

## Physician Staffing: The Right People Can Make or Break Your Practice



We work with a number of medical practices, and these kinds of operations present some unique business challenges. As with most entrepreneurial operations, doctors tend to want to focus on what they are really good at, which is healing patients. That means that running the office, the actual business operation, has to fall to staff members they can trust. However, there are some specific traits you want to look for in medical office staff. Here's what we have learned from working with our clients:

1. You need a good office manager, practice manager, or, if you have a larger practice, an office administrator. As a physician, you don't want to have to worry about managing day-to-day operations so you need a strong right-hand manager.
2. When hiring staff who interact with the public, either in the clinic, the lab, or at the front desk, you need positive, friendly people who understand that patients are really customers. With medical care we all have a choice. Private practice has to compete with the larger HMOs, and one of the biggest distinguishing factors is customer service. If you can treat the patients as individuals, providing personal, professional, kind, and courteous service, then you are more likely to keep your patients. (Compare this to bad service in a restaurant with great food. No matter how good the dishes are, if the service is bad you don't go back.)
3. The same is true for partners and referrals. If your medical practice is disorganized or discourteous, you can lose referrals from other medical practices.
4. Schedulers are the key to profitability. In the current economic climate the only way to make money is to provide quality care quickly and efficiently. If you can only spend 10 or 15 minutes with each patient to break even, then you need to have a lot of information at hand before you even see the patient. That's the scheduler's job; to make sure patients are on time, their information is up to date, and the schedule is full.

5. The billing department also has to be first rate. Unlike other businesses, doctors' billings have unique characteristics that require an additional attention to detail. We have seen cases where doctors are losing thousands to uncollected co-payments and sloppy insurance claims. Your billing staff needs to be able to collect money from patients at the appropriate time, understand how to pursue denied claims, and collect from both patients and insurers without leaving any money behind.

Whether you choose to outsource billing or keep it in-house, the billing department should be prepared to provide some intelligence into the financial performance of the practice, and their performance in terms of collections. They should be able to provide metrics that are reported monthly, or even weekly, such as:

- What is the practice's average "days in aging," i.e., how long does it take to collect from insurance companies on claims?
- Are patient balances being collected at the time of service?
- How much money is being written off each month and why? Is it from improperly submitted claims? Outdated insurance contracts? Some other problem?
- Are the billers using the proper codes for insurance claims for the best possible reimbursements?

As a physician, if you can assemble [the right team of professionals](#) who understand your business and understand how to run the office, then you can worry about the patients and let the practice run with only minor supervision.