



Retention Incentive

The IHS Office of Public Health Support presents the fourth Retention Brief in our series designed to address the challenge of retaining health professionals and clinical staff.

An IHS nurse executive makes a bold move with across-the-board salary bonuses to recruit and retain nurses. She believes this will help the facility retain nurses and ensure the best possible care for its patients. The *best practice* demonstrated by this case study is the importance of providing resourceful *leadership*.

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Case Study

Nurse Executive | Small IHS Hospital

Background: The Recruitment, Retention, and Relocation Bonus (Title 5 federal employee awards and incentives authority's "3Rs" bonus) structure has been instrumental in recruiting, retaining and relocating health professionals working within IHS; in fact, one small Indian health facility found it highly beneficial in retaining key department staff nurses.

The hospital's leadership team successfully instituted a 3-R bonus program to provide relocation, recruitment and retention bonuses in the Family Care and Obstetrics units. Two years later, a newly appointed nurse executive found that there were still a number of nurse vacancies on her nursing teams in all departments, particularly in the Emergency, Surgery and Outpatient departments, which traditionally had been easier to recruit and retain. This concerned the nurse executive. She knew that continuity of care is essential to enabling a hospital to provide the best possible patient outcomes.

Challenge: Exit interviews and staff interactions with the nurse executive indicated that the nurses were interested in earning more money. Many were leaving IHS in order to work at a local private hospital that was offering a \$10,000 recruitment bonus, plus an additional \$10,000 bonus at the end of their second year. For staff members at the GS-9 and GS-10 levels, this meant a 19 percent to 22 percent increase in pay over two years.

Solution: Realizing that a large part of her budget was spent on contract nurses and that the facility's CEO had the authority to offer 3-R bonuses, the nurse executive met with her governing board to discuss reallocating money spent on hiring contract employees to retaining staff nurses. She proposed a plan to apply the money to a 10 percent recruitment and relocation bonus and a 15 percent across-the-board performance retention bonus for all nurses.



Lessons Learned: The nurse executive realized that recruitment and retention incentives would encourage the dedicated nurses to stay with the organization and remain committed to both the IHS mission and the hospital's patient population. The incentives provided a practical way to ensure that a strong sense of continuity would be maintained on behalf of patients.

Best Practices in Action

One of the most essential **leadership** responsibilities is supporting and protecting the interests of staff members. When staff members are drawn away for reasons such as salary,

it is important to reinforce their sense of importance to the overall success of the organization and the high level of care provided to patients by re-establishing effective support for pay incentives.