

McLean, Koehler, Sparks & Hammond

Certified Public Accountants/Business Consultants

Physician Services

Appreciating staff members is key to keeping them

A healthy practice depends on robust relationships – not just with patients, but also with your staff. Devising a suitable rewards and employee benefits system can keep workers from jumping ship.

“Healthcare workers function to a large extent on psychic gratification,” says Terry B. Brauer, a medical practice management consultant in Portland, Ore.

‘A lot of people may feel anonymous. That works against the retention, against the quality of the work force.’

That means challenge and appreciation are vital.

“Too often, physicians are oblivious to their staff. They’re running between seeing patients, they’re running to the hospital to make rounds, and they don’t take the time to interact on a personal level with their staff,” Brauer says.

But it’s important to remember that staff members have the most patient contact.

“They wrestle with billing problems, long wait times – they’re the ones who have to explain all of that,” says Brauer.

Variety of benefits, rewards

Beyond paying competitive salaries upon hire, providers should view their employees as individuals. Each has a significant role to play in your enterprise – the delivery of health care, says Stuart Silver, M.D., a psychiatrist in Towson, Md., and a member of the National Physicians Alliance in Reston, Va.

Different strokes appeal to different folks. A system with several types of perks gives your staff the choice to opt in or out of what suits or doesn’t suit their needs.

Take a 401(k) retirement plan as an example. “That’s an incentive certainly for people who are middle-aged and for people who have some seniority,” says Silver. He speaks from experience gained as chairman of the board of directors for a large physician-owned group consisting of 65 doctors and 250 other employees.

“The person who is fresh out of med tech school – who might be 21 or 22 – may not be settled down or married yet,” Silver says. “They may not be that worried about their retirement at that time.”

Medical insurance may appeal to a single person but not as much to a married person whose spouse has an attractive health plan.

Having a variety of benefits available “shows that you’re concerned about your employees,” Silver says. “You can’t see people as cogs in the wheel.”

Valued personnel

In a large practice, it can be difficult to acknowledge everyone’s contribution. Billing personnel often feel neglected. Instead, make them feel valued.

“They’re very responsive to being recognized as important people,” Silver says. They don’t want to be just “the people in the back office.”

“A lot of people may feel anonymous – a lot of the people who are doing data entry or working on the credentialing,” he says. “That works against the retention, against the quality of the work force.”

Reward staff members by recognizing the importance of their work to your practice.

Equitable compensation

Don’t kid yourself – money matters.

“There really needs to be a sense of vested interest,” Brauer says. A 401(k), stock options or other incentives built around longevity go a long way toward securing loyalty.

Dissension within the office may occur when the local market compels you to pay an entry-level worker a highly competitive wage. In such instances, an employee who has been with the firm for a year may be earning only 50 cents an hour more than the new hire.

“It’s a very difficult balancing act,” Silver says.

Giving everyone the same raise also isn’t good for morale. “You can rate people every six months and move them up if you’re able to, based on the success of the business,” says Silver.

A reliable ratings system evaluates performance according to various parameters and from assessments by more than one person.

“I don’t think there’s any system that’s perfect,” Silver says.

It helps to know your staff members well enough to craft benefits and perks to suit them – even if you have to try different approaches.

McLean, Koehler, Sparks & Hammond helps owners and business leaders become more successful by providing innovative financial, technology and management solutions for every stage of their organizations’ life cycle. For more information on this article or MKS&H, please send an email to info@mksh.com or call 410.296.6200 and the marketing director can put you in touch with the right department.

Permission to use, copy and distribute this document and related graphics is hereby granted, provided that the above paragraph and the permission notice appear on all copies.

McLean, Koehler, Sparks & Hammond

11311 McCormick Road, Suite 100
Hunt Valley, MD 21031
410.296.6200

www.mksh.com

70 Thomas Johnson Drive, Suite 100
Frederick, MD 21702
301.662.2400