

# Personnel Management During a Labor Shortage



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Labor shortages are creating havoc for many businesses in the United States, and medical practices are not immune. Although there may be some relief when the federal government's bonus checks end this fall, the problem will not come to a screeching halt. Indeed, experts believe that the growth of the ambulatory sector – [22,000 of the 23,000 jobs added in health care in May alone](#) -- will propel even more challenges. Moreover, the workload burden has been unrelenting, causing some employees to migrate out of healthcare altogether to other, less stressful – and often higher-paying jobs. Regardless of how you slice it, the labor shortage is a reality.

Although you could rely on luck to get you through this challenge, consider taking proactive steps to mitigate the risk of an inadequate labor force:

**Show Your Appreciation.** There are no words for the turmoil you and your practice have endured over the past 18 months, but there is also no doubt that the pandemic touched

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the personal lives of *everyone* on your team. Show support for your team with a gesture like bringing a light breakfast to snack on, accompanied by a sign that reads: “thanks for all you do;” give everyone on your team a handwritten note: “I appreciate you, and everything you do for our patients.” Consider adding a gift card for a major retailer or gas station -- or offer a gift certificate for a movie theater with a bag of popcorn. Encourage your colleagues to take action as well; make sure your team knows they are appreciated.

***Engage with Your Team.*** Make a list of all your employees and commit to spending at least 10 minutes with each of them in the next 30 to 60 days. Ask each member of your team: “How are you?” (Yes, just this simple question demonstrates your engagement and can stand out during this tumultuous time.) Follow it with: “What can we do to make you be more successful at your job?” You will be amazed at the suggestions – and your team will appreciate being asked.

***Review Compensation.*** The labor shortage is not the only influence on staff; as more health care organizations embrace a virtual delivery platform, there is a significant shift in the employment market. Employees can work for anyone – anywhere in the world. Your employees may be bombarded by offers from your local hospital, community health center, or nursing home, but they may also be receiving offers from organizations based in California, Alaska, or other far-flung places. It is an opportune time to make sure that you’re paying competitively. As many employees may focus solely on the hourly rate, it also pays to document the benefits you offer – and even attach a dollar value. Consider listing your full compensation package, to include health insurance, disability benefits, leave, and so forth. It might also be time to add a benefit such as childcare or tuition reimbursement, a payroll-deduction emergency savings account, and an extra health day (or two) for mental health or to make up preventive care skipped during the pandemic.

***Proactively Recruit.*** Do not wait until a position opens if you find great talent. Turnover is bound to happen, and it’s a much better investment to pay an extra few months’ salary – rather than wait for someone to resign and scramble. Consider looking in unexpected places – maybe you’ve had an interaction in a retail setting with someone who went above and beyond from a customer service perspective; or recruit back a former employee who decided to stay at home, compelling him or her with a flexible, part-time schedule. Part-timers can be a huge win for your practice, as there are often days of the week that demand higher resources (e.g., Mondays) that might be perfect for a part-timer – and your virtual business, if applicable, could accommodate someone working from home.

Attrition does not have to be negative, but it certainly needs to be managed. Conduct exit interviews to learn from departing staff members what could have been done to improve the work environment. Most importantly, set a plan in motion now to avoid getting shocked by the resignations that may be coming across your desk in the near future.

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