

INITIATIVES TO PROMOTE A HEALTHY WORK ENVIRONMENT IN YOUR PRACTICE

The well-being of employees is vital to a productive workplace.

BY ASHLEY BRISSETTE, MD, MSc, FRCSC

Practice culture is extremely important in medicine. The culture of a practice affects everything, from productivity and efficiency to the health and well-being of the practice's employees. An institution's culture may be difficult to define, but it shapes the work process, the mood of the staff, and the behaviors of all involved.

At Weill Cornell Medicine and NewYork-Presbyterian, and specifically in our department of ophthalmology, we focus first and foremost on patient care. Patients always come first, and we pride ourselves on this ideal. The patient experience is enhanced by each step of the patient encounter, from the call center scheduling the appointment, to the check-in staff, to the technicians and nurses, and finally to the physicians. Each person in the practice plays an important role in ensuring that our patients get the best care possible, and all of those involved are aware of their potential individual impact.

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Our group is open and social, and we often share in each other's accolades and are quick to pass along the positive feedback we receive from patients. We are an academic practice, but we aim to provide a level of customer service and patient-centered care like that of a private practice.

EMPLOYEE INITIATIVES

In addition to our concentration on the patient experience, our institution also focuses on promoting a healthy workplace for all employees. We do this through several initiatives.

Professional development. The practice supports physician attendance at conferences both nationally and internationally. This allows us not only to form connections with ophthalmologists around the world, but also to stay up to date on the latest innovations in the field. Our ophthalmic technicians are also well supported in attending conferences and continuing education events because Weill Cornell Medicine and NewYork-Presbyterian truly believe in investing in staff development.

Our chairman, Donald J. D'Amico, MD, is also a strong believer in mentorship programs for junior faculty. This year, I received support through Weill Cornell Medicine to participate in the Leadership in Academic Medicine Program, a yearlong monthly series of programs promoting the development

of career planning, academic success, and leadership skills.

Community volunteering. Nothing feels better than dedicating your time and expertise by giving back to the community. We host information sessions at Weill Cornell Medicine, neighboring hospitals (such as the Hospital for Special Surgery), and community centers on common topics in ophthalmology in order to promote health and well-being in the community (Figure). Our residents are encouraged to volunteer in the community as well, and they perform free vision screening exams in New York City. A number of our faculty members are also engaged in medical missions abroad, providing surgery and eye exams to underserved communities in Tanzania and Mauritius.

Being able to contribute to causes that are greater than ourselves helps to encourage empathy and community within our department.

Practice flexibility. Flexibility in work scheduling improves employee autonomy. I believe this is an important factor in creating a positive work culture. In our department, we have the freedom to structure the schedule as we wish—within limits of course. This reinforces the idea that we all have lives outside of medicine, and that those lives and commitments matter to our well-being and, therefore, to the well-being of the department.



Figure. Dr. Brissette gives a lecture on cataracts and fall risk to local community members.

The freedom to choose our scope of practice, to set the number of patients we see per day, and to offer early or late appointments outside of normal work hours improves the physician's autonomy over his or her practice. This leads to improved productivity and less employee turnover.

CONCLUSION

It can be difficult to change a practice culture once it is established. Defining your employees' roles, investing in their value and autonomy, and fostering a cause greater than yourselves through community outreach are strategies that can help to promote the well-being of the workplace and its employees. ■



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