



EVERY CHALLENGE IS AN OPPORTUNITY

"Life is 10% what happens to you and 90% how you react to it."

– Charles R. Swindoll

Over the past few years, unprecedented global events such as the COVID-19 pandemic have changed society in ways we never anticipated. For many ophthalmologists, the ramifications are most evident in practice management—namely, practice staffing and culture. How do you optimize training; create a positive culture that persists through constant staff turnover; and train, retain, and foster the growth of employees over time? Many ophthalmologists spend considerably more time and energy on these practice areas now than ever before.

Many industries face similar challenges with staffing, likely indicating people's shifting attitudes toward employment.¹ For example, although the size of my practice staff is the same as before the pandemic, the percentage of long-term experienced staff members is lower. My staff works hard to deliver the high level of care our patients are accustomed to, but this can be difficult task without more experienced staff members.

Any practice that can figure out how to quickly integrate new employees and maintain a rich culture has a competitive edge. In their article, Patti Barkey, COE; Carrie Jacobs, COE, CPSS, OCS; and Cynthia Matossian, MD, FACS, highlight several pearls for maintaining a successful practice, such as employing innovative recruiting methods and embracing new employment models. They also share practice management software solutions that can help reduce the impact of staff shortages.

Staffing challenges present an opportunity to rethink your practice environment and create a culture that can appeal to employees in today's job market. In her article on the keys to successful physician recruitment, Jill Maher, MA, COE, explains that many young ophthalmologists desire to work in a medium to large practice where they have an opportunity to find an excellent mentor. Knowing what young job seekers are looking for is the first step toward minimizing staffing challenges.

Staffing difficulties also demonstrate the critical role that culture plays in the success of a practice. A strong practice culture will remain unchanged despite fluid staffing. It brings patients in and keeps them coming back, and it makes technicians want to stay with the practice. The well-known Ritz Carlton experience works so well because it clearly defines how employees should perform and interact with each other and guests. Ophthalmic practices should use similar clearly defined standards. Adopting new methods of monitoring and measuring staff performance can help identify staff who meet, exceed, or fall short of those standards. This may prevent complacency with underperforming legacy staff.

Luckily, a greater focus on staffing and culture in the practice can enhance the quality of the patient experience. A practice with high staff turnover may be better able to adapt to change than one with more legacy staff members because people tend to become set in their ways. Newer staff members may be more amenable to adopting new technologies and approaches.

As with any challenge, there are opportunities for positive change, and collaborative efforts to provide solutions to the problems facing ophthalmology have emerged. In her article, Alice T. Epitropoulos, MD, FACS, discusses how members of the ophthalmology community joined forces to educate policymakers and the media about the impact of Aetna's prior authorization requirement for all cataract surgeries. As a result of their efforts, the insurer eventually repealed the prior authorization requirement—except in Georgia and Florida—and approved a high number of cataract surgeries. The ophthalmic community came together and accomplished more in this situation than what would have been possible with individual efforts. ■

1. Kohan SE. Remote work, quiet quitting may make holiday hiring difficult for retailers. *Forbes*. August 29, 2022. Accessed August 31, 2022. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/shelleykohan/2022/08/29/remote-work-quiet-quitting-will-make-holiday-hiring-for-retailers-difficult/?sh=362ef1154746>

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