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BUSINESS

A practice culture health check: Striving towards an inclusive, principled and fun workplace

The newspaper: 13 September 2023

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Wednesday 13 September 2023, 02:00 AM

3 minutes to Read



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It is difficult to recruit in the current environment, so our practice wants to create a working culture that ensures staff don't want to leave. What are your top tips?

– Holding on, Waikato

A positive practice culture will attract good applicants and help retain your existing staff. If your employees are happy and satisfied in their work, this will be reflected in their performance and, in turn, the overall performance of the practice.

The past few years have been very tough for general practice, and the ongoing uncertainty around funding increases and pay negotiations will have left many feeling undervalued. Holding on to your valued employees is crucial to your ongoing success.

Your workplace culture has visible components, like how the practice looks and the way staff present themselves. But the real measure is often the attitude of staff and the way the practice communicates its values to staff and patients alike.

There's no right or wrong way of creating a positive workplace culture. Ultimately, it will come down to what works best for you and your people.

But it's worth thinking about how your practice performs in the following areas.

Management style

Often, the culture reflects the personality of the practice owner and the management team, so it's important to be self-aware. Having a good understanding of your management style will help you recruit leaders and staff who fit with your style and the culture you want to create. Leading by example is one of the most effective ways to embed values and culture.

Business values

Think about where your practice started and what makes you different. Owners need to determine the most important values for the business, define them in the strategic plan, then communicate it to staff. Leaders need to demonstrate and live the values, communicating well and trusting others.

Te Tiriti o Waitangi

Consider how you apply Te Tiriti o Waitangi to the provision of services in your practice and how you demonstrate its relevance to the health of Māori.

Health equity

Think about how you demonstrate that your practice provides services to promote health equity in its enrolled population. Can you demonstrate how this is achieved in a culturally safe and competent way to ensure that the integrity of each individual's identity is acknowledged and respected, and the particular needs of the community are catered for?

Diversity and inclusion

We live in an increasingly diverse society. Creating a culture in your business that is inclusive and appreciates differences will allow your staff to feel heard, respected and safe. This includes supporting positive social cohesion and social equity that increases staff motivation, innovation and creativity in the workplace. Promoting diversity and inclusion can help your business thrive.

Employees

Your employees will have the biggest impact on your culture so it's important to be clear about what you expect from them, how their performance will be measured, and achievements recognised.

Of course, things will go wrong, and issues will crop up. So it's important to be prepared to discuss difficult situations, either through incident management processes, performance management or practice meetings, and what resources you'll need to support staff.

Be aware of staff engagement and morale, and the discussions that are taking place around the "water cooler". These will give you an early heads-up if morale is low.

Policies and philosophies

Your code of conduct and dress code are some of the most visible expressions of your practice culture. Ensure your staff are aware of what is acceptable and what is not. You need them to reinforce the image you want to create for your practice, bearing in mind basic requirements around comfort and health and safety.

Fun, healthy environment

Meet regularly for training and development, but every so often include something social – maybe pizzas and a drink after the training, or some team sport. Make the workplace environment a pleasant place to be. Rooms that are light, comfortable and welcoming, are appealing not only for patients, but for staff.

Good culture is infectious and will keep good people interested and engaged. When you have created the culture you want, remember to continually ask for feedback from your staff. Maintaining the positive culture will take time and effort but will ultimately help you grow your business and achieve success.

For HealthyPractice subscribers, MAS provides an online practice culture survey and follow-up report.

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