Curi ADVISORY

Surviving the Medical Practice Staffing Shortage

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

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Introduction

When it comes to medical practice staffing, we are in a state of crisis. Talent shortages across both clinical and administrative roles pose severe challenges to medical practices' ability to maintain day-to-day operations and provide high-quality care to patients, and the traditional platitudes of "hire more people" or "optimize efficiency" just aren't cutting it. You need to dig deeper and identify how that can be done.

While we'd like to believe that a quick Google search for solutions will bring the answers we need, unfortunately, much of the typical advice you'll receive for solving staffing challenges doesn't fully translate to the medical industry, and the proposed strategies often fall short. The staffing needs of medical practices are extremely complex, with unique and nuanced requirements. Retiring professionals, burnt-out staff, limited availability of qualified candidates, and an increased demand for healthcare services are among the many factors that contribute to the crisis we're in. And it's time to find a way out.

There is no one solution that will magically dissolve all concerns and bring your practice back to peak efficiency. The current medical staffing shortage is a multi-faceted and nuanced challenge that requires careful consideration of a wide range of contributing factors. It won't be easy. It won't be quick. But it's time to throw away the band-aids and discover a cure.

The strategies discussed in this eBook will range from traditional staffing initiatives like enhancing recruitment and retention practices, providing professional development opportunities, and cultivating a positive work culture, to more specialized elements, such as practice structure, technology adoption, and succession planning—all defined in the context of medical practice operations. Each strategy will be outlined, along with relevant case studies and best practices, to provide a comprehensive understanding of their potential impact on overcoming the staffing crisis.

While working directly with a professional may be necessary to help uncover specific solutions that are tailored to your unique set of needs, our goal today is to help kick start a new way of thinking that will empower you to face this challenge head-on.

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The Challenge

What, exactly, are we up against?

A patient needs help right away, but all the practice's physicians are fully booked through next week. Another practice is having trouble keeping up with timely documentation as they rush around to help as many patients as possible. In yet another, members of the nursing staff are regularly working overtime because the two who left four months ago haven't been replaced yet.

Sound familiar?

These experiences have become commonplace as burnout, retirement, pandemic-induced losses, and a shortage of medical training programs plague the industry. Furthermore, the increased demand for healthcare services, advancing technology, and availability of multiple employment options for healthcare workers have given rise to an abundance of jobs but a shortage of people to fill them. As a result, medical organizations of all sizes are forced to compete for staff among a smaller-than-normal candidate pool.

But before we can create an effective plan forward, it's important to identify how we got here in the first place.

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CHAPTER ONE

Looking Back

Let's take a quick look back. Prior to 2020, the medical industry grew at an exceptional rate compared to other industries. With the Baby Boomers well into their 60s and 70s, the aging American population had (and continues to have) a steadily growing need for medical services.

However, while a growth period such as this presented an ideal time to recruit new staff to your medical practice, things weren't perfect, and a shortage of healthcare workers was already beginning to plague the industry. Illustrating this fact, a 2018 study predicted that, by 2025, the country would need 2.3 more healthcare workers, especially home aides, technicians, nursing assistants, and nurse practitioners.

There were certainly practice staffing challenges on the horizon, but at the time, these concerns didn't appear to be insurmountable. And no one could have predicted what was about to happen.

A pandemic strikes

The year is 2020. The entire world has seemingly turned upside down, and all eyes are on medical professionals to jump into action.

For many healthcare workers, never-ending days, mandatory overtime, and overwhelming mental, physical, and emotional strain while dealing with an unknown and extremely infectious virus all wreaked havoc on their personal and professional lives.

Doctors, nurses, practice staff—they were all left to navigate the unknown with limited and waning resources, and it was all-hands-on-deck as the rest of the world was quite literally counting on them to steer us back to safety. However, on the other end of the spectrum, some healthcare workers experienced an entirely different set of concerns, and they were left fearful for their livelihoods as many practices, surgical centers, and other medical facilities were effectively shut down in the wake of the pandemic. If the staffing shortage we face today is considered a "crisis," then the state of the industry during the COVID-19 pandemic was absolutely cataclysmic.

We know that none of this is news. You were there. You lived it. However, many of the challenges we face today are a direct consequence of that historic event, and it's important to recognize them as such.

So now that we're on the other side, let's explore the current state of the industry.

If the staffing shortage we face today is considered a "crisis," then the state of the industry during the COVID-19 pandemic was absolutely cataclysmic.

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CHAPTER TWO

Today's Staffing Challenges

According to a report published by Definitive Healthcare, nearly 334,000 healthcare workers left the workforce in 2021, with many citing burnout and pandemic-related stressors as the reason for their departure. Furthermore, since 2020 alone, nearly 1 in 5 healthcare workers have quit their jobs, and research from Elsevier Health suggests that up to 47% of U.S. healthcare workers plan to leave their positions by 2025.

Given this mass exodus of healthcare workers, there is now an abundance of open positions with few candidates available to fill them. It's a competition among practices to not only attract the necessary talent to complete their staff, but to keep them there as long as possible.

Before we discuss effective strategies to win that competition, let's dive a little deeper and look at some key factors contributing to this shortage.

