

OPENING COMMUNICATION WITH YOUR STAFF

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The old adage is, your patient knows first what's not working well with your practice. Your staff members know next...and you may never know.

Does your staff feel comfortable communicating the good and the bad news to you? Do they focus on keeping you happy or covering up their mistakes or worst of all negating the patient complaint?

In order to really understand the pulse of your practice you need to not only communicate your vision of patient care but LISTEN to what is happening with the staff.

The first step begins at the staff meetings. I am assuming everyone is meeting at least once a month. If not, this is the absolute minimum that must take place.

Step two is to have an agenda that involves everyone presenting a short segment of information or education. Focus on the expertise or responsibility of each staff member. Have them report on new activities, i.e., lens designs or insurance changes. Then each area of the practice will have statistics to track and report at each staff meeting. The point is not to place blame but to get everyone involved as a team in problem solving.

Step three setting the "dos" and "don'ts" of organizing a productive meeting.

Come prepared – if there is something you'd like to discuss advise the meeting coordinator to add it to the agenda. Each individual must bring materials that allow them to take notes or mark their calendar.

Don't leave communication devices on – cell phones or blackberries should be off during the meeting. Actually this should apply to all office hours.

Ask only relevant questions – keep on topic. Don't jump ahead or move off topic.

Do not leave early or arrive late – if you don't value the meeting those in attendance won't either.

Do not interrupt – in every situation interrupting is rude. Let someone complete their thought before expressing your point of view. Remember to try to respond with a positive as initial feedback – this will encourage people to participate. If ideas are negated they will stop flowing.

Do not eat during a meeting – many meeting are conducted over food or with snacks. While food may be served it is neither proper nor attractive to have your mouth full while responding to a question. Likewise people hesitant to participate will eat as a distraction.

Step four is creating the sense of team - SPORTS

S supportive – encourage staff to share positive and negatives information. Questions should be encouraged and then answered with respect. There should be no reprisals for “dumb” questions.

P participative – acknowledge staff opinions and ideas and truly consider implementation of all ideas.

O organized – follow the agenda and keep the talk on track. If necessary carry information over to the next meeting. Or delegate a smaller meeting to address the issue.

R – receptive – keep an open mind. Always try to move an idea forward until you reach a point of clarity. Sometimes it won't be possible to implement an idea but don't respond negatively to any idea until there has been a round of discussion.

T – timely – meetings should be scheduled on a regular basis and are conducted even if all staff cannot attend. Staff attending should be empowered to move ideas forward without needing to have every step pre approved.

S – solutions – the goal of each and every meeting is to find solutions. Avoid gripe sessions when complaining takes over the meeting. Everyone needs to vent but try to keep on track for solutions.

Please take the time to be positive with your staff. As our economic situation is in flux having experienced, qualified staff members who are dedicated will improve the value of your practice. Let each staff member know that you value them. A kind word will go a long way.