

PRACTICE PEARLS

Improve your team's effectiveness

A high-functioning team is critical to the success of a medical practice. What steps can you take to improve its effectiveness?

- Create a “mission review” card that staff members can fill out and turn in when they observe repeated actions or behaviors that do not align with the practice’s mission. Review these cards weekly during a team huddle, and encourage staff to dig deep and solve the root problem.

- A healthy workplace is one in which staff members feel comfortable providing input and helping make decisions. Make an effort to sit down with members of your team and seek their input, and take off your badge when you do. This communicates that you are just another person sitting around the table and you are ready to listen.

- Don’t ignore broken processes. For example, one common frustration in practices is handling all the messages that get passed throughout the office each day. This isn’t an easy problem to solve, and solutions will vary from practice to practice. But take the first step of identifying a “messaging champion,” someone who can round with each physician in your office to look for ways the process could be improved.

Source: Balik B, Landsman J, Rakul A, Crawley C. Joy in work – lessons from the field. Talk presented at: Institute for Healthcare Improvement 18th Annual Summit on Improving Patient Care in the Office Practice and the Community; April 21, 2017; Orlando.

Measure your team's stress level

Burnout is all too common in medicine but rarely develops overnight. There usually is a preceding pattern of deteriorating work, relationships, and efficiency.

To spot these signs of stress before they become critical, prac-

tices can use the Stress-APGAR test, modeled after the APGAR scoring system used to evaluate newborns:

- **Appearance:** Does the team member look overly tired or otherwise stressed?

- **Performance:** Is the team member becoming less efficient or effective over time, which could be connected to increased distress? Or are they over-performing and neglecting other parts of their lives?

- **Growth tension:** How does the team member react to new challenges or goals? Some people may seem overwhelmed while others seem bored.

- **Affect control:** How well does the team member regulate his or her emotions while at the office, and has that changed recently? Emotional outbursts or mood swings may be signs of physical or mental pressure.

- **Relationship:** Have the team member’s working relationships with other staff deteriorated? Is the team member socially isolated? These personal relationships can be a barometer for stress.

Using the Stress-APGAR test over time can help you determine if warning signs have increased or decreased. Asking individuals to rate themselves can also be helpful, leading to conversations about what help they need. This empathetic attention can also reduce social isolation and help individuals become more open about the sources of their stress.

Source: Hellwig T, Rook C, Florent-Treacy E, Kets de Vries MFR. An early warning system for your team’s stress level. *Harvard Business Review*. April 26, 2017. <http://bit.ly/2p79jSF>. Accessed May 16, 2017.

Use QR codes for patient education

Take advantage of patients’ use of mobile devices by sharing health information through “Quick Response,” or QR, codes. Patients scan the QR code with their phones or other devices using applications that are readily available on the App Store, Google Play, or other online stores. When scanned, the code takes the user to a specific website.

To create the QR code itself, you will need two things: 1) an easy-to-use QR code generator, which you can find free online through a Google search, and 2) the website address for the health information you want to share. You can create QR codes for patient information on a variety of subjects, from back pain to smoking cessation. You can also add codes depending on the season, providing influenza information in the winter and warnings about sunburn in the summer.



This sample QR code directs users to familydoctor.org, the AAFP’s patient health information website.

Once you’ve created your QR codes, print them out, including descriptions of what each QR code links to, and post them in the waiting room or other areas.

Source: Hayes WC. Using QR codes to connect patients to health information. *Ann Fam Med*. 2017;15(3):275.

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