By the numbers

- **334,000** healthcare workers left the workplace in 2021
- **1 in 5** healthcare workers have quit their jobs since 2020
- Up to **47%** of U.S. healthcare workers plan to leave their positions by 2025

Sources: Definitive Healthcare, Elsevier Health

Burnout

Burnout among medical professionals has emerged as a key factor contributing to the high attrition rates within the healthcare industry. Excessive workloads, long working hours, and immense pressure to deliver quality care in a fast-paced environment may often lead to physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion. To make matters worse, a massive uptick in workplace violence against providers and the growing prevalence of medical mistrust during and after the pandemic only exacerbated these feelings of burnout among healthcare workers. This chronic stress and burnout can have dire consequences, causing many medical professionals to reconsider their career paths and ultimately quit their positions

Aging population

Similar to the general population, healthcare workers are getting older, and post-pandemic burnout motivated many workers to retire early. For most medical professionals, proper education and training takes many years, and without effective succession planning, it has become particularly difficult to replenish the pool of qualified candidates to meet the rapidly growing demand for new talent.

Education limitations

Those looking to enter the medical field may also be met with significant challenges in seeking necessary education. According to the American Association of Colleges of Nursing, in 2020, nursing schools turned away nearly 80,000 program candidates because they did not

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have adequate facilities and teaching staff. As employers lost experienced nurses and their valuable skill sets, not enough new workers were available to replace them.

Furthermore, according to anecdotal experiences shared by healthcare professionals, current medical programs are often sending new graduates into the workforce with lower levels of training as they attempt to fill the many spots left by seasoned providers who have left the profession entirely. Unfortunately, this in turn forces practices to spend more time and resources to provide on-the-job guidance and coaching to help them achieve adequate competency.

Administrative professional shortage

Staffing shortages in the healthcare industry don't only apply to medical personnel. We are also experiencing a shortage of specialized administrative professionals. These employees are often the connective tissue of a medical practice, managing a whole host of responsibilities, including budgeting, billing, staffing, compliance, accreditation, medical record maintenance, patient education, internal and external communications, and contract negotiations—just to name a few.

Like their clinical colleagues, administrators in understaffed offices are subject to burnout as they try to fill the empty shoes of vacant positions in addition to tending to their regular work. And physicians trying to work without the necessary supporting staff are forced to take time away from their clinical responsibilities to make up the difference.

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CHAPTER THREE

The Resulting Effects

Now that we understand some of the key factors contributing to today's staffing crisis, let's look at a few ways that these shortages can affect your practice operations.

Quality of care and patient satisfaction

An overburdened team cannot work at normal levels of efficiency. Physicians, nurses, and administrators alike are all stretched thin—and patients can feel it.

Without adequate staffing, patients are receiving reduced time and attention, leading to longer wait times, rushed consultations, and limited opportunities for thorough assessments and comprehensive treatment plans. Moreover, this shortage hampers continuity of care, as patients may have to see different providers for their ongoing healthcare needs.

Labor costs

Staffing shortages and heavy competition among practices have resulted in an overall higher cost of labor, as many employers are increasing total compensation packages in an attempt to attract and retain qualified professionals. Among the medical practices polled in a 2022 study, over 70 percent were planning compensation increases, and in one report, hospitals reported a 37 percent increase in labor costs from 2019 to 2022.

Revenue

While labor costs increase, staffing shortages are often contributing to a significant loss in revenue, as practices simply do not have the staff necessary to serve typical patient volume. Independent primary care practices reported 5.21 percent fewer patients and 8.41 percent less patient activity in 2022, and a recent MGMA report revealed that, since the pandemic began, independent practices have three fewer full-time equivalent staff and fewer patients. Furthermore, some practices reported increases in accounts receivable and bad debts.

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PART II

The Solutions

Let’s get down to business.

As you can see, it’s rough out there. And overcoming this apparent staffing crisis will be difficult—but it’s far from impossible.

From recruitment and retention strategies to creative scheduling approaches and team-based care models, we’re going to dive into the various opportunities that may be available for you to limit any negative impact on your ability to provide high-quality care and increase revenue during this staffing crisis.

In the strategies and solutions outlined in upcoming chapters, we will focus on the three “R”s of staffing solutions—Reorganize, Recruit, and Retain. By auditing your operational structure, you may find that you’re better able to uncover tools and resources that will help maximize efficiency. By setting up an effective recruitment strategy, you’ll be more likely to attract new talent. And by focusing on a positive internal culture and a mutually beneficial employment structure, you’ll be more likely to retain hard-working employees.

So, let’s get started.

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CHAPTER FOUR

Reorganize

Conventional wisdom might suggest that if you don't have enough personnel to fill practice roles, you simply need to hire more people. Of course, in today's climate, hiring new talent is anything but "simple," but it's also not always the only answer. It's time to think outside the box.

Reallocate resources

During the planning and development of your existing practice structure, you likely identified how many employees are needed in each role to meet expected patient volumes. However, times have changed, and your existing model may no longer serve you. We encourage you to audit your practice structure, beginning with identifying what you already have and what you can accomplish with existing resources.

Are there opportunities to cross-train staff to backfill when others are unavailable or jump in to relieve their overwhelmed colleagues? By cross-training, you may be able to eliminate the need for additional staff members without putting a significant burden on the few individuals that already have the necessary skills for the job at hand.

