing, done by the mentor, is necessary to ensure consistency and comprehension. Additionally, consider written quizzes to monitor comprehension of the fundamentals. These should go hand in hand with the textbook or manual you provided when she began.

Regular feedback: Plan to sit with your trainee on a regular basis. Not only do you encourage communication but you are minimizing surprises for both parties. Review skills, understanding, and interpersonal and customer focus issues.

"Trust but Verify"

Perhaps you were lucky enough to have experienced, and even certified, personnel answer your ad. If your candidate claims to be certified, verify that status with the Joint Commission on Allied Health Personnel in Ophthalmology (JCAHPO). Don't forget to perform a skills evaluation as part of the interview process. Be certain to include a senior-level technician in that assessment. Your candidate will be nervous and unfamiliar with your recording sheet, but as the adage says, "A picture is worth 1,000 words." **AE**



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