



Be an Advocate for Both Patients and Staff

The IHS Office of Public Health Support (OPHS) presents the fifth in its series of Retention Briefs designed to help address the challenge of retaining professional and clinical staff within an Indian health facility. We encourage you to review these cases and to discuss with the leadership team (administration, clinical directors, other leaders, etc.) how you can implement these practices when faced with similar challenges.

This issue talks about how important good interactions are in the workplace. For instance, when issues arise and you must make an unpopular decision, remember that your delivery of the information can positively impact how your staff responds. This also holds true when you ask patients for their opinions. Ensuring that both clinicians – and patients – feel valued will have an overarching effect on your ability to keep your staff happy and in it for the long term.

“ Acknowledging the concerns of your patients – either personally or through clinical or administrative staff is imperative not only in Indian health facilities but throughout the spectrum of health care. ”

Best Practices

LEADERSHIP

Making Unpopular Decisions Acceptable — At times, all leaders are tasked with making difficult or unpopular choices. In these situations, keep in mind that your top priority as a leader in the health care community is the patient population you serve. Take the opportunity to emphasize your role as the patients' advocate by making decisions based on what is best for them. This will depersonalize the decision making process and ensure that your staff does not interpret your actions as a personal affront to them. While some decisions may not be agreeable to everyone, if given ample explanation (when possible), the staff will be more likely to respond positively.

FEEDBACK IS KEY

Patient Satisfaction — Acknowledging the concerns of your patients — either personally or through clinical or administrative staff is imperative not only in Indian health facilities but throughout the spectrum of health care. An easy way to discover how your patients feel about the services your facility provides is to develop a customer satisfaction survey. Use a brief, simple form that offers ample room for comments (up to 25 words); allowing too much writing space can lead to complaints that are more appropriately addressed in another forum. When you receive feedback, be sure to personally respond to any pertinent concerns. Consider addressing common complaints by posting notices in the waiting room detailing approximate waiting times, documentation needed at check-in, etc. Let your patients know that you are an advocate for them.

DURING RECRUITMENT

Show Your Appreciation Before You Hire — A pre-hire orientation package is a great way to introduce all that a career in Indian health has to offer. Information about housing, schools, services, utilities and distances to general facilities such as airports and train stations is a good start. Also include suggestions on recreational pursuits, hiking, skiing, fishing, hunting, etc. This should also serve as an introduction to the Indian health community, so include background information about the Tribe, its unique heritage and how to respect its traditions, as well as descriptions of ceremonial events and celebrations that a potential hire may have an opportunity to experience firsthand. Create a "Welcome" package that offers coupons for local services, area maps and detailed information about local businesses. By educating potential hires about the patient population and community, you'll show how much the organization cares about bringing them onboard and will help ease the transition for them once they join your practice and settle in.

COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Your Patients are Your No. 1 Priority — When a patient visits your practice, he or she is counting on receiving the most comprehensive care possible. Therefore, it's incumbent on you to acquire and maintain a philosophy that every patient who enters your facility is a top priority. This applies not only to the practicing clinician, but everyone within your facility with whom a patient comes in contact. If a situation arises in which a specific treatment or request cannot be fulfilled, clearly communicate that to the patient and offer an alternative method or solution. Always treat your patients with the utmost respect and concern. They, in turn, will leave your facility knowing they were given the best possible care and will communicate that to others within the community.