In addition, while full-time candidates may be hard to come by, is it possible to instead seek multiple professionals looking for part-time opportunities? While your original model may dictate that your operations require two additional full-time physicians, the same work could possibly be executed by three to four part-time physicians, widening your pool of potential candidates.

Sometimes, unfortunately, there are also some tough decisions to be made, and consolidation of your team may be the answer. By looking at the numbers and key practice data, areas of opportunity for consolidation will reveal themselves. And while this kind of reality check is understandably hard to swallow, it's important to be honest with yourself about what structure your business can sustain while remaining profitable.

Reduce costs

To maximize your revenue or find extra room in the budget to enhance employee compensation packages, there are a few avenues available for operational cost reduction.

We want to start by reminding you that the medical community is just that—a community. Tapping into the collaborative spirit of healthcare providers can be an effective way to reduce costs. Some examples may include:

1. **Group buying**

   Collaboration among medical practices, such as through group buying, is a common strategy to reduce costs and achieve economies of scale.

   By pooling purchasing power, together you may be able to negotiate better prices for supplies, equipment, and services.

   For example, medical practices can establish or join group purchasing organizations (GPOs) where you collectively buy medical supplies,

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pharmaceuticals, and other resources in bulk—leading to cost savings.

2. Shared services

By combining resources and expertise, you may be able to further streamline operations, make processes more efficient, and lower costs. Sharing common administrative functions like billing and coding, human resources, IT services, and compliance are examples of how this can be done.

3. Key performance indicator tracking

Implementing analytics platforms (more on this later) and tracking key performance indicators can also help you identify areas for improvement in patient care and operational efficiency. This data-driven approach can lead to cost reductions through better decision-making and resource allocation. Additionally, data awareness facilitates knowledge exchange, fosters collaboration, and creates opportunities for benchmarking and continuous improvement.

Finally, when applicable, practices should place an emphasis on preventative care to reduce the need for costly interventions. Encouraging patients to attend regular check-ups and screenings through a steady stream of communication as well as prioritizing follow-up conversations can greatly improve your ability to identify and address health issues early, keep your practice busy with a full schedule of appointments, and maintain a positive and lasting relationship with existing patients.

Implement useful technology

Using current technology in your practice can make your staff's jobs easier and more efficient, creating opportunities for reducing time spent on various administrative and clinical tasks. Furthermore, data and analytics software can help with decision-making processes, and the right tech can attract job candidates who will view your office as an up-to-date, streamlined, and efficient workplace.

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Let's break these down into a few categories based on your practice's specific goals:

1. Streamline internal operations

There's plenty of technology available today that is specifically designed to help medical practices streamline many internal processes, including communication, record-keeping, and patient management. While electronic medical record technology is commonplace, we encourage you to thoroughly vet software before implementation to avoid complex changes. During this process, you should consider things such as ease of use, interoperability with other existing systems, customization options, scalability, and training and support options from the vendor. Before jumping into a decision headfirst, you should meet with your team to discuss which elements are most important to your practice and weigh the options available.

Another technology that may be useful for your practice is speech recognition programs. These programs allow healthcare professionals to transcribe clinical documentation quickly and accurately in real time, significantly reducing the amount of time necessary to complete manual documentation. That said, it's of critical importance that clinical staff are appropriately trained to not only use this type of program, but to check every entry for accuracy. Speech recognition should be used as a tool to assist with documentation, not a replacement for data entry. Even with advances in this technology, errors can still occur—especially when medical jargon or complex terms are used. With this in mind, partnering with a vendor that provides comprehensive training and education can be extremely helpful to make sure users are comfortable and confident in this software.

Finally, software is also available to assist with timely and consistent patient communication. Advanced systems can contact patients to remind them when they are due for preventative services, confirm upcoming appointments, complete check-in processes, collect billing information and patient balances, or follow up on recent visits automatically. This can significantly reduce the amount of time spent on communication efforts, allowing your team to focus on other work.

2. Capture actionable data and analytics

By using software to collect data from and about your practice, you will have the opportunity to make decisions

