Developing and Implementing an Effective Recruitment Process

By **Margie Satinsky, M.B.A.**

The people who work with you and for you are your practice's most important assets. Regardless of how well you are organized and financed, success depends on your practice's ability to recruit and retain good employees.

This article suggests a multi-step recruitment process that includes understanding federal and state laws, articulating the practice's mission, goals, priorities and values, setting employee goals, determining job requirements, developing a formal job description, publicizing the position, reviewing applications, conducting telephone and face-to-face interviews, checking references, making a job offer, providing orientation and seeking external guidance as needed.

Understand the Federal and State Laws that Govern the Employer-Employee Relationship

Make sure you understand the legal environment in which you manage your practice. Your attorney can provide guidance. Design your recruitment process so it shows your commitment to equal employment and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) by producing an adequate pool of women, minorities, mature and disabled workers.

Articulate your Practice's Mission, Goals, Priorities and Values

Start with your practice's unique characteristics. What makes the practice special? It may be a combination of services offered and demonstrated commitment to honoring the individuality of each and every patient.

What's the practice's future direction? Clearly articulate goals for the next three to five years.

What personal characteristics are important in your work environment? Smart and motivated individuals who focus on tasks with little regard for interpersonal relationships and teamwork may not be the best choice.

State the Position Goals

Make sure that the goals for the vacant or new position are consistent with the practice's goals. For example, if you plan to simultaneously open a satellite office and replace your electronic health record (EHR) system, recruit a practice manager who can handle both special projects while continuing to manage ongoing daily operations. If the goal is business as usual with no special projects, think less about initiative and recruit a person who is skilled at keeping things on an even keel.

Identify the Job Requirements

What knowledge, skills and education are required to successfully perform the job? Is an advanced degree necessary? Does the position require someone who thrives on taking the initiative and in helping you move in new directions? What's the scope of supervision?

Develop a Formal Job Description

Use the position goals and job requirements as a foundation for developing a formal job description. We recommend a standard format that includes the job title, reporting relationship, span of control/supervisory responsibilities, required initiative/leadership, general summary of duties and responsibilities, priority and secondary functions, working conditions, physical and mental effort required, time commitment and performance requirements (knowledge/skills/abilities, education, experience, certification, licenses and alternatives to minimum qualifications).

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Publicize the Position

Publicize the new or vacant position in appropriate places. If you are an existing practice and encourage current employees to apply for vacant positions, start by posting the job internally.

For recruitment outside the practice, use

both free recruitment methods (e.g. mentioning the position to medical colleagues and employees) and select appropriate paid advertising. For example, in North Carolina, the North Carolina Medical Group Managers maintains an active job recruitment service. National organizations like the Medical Group Management Association of America (MGMA) offer job search assistance to both practices that are hiring and to individuals who are looking for new opportunities. The national organizations for both primary care and specialty physicians may also offer recruitment services.

Be sure to post vacant positions on your website. Some of your patients or their family members and friends may be well qualified for a position.

When ready to make a job offer to the top candidate, call the individual on the phone, make a verbal offer and follow up with a written letter.

Review the Resumes that You Receive

Designate one individual in your practice (or an external consultant, if you have chosen to use one) to review the resumes that you receive. As a courtesy and as a method of reducing phone calls to your practice, notify all applicants that you have received the applications. When you eliminate candidates, let them know and thank them for their interest. Tell the candidates that interest you of the timetable for interviewing and making a decision.

Conduct Telephone and Face-to-Face Interviews

Reduce the group of qualified applicants down to six to eight people. Schedule brief telephone interviews to obtain additional information and a sense of the applicants' telephone skills. Pare down the list and invite only the best four or five candidates to come in for personal interviews.

Prepare carefully for the personal interviews. Develop a standard list of interview questions that you ask every applicant, keeping in mind the questions that you can ask/cannot ask to comply with federal and state laws. For example, ask about each applicant's ability to perform the job, not about a disability or handicap. Don't ask about marital status; it's not relevant to the job.

Consider starting with one-on-one interviews. When you invite the most promising candidates back for second interviews, involve other members of your team.

Contact References

Following the completion of several rounds of interviews, narrow the selection to two or three people. At this point, with applicant permission, contact references and check credentials. Ask each reference the same set of questions.

Perform Criminal and Background Checks

As an employer in the medical field, be particularly diligent about performing criminal and background checks. The financial penalties and/or repercussions for billing fraud and clinical incompetence are severe.

Two practical steps can help you accomplish this step easily. First, engage an outside service to do the criminal and background checks. Second, ask those employees who require professional certification or licensure to sign a statement indicating they will maintain these credentials.

Make the Job Offer

When ready to make a job offer to the top candidate, call the individual on the phone, make a verbal offer and follow up with a written letter. The offer letter is different from an employment contract, and for some employees you need both.

Include in the letter the job title, starting date, reporting relationship, job description, benefits and eligibility date and description of the probationary period (if you have one). If the offer is contingent on the results of drug and alcohol screening, make that requirement clear. Attach a copy of the employee benefits so the individual to whom the offer is being extended can take this information into consideration in making his/her decision.

Provide Orientation

Regardless of the position level of the new employee, schedule one or more formal orientation sessions. Taking time to introduce new employees to the practice's unique environment yields better results than asking new people to hit the ground running.

Seek External Help As Needed

Two external professionals can assist in the recruitment process. Seek guidance from legal counsel regarding employment contracts. If you'd like guidance on the overall process, telephone and personal interviews and reference checks, seek help from a qualified practice management consultant.

Regardless of whether or not you do everything internally or outsource some or part of the recruitment responsibility, move slowly and carefully. Make a good choice!