



Private Practice Staffing Guide

Hiring employees will be one of the toughest yet one of the most rewarding things you do as an employer. Practices that consistently do well financially also tend to have the best employees, and those 2 factors are inextricably linked.

Good employees can make going to work a pleasure; difficult employees can try the patience of even the most forgiving employer. The key to having good employees is to find the best candidates and then provide good management to maintain high levels of motivation and dedication to the practice.

Even as an employee, a physician is viewed as an authority figure in a medical practice. The medical assistants, receptionists, billing staff, and supervisors expect physicians to understand and follow the rules. Therefore, as an employer you should have a working knowledge of the laws and statutes regulating the medical practice, and a thorough understanding of the internal personnel guidelines that pertain to managing employees, and be knowledgeable about customary compensation and benefits.

For example, new guidelines allow multiple-contributor documentation directly into the chart, saving the physician time. These documentation contributors can include certified or licensed team members (often medical assistants) or non-licensed non-certified team members, and even the patient. This opens the opportunity to hire pre-allied health students, transcriptionists, and others to assist with work. A shared understanding of this regulation by the physician and the practice staff can increase practice efficiencies and increase levels of professional satisfaction from all parties. The AMA Debunking Regulatory Myths website and the STEPS Forward® Team Documentation toolkit can help you navigate ways that supporting team members can assist the physician in patient care and documentation.

Staffing Your Practice

Staffing ratios can be highly variable, and there are numerous considerations for creating a high-functioning, cohesive, and efficient team that delivers excellent care. The objective is to pinpoint a staffing ratio and team makeup that provides optimal support for physicians in your practice setting. Your specialty or subspecialty professional society may be helpful in providing data specific to your practice.

Calculating the number of support team members that a practice needs relies on determining the number of physicians employed as full-time equivalent (FTE). This can be misleading, however, as calculating FTE with the hours worked per week is frequently based on a standard 40-hour workweek. Research suggests that for every hour of direct face time with patients, a physician spends an additional hour on non-patient-facing desktop medicine (patient portal communication, responding to online requests, etc.).⁴ Taking this into account, a physician with 28 patient scheduled hours likely works closer to 56 total hours per week. It is important to be aware of this when calculating FTEs and establishing your ideal staffing ratio.

Evaluating Clinical Care Team and Administrative Staffing Needs

Figure 1. Evaluating Staffing Needs

Support Staff Per Full-time Equivalent (FTE) Physician Ratio

The number of full-time administrative and clinical team members needed to effectively support 1 full-time physician. The ratio of FTE support team members for every FTE physician will differ between practices, and there is no “right” ratio.

Calculating Staffing Needs

- Determine the total number of physicians in your practice expressed in FTEs. Each full-time physician counts as 1, while each physician that works less than full time counts as fraction of an FTE calculated by dividing their average number of hours worked per week by the full-time standard in your practice.
- Calculate your staffing needs by multiplying the total number of physician FTEs by the total number of FTE non-physician team members needed to effectively support 1 full-time physician in your practice.

Factors That Can Inform Your Staffing Needs

Administrative

- Is billing done in-house, or do you have a vendor?
- Are prior authorizations done in-house or via a vendor?
- What administrative tasks have you outsourced, and what administrative staff do you need to hire (eg, receptionists, staff who complete billing, coding, prior authorization, referrals, and credentialing, managers, human resources, and others)?
- Can you cross-train full-time team members to fill several part-time roles, such as an administrative member handling billing, prior authorization, and referrals, or a practice manager taking on human resources tasks?

Clinical workflows

- How many procedures are done in the office?
- How many clinical and non-clinical tasks are the responsibility of supporting team members?
- Are you performing telehealth visits?
- How many exam rooms do you have?
- How does your practice layout affect your workflows? How much time does it take physicians, support team members, and patients to move through your practice space to address their duties or visit needs?

Patient population

- What is your patient panel size?
- How many patients does each physician see per day?
- What are the needs of your patients? Do they require extra time for assessment and treatment plan review?
- Do your patients have social determinants of health (SDOH) or other needs that require a higher level of care?

Other

- Does your specialty society have staffing recommendations?

Additional Considerations

Staffing
shortages

On-call schedule
(for staff absences)

Training
opportunities

Benefit
packages

Remote
employment
options

Building Bridges Between Practicing Physicians and Administrators

Sometimes physicians overlook the capabilities of their administrative colleagues, and as a result take on more responsibility than they should. Consider every member of your team may have more to offer than their current job description shows. An investment in your team's professional development and responsibilities is an investment in your practice. A practice that recognizes the skill sets and training of its team members—and puts those attributes into action—is a practice that thrives.