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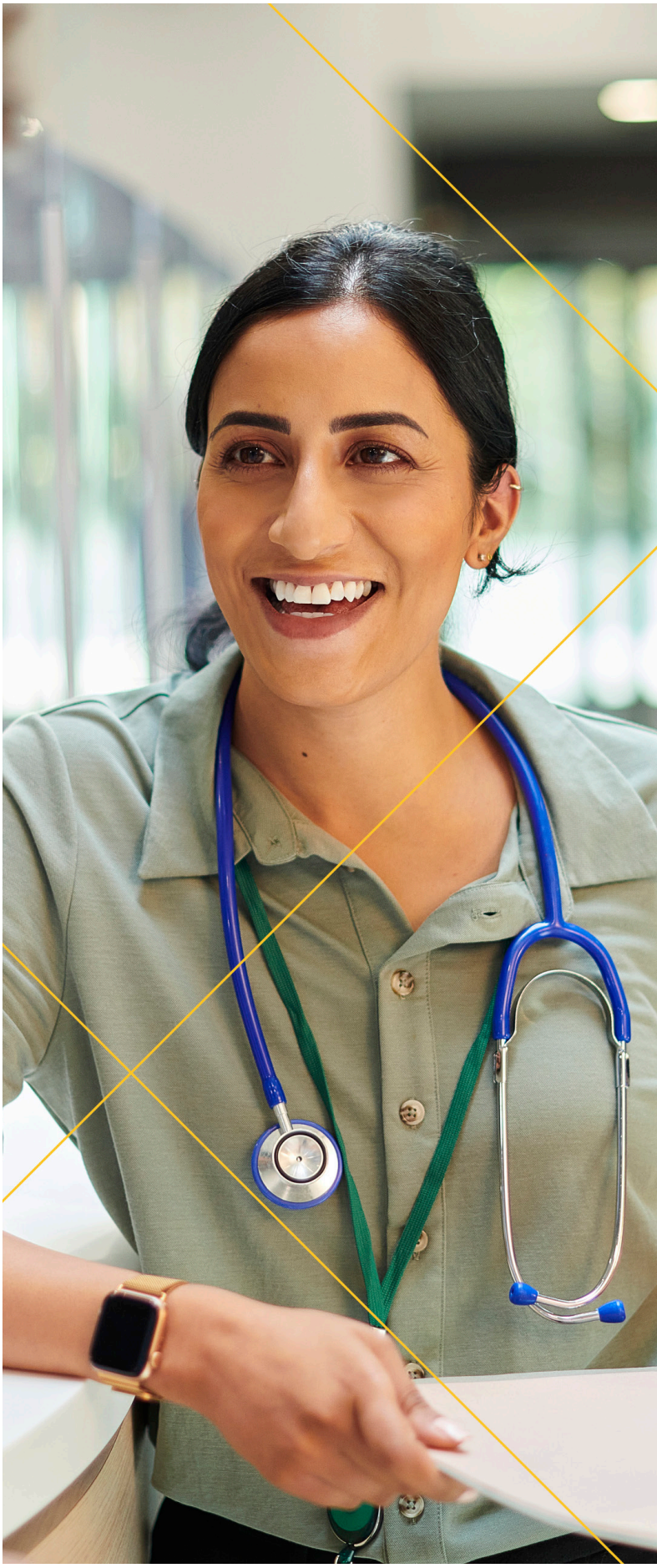
based on facts and figures—not just gut feelings. With this data, you can gain the ability to track key performance indicators, drive new patient volume, and optimize practice performance.

Gathering data is paramount to building effective processes and measuring success. Products like Curi Advisory's Arrowlytics platform provide real-time data and reporting that can directly relate to organizational and practice-specific goals. While there are other options out there, Arrowlytics was specifically built for medical practices by individuals with personal experience in the industry, making it highly unique and specialized to their needs.

3. Create an attractive workplace

Candidates are more likely to accept jobs from practices that position themselves on the cutting-edge of technology, as it demonstrates a progressive and modern culture—so if your budget allows, why not invest in some patient and teammate-friendly tech?

We're not necessarily talking about the must-haves of the tech world, but the nice-to-haves. Things like mobile health applications, modernized patient portals, remote patient monitoring tech—all the latest and greatest innovations that make you say, "huh, that's neat." By nature, medical professionals are a curious bunch, and having the opportunity to explore new and exciting tools can be particularly enticing when searching for job opportunities.



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CHAPTER FIVE

Recruit

Like everyone else in the industry, your recruiting efforts are hindered by candidate shortages at all levels and the resulting intensified competition for talent. An effective recruitment strategy will help you determine how to position your practice as a place where candidates want to be.

But what about larger employers, such as hospitals, that offer higher pay and more opportunities for advancement and experience? They have more money, staff, and resources to devote to recruiting. Right? Perhaps they do.

Focus on what you have and what you can offer and present those things as advantages. For example:

- Salaries may be smaller, but you can offer more flexibility and work/life balance.
- Your staff gets to know patients as you care for them long-term.
- You value and encourage continuous learning and training for staff.

With your advantages in mind, describe your ideal candidates—people who can thrive in your environment—then decide where to find them and how to select the best.

Find skilled candidates

The first step to attracting skilled candidates is a simple one. If you haven't already, it's critical to establish a well-designed and responsive website that adapts for both desktop and mobile use. This will be the first stop for many candidates interested in learning about your practice—and first impressions matter. In particular, it's important to include a prominent "careers" page with engaging job descriptions that will entice potential staff. To reduce the amount of time and effort spent on this, you may wish to start with AI technology to assist with the development of these descriptions by providing AI content generators with applicable keywords and phrases.

While having a website is critical, it's equally important to take the necessary steps to drive traffic to this site. Leveraging social media platforms is a fast, easy, and cost-effective way to get the word out. While these platforms are often used to market toward new patients, including various posts about company culture or sharing employee testimonials can help potential candidates learn more about what it's like to work for your practice.

Ultimately, the best form of recruitment in the medical industry is word of mouth.

Practice leaders responsible for recruitment and other human resource functions may also consider hosting live virtual Q&A sessions for people who are curious about your practice.

During these events, candidates will have the opportunity to interact with current staff members to ask about the practice, work culture, and career development opportunities.

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Encourage your team to share information about available opportunities with their networks to drive interest and organic engagement among potential candidates.

