

# RE-THINK THE INK

Adopt a modern attitude toward employees with tattoos, and don't let the writing on the wall be a barrier to clinic team success.

BY LAURA M. PERIMAN, MD

**L**ynyrd (Figure 1) is an exceptional employee. He is always on time and positive on the phone with patients. He is a dedicated and resourceful problem-solver and an avid patient advocate. He multitasks front desk reception, patient calls, prior authorizations, and surgical scheduling with grace and ease. Patients absolutely love his heart-centered, generous, and positive demeanor. I love his warm, sunny greetings every morning.

Outfitted in a dress shirt and coordinating tie, Lynyrd's appearance is always professional and polished, and it inspires other staff and physicians to up their fashion game. And because of his professionalism, incredible patient advocacy, and ability to meaningfully connect with people, patients don't give a second thought to the extensive tattoos extending past his pressed shirtsleeves and collar, unless they find them beautiful and ask about them.

When that happens, patients learn that Lynyrd is a Pacific Islander and that the extensive tattoos are symbolic, powerful, and culturally meaningful to him. Anyone who would dismiss such a gregarious and talented employee based simply on visible tattoos would be missing out on an incredibly valuable team member who elevates the entire clinic and patient experience.

Equally exceptional is Christeen (Figure 2), a hard-working single mom with a heart of gold. Every patient she encounters feels that he or she has received VIP treatment, and I suspect her tender loving care for patients plays a role in their successful outcomes. Christeen is the ultimate physician



Figure 1. Lynyrd.



Figure 2. Christeen.

extender, with the emotional and raw intelligence to counsel patients on treatment recommendations after I've left the room. She is also absolutely dedicated to patient care—either you have it or you don't—so much so that she facilitates patient education and personally addresses each patient's questions and needs.

Christeen wears clean, pressed scrubs with a long-sleeved t-shirt underneath her short-sleeved scrub top or a long-sleeved scrub top to mask her tattoos. Patients deeply appreciate her attention and diligence enough that the occasional flash of ink from underneath her long sleeves is insignificant. As with Lynyrd, the person and his or her drive to help patients are what matters.

Tattoos that include obscene words or are erotic in content are different; these need to be covered up at all times. The point is that tattoos should

not be automatic disqualifiers for employment. An employee without tattoos who is slovenly, has unclean hair, or reeks of body odor can affect a clinic's ability to create a positive patient experience. We've had that situation, too, and quality control decisions were made.

Ophthalmology staff members tend to be young, and tattoos are generationaly popular. I grew up in the preppy, clean-cut '80s, but I do think that Lynyrd's tattoos are artful, beautiful, and a meaningful expression of his heritage and that Christeen's tattoos are an extension of her identity. If Lynyrd or Christeen had been passed over for employment based on visible tattoos, I would have missed out on working with two wonderful people who make my job easier and, more important, make our patients happy

and our clinic special. Consider the whole person: His or her real worth is more than skin deep. ■



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## TATTOOS IN THE WORKPLACE: STATISTICS AND STUDIES

### APPROXIMATELY...



**36%** of young adults (18-25 years)

**38%** of millennials

**40%** of generation Xers

HAVE AT LEAST ONE TATTOO.<sup>1</sup>

### IN ONE STUDY THAT ENROLLED...



from across all 50 states, the wages and annual earnings of tattooed employees were indistinguishable from those of employees without tattoos.<sup>2</sup> Of the respondents, 23% of men and 37% of women had tattoos.

### ACCORDING TO A SURVEY CONDUCTED BY SALARY.COM...



**76%** of respondents felt that tattoos and piercings could hurt a person's chances of being hired, **39%** felt that employees with tattoos and piercings reflected poorly on their employers, and **42%** felt that visible tattoos were always inappropriate at work.<sup>3</sup>

In that same Salary.com study, **4%** of the respondents with tattoos and piercings reported having faced discrimination because of their tattoos and body art.<sup>3</sup>

### A STUDY BY CAREERBUILDER.COM FOUND THAT...



**37%** of human resources managers list tattoos as the third most likely physical attribute to limit career potential.<sup>4</sup>



### ABOUT...

**13%** of individuals employed in health care have tattoos.<sup>5</sup>

1. Tattooed Gen Nexters. Pew Research Center website. December 9, 2008. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2008/12/09/tattooed-gen-nexters/>. Accessed April 2, 2019.

2. French MT, Mortensen K, Timming AR. Are tattoos associated with employment and wage discrimination? Analyzing the relationships between body art and labor market outcomes. *Human Relations*. 2019;72(5):962-987.

3. Tattoos hurt your chances of getting a job. Salary.com. April 17, 2018. <https://www.salary.com/articles/tattoos-hurt-chances-getting-job/>. Accessed April 2, 2019.

4. Bad breath, heavy cologne and wrinkled clothes among factors that can make you less likely to get promoted, CareerBuilder study finds. CareerBuilder website. June 29, 2011. <http://www.careerbuilder.com/share/aboutus/pressreleasesdetail.aspx?sd=6%2F30%2F2011&id=pr642&ed=12%2F31%2F2011>. Accessed April 2, 2019.

5. Interesting statistics about tattoos in the workplace. Job Monkey website. March 24, 2016. <https://www.jobmonkey.com/statistics-tattoos-workplace/>. Accessed April 2, 2019.