

Hiring the Best Medical Practice Manager

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PHYSICIANS
PRACTICE

Finding the right practice manager or administrator is essential to the health of your medical practice. No other position routinely touches upon each and every practice area, function, and staffing on a daily basis, like a top-notch administrator. Using insights from physicians and managers who have successfully hired "Mr. or Ms. Right," here is my advice for getting it right when hiring your practice manager.



One Size Does Not Fit All

Before you hire, do your homework to determine what skill set you need. There is no perfect administrator; look for the person who best meets your needs.

- Poor financials? You'll look for a manager who is strong in revenue cycle management and makes sure you get every dollar coming to you.
- Constant employee turnover? Look for a leader who "connects" and inspires your staff as needed.
- Mergers in your future? Look for someone who has thrived in bringing disparate practices and their attendant cultures together.

Versatility and Discontent

Today's successful manager is a juggler, an opportunist, and a time manager. The job has outgrown the bookkeeper of yesteryear. Look for someone who is exceptional in your area(s) of greatest need but strong in other areas, too.

- Standing still is falling behind — maintainers of the status quo need not apply.
- A track record of transforming weak into strong and good into great is your goal.

Know Who You Are Getting

Thorough background checks are a must, in my opinion.

- Investigate to ensure the applicant has no history of embezzlement and has not been barred by Medicare.
- Talk with several doctors the applicant has worked with; talk with employees who have worked under the applicant; ask for examples of leadership, good character, and decision-making.
- Go back two or three practices in time, if possible, in checking references.

Yes Man or No Ma'am?

Don't hire someone who tells you only what you want to hear. What you "need" to hear may be different. It is okay if you and your administrator disagree on occasion.

- A strong backbone and a willingness to accept responsibility are critical in this tumultuous healthcare climate — a "yes man" has neither.
- Administrators and physicians approach the same issue from different perspectives. It's prudent to respect and leverage this intersection of ideas and thinking.

Avoid the Ostrich

If my head is stuck in the sand, I am not looking out for your practice.

- A good manager is connected with the medical community and always on the lookout for opportunities and risks.
- The best ideas are those we borrow from others and then optimize for our practice. That's what a good administrator does.
- The best references come from those who know the good, the bad, and the ugly about common products, services, and vendors. The ostrich wouldn't know.

Mutual Respect

You want a manager who shares the values you hold most true, whom you respect as a person. Character is critical.

- My managing partner and I share a "group-first mentality" and do what is best for the group, even when that is unpopular with others. In putting the group's needs before our own, we lead.
- While leadership styles and approaches can be very different, mutual respect and trust can enable the sum to be greater than the whole.
- Look for someone cut of the same character cloth, but perhaps not from the same pattern. Just as opposites attract, differences complement.

Ownership vs. Stewardship

You want someone who takes ownership of your practice *without being an owner*. The best manager is a true steward of your practice.

- Look for a manager who uses "we" instead of "I" and who values team (practice) victories over personal accolades. An exception is the use of "my or our" practice, which demonstrates the stewardship I am attempting to define.
- Look for a manager who enjoys being part of a team, as the most effective practices have synergistic physician-administrator teams.

Hire Slowly and Deliberately

Finding the right administrator is one of the most important decisions your practice will make.

- Before you begin, candidly assess your practice's strengths and weaknesses to make sure you are looking for *what you need*.
- Do your background checks and deep reference checks.
- Spend time with the candidates — just as you would a potential partner — and get to know them beyond their CVs. Just as you've made sure you know what you need, make sure you know what you are getting.