Properly vet candidates

If you take away only one thing from this eBook, let this be it. Taking the time to find, vet, and hire the right person for a role is one of the most important aspects of building your team—and lays the groundwork for your success overall. Both recruitment and training are costly and time-consuming. Investing in an employee who isn't the right fit for your practice can be an expensive waste of time and effort. In fact, according to nationally-recognized talent acquisition expert, Edie Goldberg, the total cost of hiring a new employee can be three to four times the position's salary, when considering both hard and soft costs.

Below, we have outlined specific steps you can take to avoid making this mistake and feel confident in your hiring decisions:

1. Create thorough job descriptions

Thorough job descriptions are essential in any organization as they provide clarity and structure for both employers and employees. This is true across all industries and disciplines. These descriptions serve as a foundation for effective recruitment, selection, and performance management processes.

When you're ready to create a job description, start by clearly defining the purpose and objectives of the position.

This step will help identify the necessary skills, qualifications, and experience required in this role. With those objectives in mind, outline the specific responsibilities and tasks that the employee will be responsible for. Be detailed and specific, including any tools or software they will need to use.

Next, consider the required qualifications and skills. This includes educational background, certifications, and any necessary technical skills. Be sure to include both required and preferred qualifications to attract only well-suited candidates for the role. Within the job description, you should also outline reporting relationships and any supervisory responsibilities, as well as any key performance indicators or metrics that will be used to measure success in the role.

As a final step, be sure to review and finalize the job description with relevant stakeholders and practice leaders to check for accuracy and completeness. It's also a good practice to periodically update and revise job descriptions as roles and responsibilities evolve within the practice.

Taking the time to find, vet, and hire the right person for a role is one of the most important aspects of building your team—and lays the groundwork for your success overall.

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2. Develop thoughtful interview questions

You've already determined that certain candidates have the basic skills and experience you require, now it's time to dig deeper. During the interview process, the hiring team will gather more details supporting those skills and experiences, showcasing how that person works, interacts with others, solves problems, and thinks critically.

It's important to carefully craft interview questions that will elicit specific and relevant information from candidates. Well-designed questions allow employers to assess the candidate's skills, knowledge, and fit for the role. They also help to ensure fair and unbiased evaluations by focusing on job-related qualifications and avoiding discriminatory or irrelevant inquiries.

Interviews are usually not too long, so only ask open-ended questions that will produce the most information. Every question must be directly related to the job, and you should ask each candidate the same questions.

To get the details you're looking for, avoid yes/no questions and ask open-ended, behavioral questions that require the candidate to give real-life examples of situations where they have used their skills and experience.

Interview Question Examples

- How do you resolve conflict within your team?
- Describe a major change that occurred in a job that you held, and what did you do to adapt?
- Can you tell us about a time when you had to motivate your direct reports or co-workers?
- If you were given a task outside of your skill set, how would you handle that situation?
- What would you say are your most significant projects or accomplishments at work?
- Describe a time that you made a mistake—what did you take away from that experience?
- How would you handle a phone call with a patient or family member who is upset or confrontational?
- What type of work environments bring out the best in you?
- What do you know about our practice and what attracts you to our organization?
- Where do you stand out professionally? What would your co-workers tell me that you were great at?
- How would the last few people that you have worked for/reported to rate your performance? Have you listed any of these people as a reference?
- What makes you the best candidate for this position?

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3. Evaluate candidates

After completing the interviews, get your team together immediately to review all candidates. Don't wait! You want to meet while their impressions are still fresh in your minds. During this discussion, compare and contrast the results of each interview. What strengths and weaknesses did you find? Are there any unique experiences or accomplishments that stand out?

After the interviewing process is complete, the best way to compare job candidates is to use a standardized evaluation framework that includes specific criteria and scoring systems that align with the role's requirements. As a team, you should carefully evaluate and rank candidates based on their performance during the interview, including their responses to questions, problem-solving abilities, communication skills, and cultural fit. By using a systematic approach, you'll be better equipped to execute a fair and objective assessment of each candidate, allowing for a well-informed decision-making process.

4. Conduct background checks

Many staff members will work directly with patients and/or have access to confidential medical information and prescription drugs. Conducting background checks will help you verify their credentials and protect patients, staff, your records, and your practice.

You can hire companies to run thorough checks for you. This type of information is key to making informed hiring decisions, especially within a medical practice where many employees have access to protected health information or work with vulnerable populations.

Depending on the job's requirements, you can use background checks for:

- Work and credit histories
- Educational degrees, certifications, and licenses
- Criminal records
- Drug screening

Thorough background checks also help to protect the company from potential liability or damage to its reputation. Ultimately, this process demonstrates your practice's commitment to ensuring the safety and well-being of both staff and patients, as well as upholding ethical and legal standards.

5. Offer enticing compensation and perks

Competitive compensation is of the utmost importance when it comes to not only attracting candidates, but also retaining existing employees long-term. Before beginning your search, you should take some time to research competitive salaries to appropriately establish salary ranges and compensation packages. The job market is fierce, and time is of the essence—be ready to extend an offer at a moment's notice.

