



Career Longevity

The IHS Office of Public Health Support (OPHS) presents the seventh 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 discusses how to apply ingenuity in ways that will encourage career longevity among staff, ensure that information is shared and heard and extend the idea of work-life balance to helping your employees' spouses find employment.

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Best Practices

MORALE BUILDING

Encourage Longevity, Not Turnover — High turnover is bad for any organization. If a work environment becomes unfulfilling, unstable or, even worse, unbearable, employees look for work elsewhere. Job vacancies create heavier workloads and additional stress for remaining staff members. In this setting, it is very difficult to create unity or to build morale and attain goals. When you create a stable environment that runs effectively and efficiently, you will attract individuals who will stay on board and perpetuate good work — and career — habits. By employing effective leadership tools, such as making yourself available to employees every day, communicating any changes in personnel, taking into consideration information from exit interviews, and establishing open communication, you can stay on top of high turnover and eventually gain the momentum you need to reverse it. You will attract the best by being the best.

COMMUNICATE AS A TEAM

A Consensus Speaks Volumes — Presenting a united front among your facility's leadership team sends a clear message to the staff. It demonstrates that you operate as a team — and with shared decision making. The more that information is shared and the more you incorporate the voice of your staff, the better able you will be to form a committed and unified relationship. An additional advantage is that good communication among the executive team will help to prevent going around in circles over an issue.

“RECRUITENTION”

Opportunities for Spouses — One of the hardest things about moving to a new location isn't just blending into the new environment; it's finding a purpose there. In addition to welcoming the new hire into your facility's family of clinicians, consider helping find employment opportunities for that employee's spouse or a family member. During the negotiation process, inquire about a spouse's plans for the move and offer to network with other facility staff to explore options on his or her behalf and connect them with the community liaison. This could include arrangements with local businesses or private entities on or near a reservation, such as partnering with them to fund and staff their positions for spouses. Work with your personnel department to create part-time and job-share positions. These jobs may not always be ideal for those involved, but the initial contact could lead to a position for which they are better suited. This goodwill gesture could mean the difference of retaining good medical staff versus losing them to another facility.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPTIONS

Be Innovative — If budget limitations restrict training for your staff, find new ways for them to learn. Look into establishing relationships with university programs as field educational sites, especially for the medical and pharmacy fields. In return, staff members will become field faculty and eligible for free or reduced tuition to earn advanced degrees. Also, encourage your staff to pursue knowledge in other personal or professional areas as a practice of life-long learning. Any educational investment, whether its within one's field or not, is an investment in one's future, enhancing his or her personal development, hiring potential and social interaction. This can be achieved through on-site training, adult education classes and eLearning programs. Work with the staff to identify a program best suited for them and their personal/professional interests.