Building trust and transparency between practicing physicians and administrators has the potential to improve practice culture and patient experience. This bridge can result in improved working relationships, healthier workplaces, increased personal and organizational resilience, and improved patient–physician experiences.



EXPLORE MORE!

[Building Bridges Between Practicing Physicians and Administrators toolkit](#)

Medical Assistant Professional Development

Medical assistants (MAs) are at the front line of patient care and play an integral role in achieving practice goals such as increased patient satisfaction, improved quality of care, and enhanced team-based care. You can enable medical assistants to contribute in a more meaningful way to the practice team through professional development training.

Note: While creating your own medical assistant professional development program will be invaluable to your practice, it does not take the place of a certified medical assistant training program accredited by organizations.



EXPLORE MORE!

[Medical Assistant Recruitment and Retention toolkit](#)

[Medical Assistant Professional Development toolkit](#)

Team Meetings: Strengthen Relationships and Increase Productivity

Team meetings bring all members of the practice, such as the physician, nurse, MA, and office team members together to analyze the way work is currently being done and take steps to improve efficiency. Because all team members should be involved, you may have to send calls to voicemail during this time. In effective team meetings, each team member is encouraged to share ideas to improve the practice's workflow.



EXPLORE MORE!

[Team Meetings toolkit](#)

[Appreciative Inquiry Principles toolkit](#)

Team-Based Care

Providing care in a collaborative system, one in which team members share responsibilities to achieve high-quality and efficient patient care, improves team collaboration and pride in their work, workflow efficiency, and patient satisfaction.⁴ With the help of other team members, physicians are better able to connect with patients and remain focused on their primary task of patient care.



EXPLORE MORE!

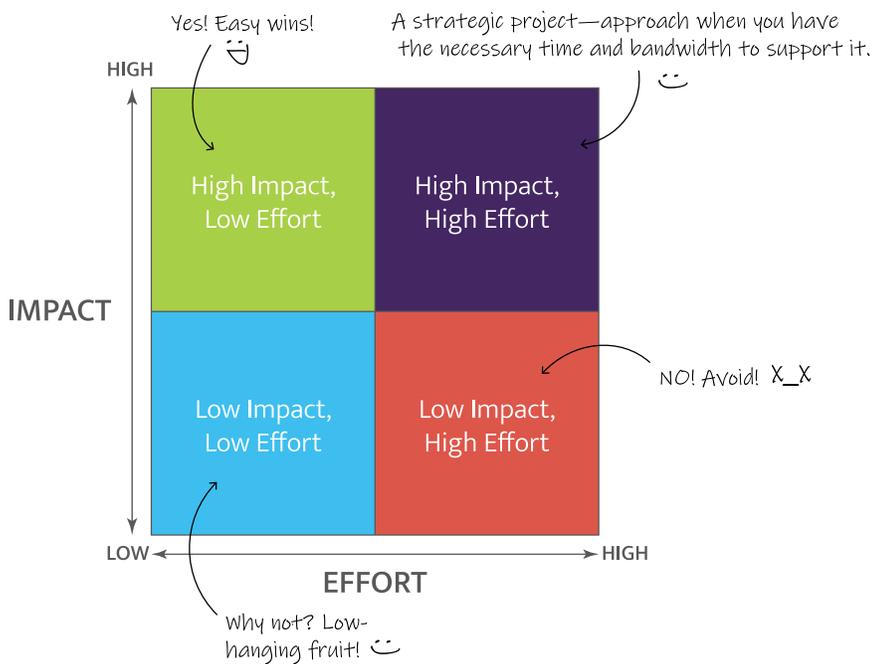
[Team-Based Care toolkit](#)

Team Culture: Strengthen Team Cohesion and Engagement

Team culture in your practice is a set of underlying rules and beliefs that determine how your team interacts with patients and each other. Culture is the way an organization “does business.” New team members may gradually absorb the practice’s culture without being taught or even noticing, but that process is not ideal. Having defined expectations and ways to achieve them can make all those in the medical practice feel part of the team.

One way to foster collaboration is to select a small project as a team that would improve an aspect of your practice. The Impact-Effort matrix below is an example of a way to prioritize ideas for a quick win.

Figure 2. Impact–Effort Matrix Example



HOT TOPIC!

[Bullying in the Health Care Workplace: A Guide to Prevention and Mitigation \(PDF\)](#)

Want more content like this? Check out the complete [Private Practice Playbook](#) and more at www.stepsforward.org.

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