In today's job market, many candidates seek out flexible schedules when choosing where to work. While this may not always be possible across every role in your practice, take some time to

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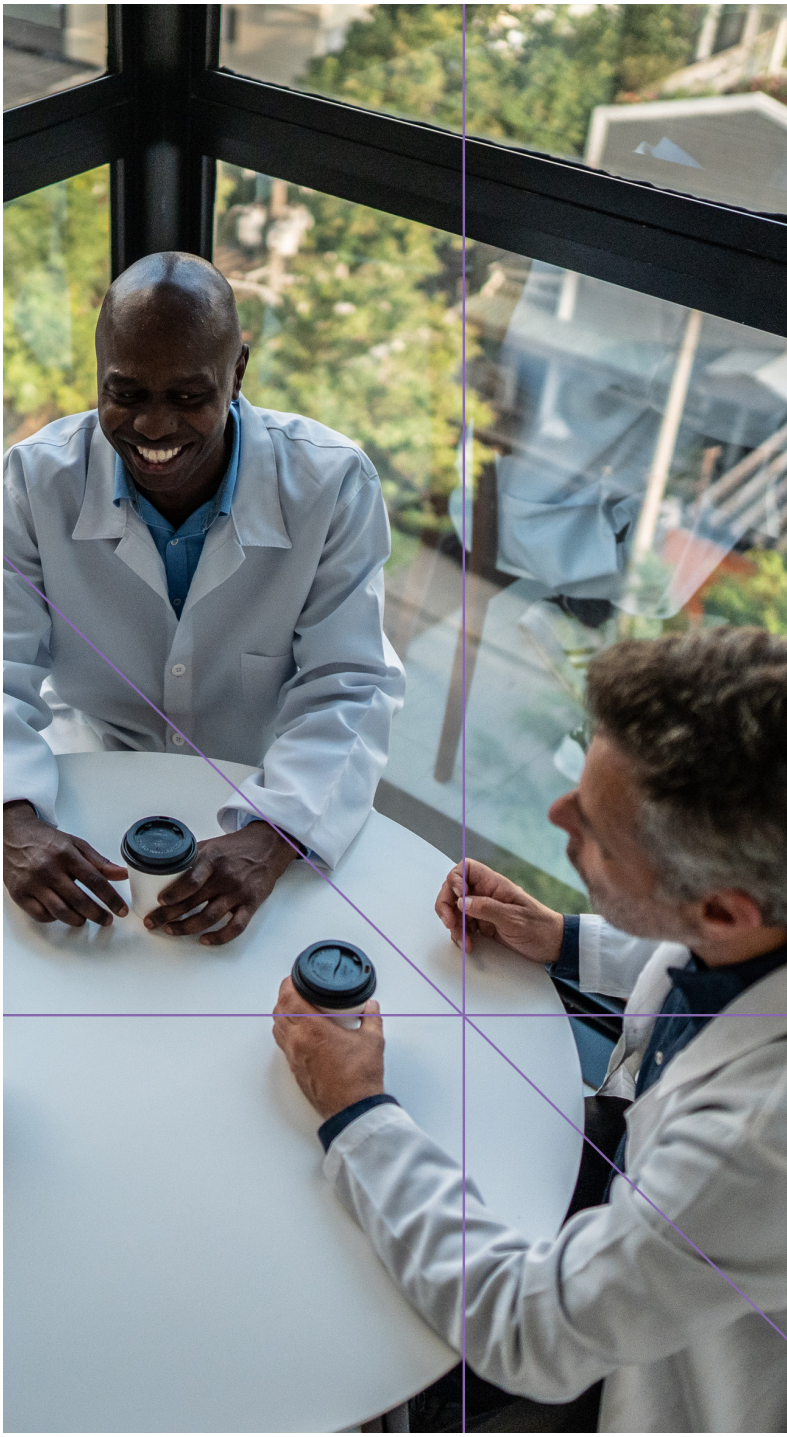
identify where you may be able to offer staff the ability to work from home or create their own hours.

An effective way to meet the expectations of potential candidates is to understand what offerings are most important to them. In our experience, compensation will greatly outweigh other options for many front-line workers. However, certain benefits such as healthcare premiums for all teammates or sign-on bonuses can be an effective means to display additional monetary value outside of compensation rates. For other workers, “soft benefits” are given a great deal of importance, so we encourage you to consider unique perks and benefits that set your practice apart from the pack. Well-being programs, family education savings plans, and professional development opportunities are all excellent examples of such offerings.

6. Give yourself grace to make mistakes

Despite your best efforts, it’s still possible that a new hire isn’t displaying the skills that your practice needs. While this realization can pose serious challenges, it’s important that you don’t waste time and resources that are not going to net you positive results.

While many employers leverage a 90-day probationary period for new workers, employment in many U.S. states is ‘at-will’, meaning an employee or employer can terminate the employment relationship at any time, for any reason (except, of course, for discrimination). That said, designating a specific amount of time as an introductory period can be an effective way to closely review



performance and provide coaching as necessary during those early days when it may be most impactful.

For illustrative purposes, if your practice decides to follow a probationary or introductory period, we encourage you to look critically at your new hire’s performance and contributions to the

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team right from the start. If during this time you are not completely confident in your hiring decision, identify which areas of their performance have you feeling concerned. From there, provide the employee with opportunities for coaching and feedback to help them improve their performance using clearly defined goals and expectations. You will then need to pay very close attention over the remainder of the introductory period to assess how things have or haven't changed.

