Indian Health Retention *Insights*

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Recruiting to Retain — Staff retention at Indian health facilities begins with successful staff recruitment.

"Recruitention"

Health care clinicians most likely to thrive — and stay — at a facility are those who have the individual qualities and skills that make them likely to succeed on the job. This includes clinicians who face the unfamiliar with a sense of adventure; whose personal and professional interests fit in well with the community and environment; and whose personal relationships and social aspirations allow for assignments in sometimes isolated, rural settings.

Such selectivity may be difficult when a facility's administrators are under pressure to fill a key position. Still, whenever possible, it's best to consider the following .strategies when recruiting new staff members.

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Look for the Right Skill Sets

Certain potential staff members come readily equipped with skill sets and attitudes that significantly increase the likelihood they will hire on and stay put. Targeting these individuals in recruitment efforts makes good sense. An excellent pool of potential clinicians is health professionals who have served in the military. These individuals are experienced clinicians who are familiar with health care, have strong leadership and team-building skills, are accustomed to living in structured environments and have often received additional specialized training. For clinicians who are leaving the armed forces working for an Indian health program can be a highly attractive transition. Becoming an officer in the Commissioned Corps may enable them to maintain their benefits, continue their retirement and assume new work without the frustrations and stress involved in setting up private practice.

- A physical therapist at a medical center is a case in point. Enlisted in the US Air Force, she recognized the advantages that military personnel have when making the transition to the Commissioned Corps and was eager to take advantage of the job security and many of the paybacks she was accustomed to in the military. Health professionals with family members in the Commissioned Corps are additional candidates likely to understand and appreciate the benefits of practicing at Indian health program facilities.

Engage in Facility-Specific Recruitment/ Promotion

Some individuals are more likely to thrive in a specific facility, community and environment. Finding the right person for the job may not be a simple task, but the time you invest in interviewing and determining the right candidate will save you money in the long run. Working with them to learn about the culture of your facility and the community can only help to strengthen their commitment. Promoting from within also can be effective — it is excellent for staff morale and it rewards and helps retain staff members who have already established close ties with the community and facility.

- Here is an excellent example of a recruiting process that highlighted the specific characteristics of a facility: A pharmacist who is also an enthusiastic hunter was convinced to take a job at an isolated Indian health facility after a recruiter touted the facility's proximity to wilderness areas where he could pursue his favorite sport. An equally important attraction was the recruiter's description of the range of duties and responsibilities available at the small facility that might not have been open to this young pharmacist in a larger or more mainstream facility.

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Look for Personal Qualities that are a "Good Fit"

Retention can be strongly influenced by the recruitment of people who possess personal characteristics that meld well with the environment and people they will serve within Indian health communities. Depending upon the facility, such characteristics might include: Curiosity and openness to new cultures and experiences; a desire for public service; enjoyment of the local recreational activities such as hunting, hiking, skiing and fishing; a tendency to exercise initiative (for example, by actively exploring the opportunities at the facility before meeting with recruiters); familiarity with lower-income areas with limited medical facilities and a lower level of technology; a generally upbeat world view; and the ability to tolerate and even enjoy isolated locations. Making the transition to a rural or even remote area can be challenging for some not accustomed to the lifestyle and environment or for those who make the move alone. For example, a clinician whose family lives a great distance away might eventually opt to find work closer to his or her loved ones. *A Successful Transitions series of urban to rural transition guidelines will soon be available on the website as a brochure, workbook and PowerPoint Presentation (PPT).*

Strive for Complementary Staffing

Establishing hiring policies that aim to create a mix of the right people with the right skill sets can lead to greater staff satisfaction. For example, such policies might ensure that younger clinicians have other young people with whom to socialize or that older, more experienced clinicians are available to help younger staff learn and adjust on the job. A mix of health professionals also makes the workplace more varied and interesting.

Monitor Recruitment/ Promotion/Bonus Processes Closely

Clinicians who express interest in working at individual facilities are often required to apply at an Area office, which may entail extra communication and tracking of their progress. Promotion of existing staff or the award of bonuses may be complicated or delayed by paperwork and procedure. These processes can result in frustration and the loss of staff members or potential new hires. Tracking the progress of staff applications for hiring, promotion or bonuses as closely as possible may help speed up these processes. Such monitoring also enables management to maintain contact with and provide status updates to individuals involved in these processes, helping them endure the wait and resulting, eventually, in the acquisition or retention of desirable health professionals.

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