

PHYSICIANS PRACTICE

YOUR PRACTICE YOUR WAY

Patient Relations

How a Small Staff Can Improve Patient Care

Here are five ways your staff can provide great patient care despite fewer resources and a smaller team

BY TRACY L. MORRIS

The pool of talented healthcare staff from which medical practices can draw never seems to keep pace, and expectations among patients have risen dramatically. How can private practices achieve excellence in this new era? The answer cannot simply be more staff.

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Loe's guiding perspective: "The sum of the whole is more important than any individual, including myself."

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Fred Loe, MD

The key is embracing policies and procedures that help staff provide spectacular patient care.

Here are five strategies to consider implementing at your practice:

1. HIRE FOR BALANCE

Hiring the right staff is even more crucial for smaller practices. Being at the helm of any practice requires discernment and decisiveness, but when the group is small, sensitivity to balance when making hiring decisions plays a bigger role.

Fred Loe, a Texas oral and maxillofacial surgeon, puts an emphasis on new hires fitting in with the team.

"We maintain balance in my

2. PRIORITIZE PATIENT COMMUNICATION

Florida-based cardiologist Adam Splaver believes that at the heart of great patient care is great communication. As a result, he says, prioritizing patient communication must be every individual staff member's bottom line.

Splaver says attention to interaction among staff and physicians creates a loyal patient. "Listening to what patients have to say, properly communicating health information to them — that's the core of a successful practice," he says. "It's also why I think one of the biggest mistakes a physician can make is not returning a patient's phone call in a timely manner."



3. HELP STAFF SERVE AS INFORMATION GUIDES

The Internet and accessibility to information has created a more educated and demanding patient population. David Genet, a Florida periodontist, views this shift as positive.

"The old model of 'doctor knows best' no longer applies," he says. "Empowerment encourages patients to take responsibility for their health and be proactive in their search for options."

Splaver also appreciates the more active role in learning patients are taking, "... by consulting 'Dr. Google,' paying attention to drug commercials, listening to family and friends' advice, and keeping their eyes and ears open for opinions on living a healthy lifestyle."

But, he adds, even helpful information can cloud the big picture for patients. As a result, Splaver says he and his staff "have an even more vital role in helping patients sort through the overwhelming data to determine what is and what is not relevant to their own situation."

4. DEMONSTRATE TOP-DOWN LOYALTY

If the scale must be tipped, you might first need to favor your staff over your patients. After all, a happy staff will lead to happier patients. Respected staff equates to respected patients who respond with loyalty.

Genet shares this tip: "We allot dedicated time daily when no appointments are booked. This allows us to accommodate emergencies and sends a strong message of respect for each patient's time and our value for office organization. The end product: a non-stressful office environment, happy staff and patients, and extensive referrals from them."