If you are still not confident in your new hire's abilities after your initial introductory period, it's always an option to extend the introductory period, typically at 30-day intervals. Don't be afraid to use your practice's performance management structure to address any concerns you have, such as verbal or written warnings. If at any point, you think that your new hire is not going to work out, having written expectations will go a long way to justify a potential involuntary termination.

Your time is valuable as is your new hire's and the last thing you want to do is waste time trying to make a square peg fit into a round hole. It is important to have honest two-way communication during this time as you both assess if the role and expectations are a good fit for each other.

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CHAPTER SIX

Retain

In the previous chapter, we explored some of the ways that you can enhance your recruitment strategies to bring new, talented staff members to your practice. Equally important, however, is understanding how to keep them.

Increased competition among medical practices does more than just make recruitment difficult. With so many options available to them, your existing staff members also have the opportunity to easily seek out new employment if they're feeling unsatisfied or "stuck" in their current job. If you want to keep these hard workers on your payroll—you have to give them a reason to stay.

Towards the end of Chapter 5, we discussed how you can stay competitive with compensation and benefits, but this isn't the only factor defining a great place to work. You need to design your practice in such a way that current employees have plenty of reasons to want to come to work every day.

Let's look at some of the ways you can make your practice the place where employees and candidates want to be.

Define your company culture

A company culture is your practice's personality. It defines your values, how your team interacts with patients and others with whom you do business, and how you present your business to the outside world.

A positive and supportive culture plays a vital role in creating a healthy work environment where staff members feel valued, respected, and motivated. This, in turn, leads to increased employee satisfaction and engagement—which are key factors in reducing turnover.

A strong company culture can foster a sense of belonging and teamwork, enhancing collaboration among staff members and promoting a cohesive and harmonious work atmosphere.

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Having this strong foundation can also cultivate a sense of loyalty and commitment to the organization where employees feel that they can thrive and grow professionally.

Establishing this kind of positive company culture begins with strong leadership and clear values. Practice leaders should come together to outline their overarching mission and practice values and be prepared to demonstrate and promote this culture through their own actions and behaviors.

Establishing Your Vision, Mission, & Values

We recommend you consider the following steps to thoughtfully craft your practice's vision, mission, and values:

1. **Assess and establish your practice's vision.**

   Leaders should evaluate the purpose and long-term aspirations of the medical practice. Engage key stakeholders such as employees, patients, and community members in the process. Their input will help create more comprehensive and inclusive vision, mission, and values statements.

2. **Conduct a values identification exercise.**

   Collaboratively identify the core values that represent the practice's overarching beliefs and principles. This can be done through surveys, focus groups, or workshops to gather input and consensus.

3. **Define the mission statement.**

   Clearly articulate the practice's reason for existence, target audience, and the value it provides. The mission statement should be concise, impactful, and memorable.

4. **Draft the values statement.**

   Develop a set of values that reflect the desired behaviors and attitudes within the medical practice. These values should be specific, actionable, and representative of the practice's culture.

5. **Communicate and integrate.**

   Share the finalized vision, mission, and values statements with the entire staff, along with the rationale behind them. Integrate the mission and values into daily operations, decision-making processes, and performance evaluations to reinforce their importance.

6. **Review and adapt.**

   Regularly review and assess how effectively the vision, mission, and values statements are being put into practice. Adjust as needed to remain in alignment with the evolving needs and goals of the practice.

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Provide advancement opportunities

When you create opportunities for professional development and growth that match your employees' skill sets and career goals, they are much more likely to feel valued by the organization and stay with you for the long haul. In comparison to large hospitals, small practices often have even greater opportunities for advancement with the ability to cross-train staff and add to their skill sets.

One effective way to explore opportunities that are well-suited for individual staff members is by working with them directly to develop what's known as an Individual Development Plan (IDP). IDPs are used in organizations across many industries as a tool to assist employees in their career and personal development as they work towards both short and long-term career goals.

By the numbers

- Employees are **18x more likely** to produce great work when they receive recognition for their efforts.

Source: O.C. Tanner

When starting this process, communication is key. It's the only way to build trust and understanding among staff members and leaders. To create effective IDPs, start by establishing regular one-on-one meetings with direct reports, and use this time to discuss their career aspirations, strengths, and areas for improvement. Together, work to identify growth opportunities that may be beneficial to both the practice and the staff member, and develop clear and measurable goals that align with both of your needs.

With these goals in mind, you can use this framework to determine the resources and opportunities available, such as training programs, certification programs, mentorship, or additional responsibilities. Just don't let the conversation end there—be sure to continue to reference an employee's IDP during feedback sessions and performance reviews, and revisit goals as their role evolves.

For example, when discussing career goals with a medical assistant, you may learn that they hope to one day become a registered nurse—a very noble pursuit! To support their growth, you can create opportunities for one-on-one mentorship with more senior members of the nursing staff or give them tools to further their education. One way to do this would be implementing a tuition reimbursement program. With these programs, the employees can sign a written agreement to work within the practice for a certain period of time following their graduation from the program of their choice in order to qualify for the full reimbursement.

Programs like this are mutually beneficial, as the employee gains access to the means they need to achieve their personal career goals and the practice is better able to retain talented staff long term.

Show your appreciation

This one is pretty straightforward, but you would be surprised just how impactful a thoughtful employee appreciation program can be.

