

The Importance of Employee Engagement

The most valuable asset to your medical practice is not what you think.

BY KIM NICHOLS, MD; EMILY ANNE PALMER, MA; AND SHAINA GREGORY

Each and every single aspect of a private practice's operation contributes to its success. One of the most important parts of a company is the caliber and the tenure of its good employees. Unbeknownst to many medical doctors, true employee engagement is the key to any successful medical practice. It's impossible for a dermatologist to operate a medical office with impeccable patient care without the right staff exhibiting your vision consistently.

The goal of employee engagement is tenure, an HR term simply defined as the ability to keep your staff on your staff. Having dedicated and committed employees is not organic or simple, but it is one of the most significant contributions to NicholsMD becoming a booming practice.

KNOW YOUR PATIENTS

Patients love to see familiar faces when they visit you for treatments. They trust a familiar face, so they are more likely to have a service done with you, as well as return for follow up appointments, because of the bond they experienced in their patient care. Thus, employee tenure is not only saving time and money on recruitment costs and onboarding training, but it's also a contributing factor in your patients' satisfaction with you and your practice. Patients appreciate when employees remember them and their special events, like weddings, birthdays, promotions, or vacations, at their follow-up appointment. This type of patient care makes even a large practice feel more intimate and boutique-like, because your staff *knows* your patients. Truly, patients aren't interested in how much you know until they know how much you care. As a practice, we highly encourage our staff to keep calendars, not just for tasks and deadlines, but also to make note of their patients' special life events. It is extremely rare that you find another medical office calling a patient to say, "Jane, I just wanted to say have a great trip to Cabo. Don't forget

"Consistency, dedication, and engagement are key attributes that each employee must possess in order for the office to succeed."

your SPF (I can pack you a travel-size in case you need one), and we'll see you when you get back. You deserve it!"

Be the office that makes these types of unprecedented follow-ups that are genuine and lead to patient tenure, thanks to invested, tenured employees.

TAKE PRIDE IN EMPLOYEES

At NicholsMD, we take pride in each and every one of our employees. It is important to recognize all the successes and celebrations that each employee has, not only as employees, but most importantly as people. We keep track of an employee's birthday, work anniversary, graduation, and other exciting life announcements. We always make sure to congratulate each employee with a special gift. Our signature gift is an exotic orchid, which is probably more expensive than the average employee token, but is a nice treat when we send one to an employee who may not have otherwise bought this luxury item for themselves. On a less expensive note, Starbucks e-Gift Cards are convenient for smaller congratulations. Consider a note, such as, "The next cup is on us! Your extra efforts were noticed from this busy week." No matter the investment, it's important to articulate your appreciation of each employee and to keep the gift consistent. It gives the understanding that all workers are treated equally and recognized.

TRACK KPIS

Another way we ensure that our staff is professionally

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engaged is our KPI system for consistent, timely feedback. KPIs, which stands for Key Performance Indicators, are done monthly, and it’s a tool that assesses each employee on their general adherence to the office’s mission statements and values, as well as their individual performance as noted on their job description. On the last Friday of each month, the employee fills out their own KPI review, which helps them to reflect on their professional performance. The scale is simple: 1 (below expected level), 2 (at expected level), and 3 (exceptional, beyond expected level). The approximately 15-item questionnaire is then given to the office manager who reviews the employee’s performance, and also scores the employee.

It’s important for the manager to be cognizant of the employee’s self-awareness. What did the employee score themselves high on? Low on? What discrepancies are shown between the management score and the employee score? These questions are answered in 30-minute meetings on the first Tuesday of the new month between the manager and the employee. The manager gives feedback, discusses goals, and acknowledges successes.

As an added treat, when an employee scores a 90 percent or better, they receive a flat stipend of \$100 as our thank you. This encourages the employees to put in extra effort and to give proper thought into their own performance each and every day. According to *Forbes* magazine, 72 percent of Millennials who received consistent feedback from their managers found satisfaction in their workplace. Therefore, waiting for an annual review to discuss how employees should be more productive is not effective. KPIs are efficient, effective, and keep the company performing at its best.

MEET REGULARLY

Beyond individual professional performance, we also host a staff meetings to “recalibrate” after the weekend. On Mondays, the main goal is to reset the general pace and expectations of the practice. The meetings on Mondays give management an opportunity to present

their expectations for the upcoming week, review policies, and plan for the week ahead. Additionally, each week, individual staff members present a Staff Education Spotlight. This portion of the meeting gives one staff member the chance to enlighten the entire staff in their area of expertise, such as Administrators reviewing phone etiquette, the Physician Assistant updating on rosacea, or the Medical Assistant addressing HIPAA. At the end of their presentation, the staff then has to answer a three question quiz as a follow-up to the presentation. Anyone who passes five quizzes receives a free skincare product.

To further keep employees engaged, we host a weekly book club. In these meetings, the staff utilizes the opportunity to read a book aligned to the way we want them to engage with our patients. Currently, we are reading *Hug Your Customers* by Jack Mitchell. This book touches on how to properly engage patients and put their interest first and foremost. This allows for employees to be inspired by how other offices personalize sales and achieve astounding results in the way they treat their customers. It’s important for employees to have buy in for “hugging” patients, a term coined by Jack Mitchell, which means to go above and beyond. These meetings allow for the staff to contribute openly, honestly, and come up with their own ideas on how to enhance their job, the staff, and the practice to an exceptional level. And 100 percent of our employees, when surveyed, have indicated that they have found the book club rewarding.

A KEY TO SUCCESS

Keeping employees engaged is a key factor to any private practice’s success. Business owners must be willing to exert the right amount effort and energy that it takes to keep employees truly engaged. It is not organic, and definitely not easy. However, when your company mission is being fulfilled and patients are responding positively to your patient care initiatives, you will definitely secure your spot as a successful practice! ■

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