

Just How Qualified is Your Staff?



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Is your staff fully qualified to care for your patients needs? How do you know? Does your staff provide complete and accurate information when needed? How do you know?

Seventy percent (70%) of staff do NOT clearly understand what is expected of them. Is that true for your staff? How do you know? Can they demonstrate their skills and knowledge or are you assuming a level of competence?

Making sure that your staff is qualified to provide the level of care you want for your patients is as easy as 1, 2, and 3.

Step One

The first step in assuring yourself that each of your patients receives the quality care you want for them is to clearly communicate your expectation to the staff.

Begin by conducting a staff performance evaluation. Meet with each staff member individually to determine their strengths and weaknesses and establish personal performance goals for each. Once these goals are established you can meet quarterly to confirm that the goals are being meet or hopefully exceeded.

Step Two

Fifty percent (50%) of staff do not feel they truly understand how to perform their duties. They might know what to do, but not why they're doing it; that makes it very hard to make decisions and have credibility with patients.

The second step is to provide training and education for your staff on a regular basis. By providing training you are assured your staff is current and up to date with changes in technology, you will have the ability to reinforce the performance standards and you have a system for communicating changes within the practice. It is human nature to resist change and to fall back into old habits; by training on a regular basis you have established a format to facilitate new behavior.

Set up a training program with more experienced staff, provide monthly internal training programs at your staff meetings, attend classes offered by the American Optometric Association (AOA), and bring in vendors reps to cover product specifics. This outlines a minimum requirement for all staff which should be provided on an ongoing basis. The age old saying, "Staff that needs training the most receives it the least and those that need it the least receive it the most," is, unfortunately, something I see often in my workshops. Continuing education is required of doctors, why wouldn't you require it of your staff?

Some staff-training ideas:

- Bring in a trainer or instructor each quarter to increase the technical knowledge of your staff. These instructors can be vendors or consultants.
- Provide customized training just for your practice on practice management issues, such as Dealing with Difficult People or Customer Service skills.
- Send staff to off site training and education through State Optometric Association, Vision Expos or PEN, to name a few.

Step Three

The third step is to encourage your staff to become Certified Paraoptometrics. This will start them on a career path and allow them to view the position as a profession instead of a job. It will also assure you that your staff is committed to the field and willing to expand their knowledge and have a long term view for your practice and patients.

Contact AOA – at aoa.org or 1-800-365-2219 for details and study materials.

Sample Pop Quiz

In a non threatening environment, possibly at a staff meeting or a performance evaluation, explain that you want to evaluate the level of knowledge for each staff member to enable you to put together a comprehensive training program. But first you need to understand their level of knowledge.

Begin this process by confirming the skills of the staff through a short quiz for each person in each position. Here is a sample of a few quiz topics:

Name three progressive lenses.

Name the fitting characteristics of those lenses (like you would explain it to a patient).

What does a polarizing lens do?

How do you explain polarization to patients?

How does LASIK work?

How do you explain LASIK to a patient?

What does RGP stand for?

Which instruments are used when measuring the cornea to fit a rigid contact lens?

What is a cataract?

Where is a cataract in a patient's eye?

What is the difference between an Optometrist and an Ophthalmologist?

Why do we perform a visual field test?

What area of the eye is damaged by untreated glaucoma?

What is corneal edema?

What is macular degeneration?

The goal of this quiz is to identify the areas within your practice where your staff knowledge could improve, please don't emphasize scoring 100%, the goal is to understand where you need to focus training and development programs and improve patient care. If necessary, alter the quiz to fit the direction of your practice specialty.

Good luck and remember its one step at a time and plan a regular schedule to follow up progress...now, its back to step one!

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