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***Retention Strategies*** — The foundation of any successful health care practice is to have satisfied employees. Key to ensuring that the clinicians you hire will remain happy and want to stay with your organization requires good communication, orientation, recognition and, of course, finding the right candidate off the bat. When welcoming a new hire to your facility, consider implementing the retention strategies listed in this issue.

## Cultural Orientation

For many applicants, an appealing aspect of service with an Indian health program is having the opportunity to practice and live in American Indian and Alaska Native communities. In some instances, applicants are looking for positions in communities similar to the ones in which they grew up. For example, one nurse recruit signed on to practice at an Indian health facility to help people who, like her grandparents, needed to adjust to an English-speaking medical system. Other applicants might be excited by the prospect of living among and learning about cultures different from their own.

However, when recently hired health professionals actually confront their new surroundings, many of them go through a challenging adjustment period that can shake their confidence and influence their feelings about making a career with an Indian health program. Taking steps to ease the cultural integration of new staff members into the facility and the community is an excellent management strategy for retaining staff. *Available soon on the website—a good resource for managers to share with those making the transition from an urban area to a rural community will be the Successful Transitions series of urban to rural transition guidelines. These guidelines will be available as a brochure, workbook and PowerPoint Presentation (PPT).*

## “Recruitment”

Creating a staff that thrives in a demanding, culturally diverse environment begins at the recruitment stage. Interviews of potential new hires should include a frank discussion of the facility’s cultural environment and the challenges sometimes encountered by new staff. This will help recruits develop reasonable expectations about the job and the community. Addressing cultural issues during recruitment interviews with potential hires will help to ensure that those health professionals who do come on board are a good fit.

## Ongoing Support



Cultural orientation in the recruitment phase is just the first step. Once on the job, many new hires are unfamiliar with the cultural aspects of working with a Native patient population, as well as other staff members and the community itself. Cultural orientation programs can help.

Here are two excellent examples of cultural orientation programs devised by Indian health program administrators:

- **A transition program** developed by an administrative officer at a small Indian health facility helps new hires from different backgrounds to adjust to the facility and local community. New staff members are assigned to community liaisons, in essence, select host families from the community who help them with cultural integration, keep them abreast of community events and activities and provide friendship and support to help counteract feelings of isolation. The host families are a valuable resource for new staff members by establishing a sense of belonging within the community. Key to transitioning into an Indian health community is understanding and participating in the local history, arts, culture and Tribal ceremonial events of the Area.
- **An interactive program** devised by an administrator at an Indian health clinic aims to send staff members from the facility into the local community where they will meet with residents to inform them about the facility’s services. These encounters encourage community residents to take advantage of facility services and, at the same time, help facility staff form deeper connections with community members.

## Social/Cultural Activities



You can encourage employees to participate in social events sponsored by the local community by publicizing activities and having a community liaison coordinate a calendar of events. A liaison can answer questions about the community, encourage facility staff to attend local festivals, commemorations of important events, school sporting events and graduations and other gatherings. By participating, your facility staff will gain a deeper understanding of the local culture simply by coming into social contact with the community. Just as important, involvement in the life of the community can help new staff members form new and rewarding friendships that will make them more likely to want to remain in the area.

In addition, efforts can also be made to bring the local culture to the facility through the sponsorship of special events planned specifically for health professionals. For example, at one Indian health facility, administrators help plan cultural events such as arts and crafts shows and Native food fairs for hospital staff.