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Generally speaking, employees are 18 times more likely to produce great work when they receive recognition for their efforts and many studies have shown that employee recognition is a key determining factor for employee retention. Even better news? It doesn't take much. According to one of these studies, companies that spend just 1% of their payroll on recognition have a 79% higher success rate in achieving their business goals, as compared to those who spend less. To capitalize on this trend, you could create a formal recognition program for a pre-determined set of accomplishments or keep it simple with ad-hoc rewards for a job well done.

And while these formal appreciation programs are a necessary part of retention strategy, cultivating a general culture of gratitude will also go a long way. Encourage physicians and practice leaders to adopt the habit of saying "thank you" to staff members in the moment to recognize a job well-done, as these simple words can hold a significant amount of weight in a team-based environment. In our experience, healthcare workers are particularly loyal to the doctors and staff they support and receiving that direct and immediate acknowledgment can help them feel valued as a part of the larger team.

Examples of Employee Recognition

- Social media "shout-outs"
- Company outings
- Customized rewards for high-performing employees
- Milestone celebrations
- Certificates of achievement
- Handwritten notes to acknowledge performance

Enact well-being initiatives

Well-being initiatives have become commonplace throughout workplaces in many industries, but the importance of these initiatives in the medical industry cannot be overstated.

As previously discussed, burnout among staff members is a major contributor to attrition rates within the medical industry. Even in a fully-staffed environment, these jobs are no walk in the park, and providing avenues for employees to prioritize their mental and emotional well-being is critical

To initiate well-being programs, start by assessing the needs and preferences of the staff, such as stress management, mindfulness, or physical health. Then create a dedicated well-being team to plan, implement, and evaluate programs, and determine the budget and resources available to dedicate to well-being initiatives to see what's within reach. If possible, we encourage you to explore outsourcing this process to organizations that specialize in building effective well-being programs, or even leverage community partnerships to supplement these programs.

Once in place, you'll need to develop clear and effective communication plans to promote awareness of the well-being program and encourage participation.

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Need more buy-in from staff? Try introducing incentives or recognition programs to motivate active engagement.

One thing to watch out for when creating a plan is to avoid what is known as "well-being washing"—essentially, talking the talk without walking the walk (more about this phenomenon on the Curi blog). To make sure that your programs are achieving the desired result, be sure to regularly monitor and evaluate their effectiveness and solicit feedback from staff.

Develop a succession plan

You may be years, even decades, away from retirement. But that's the best time to plan. Succession planning is crucial in a medical practice, as it promotes continuity of care and leadership, while allowing for the identification and development of talent within the organization—further fostering a culture of growth and professional advancement.

5 Steps for Succession Planning

Some steps to consider when developing a succession plan may include:

1. **Identify key leadership.**

   Determine which roles are essential for your practice's continued success in the future. This may include positions such as senior physicians, the practice manager, and other organizational leaders, as well as staff members with specialized skills and training.

2. **Establish clear criteria for succession.**

   Clearly define the criteria and qualifications required for individuals to be considered for succession into key roles. (Make sure you're paying attention to both the technical skills and leadership qualities that are essential for the role!)

3. **Assess current talent.**

   Take some time to evaluate the skills, competencies, and potential of your current staff members, both clinical and non-clinical, to identify specific individuals who may have the capability to assume leadership roles in the future.

4. **Provide mentorship and coaching.**

   Establish mentorship and coaching programs that pair high-potential employees with experienced leaders within the organization to facilitate knowledge transfer and skill development over a long period of time.

5. **Develop a written succession plan.**

   If you're nearing retirement, outline the steps and timelines for identifying, developing, and promoting internal talent, including specific actions for addressing potential gaps in leadership.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

Don’t be Afraid to Ask for Help

That was a lot of information to take in with a wide range of strategies to consider as you navigate the staffing crisis. But before you get overwhelmed, we want to remind you that you don’t have to do this alone. Recruitment firms, technology partners, marketing experts—there are a wide range of professionals that are dedicated to helping you achieve your goals with proven expertise and experience. To further streamline processes and use your time and resources effectively, holistic consulting firms like Curi Advisory can also serve as an incredible asset, as they take much of the burden off your team by designing and execute solutions that have your unique goals and objectives in mind.

While the solutions outlined in this eBook are not one-size-fits-all, we hope that you have learned a bit more about what it will take to not only make it through today’s staffing crisis—but come out on top. It’s natural to experience some anxiety regarding the future of your practice, but you can rest assured that there are solutions out there, you **can** survive this staffing crisis, and we are here to help you through it.

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About Curi Advisory

Protect, optimize, and grow with confidence.

Curi Advisory is Curi's business unit providing data-driven, human-inspired healthcare business solutions. In today's fast-moving healthcare landscape, technology and data alone are not enough. You need human insight to make data actionable.

As thoughtful partners with deep practice management expertise, we actively listen and proactively curate solutions to protect, optimize, and grow your practice. Our proprietary healthcare marketing and analytics platform and data-driven approach to consulting allow us to pinpoint your business's specific needs and identify opportunities to help your practice thrive.

To learn more about Curi Advisory, visit curi.com/advisory. Or click here to connect with our experts who can help you navigate the staffing crisis today.

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