High-performance hiring
Getting it right the first time

By Betsy Wheat
It’s 8 a.m. on the first day after the Memorial Day weekend. You walk into your office and find two patients standing in your waiting room, both looking quite annoyed. With good reason: Nobody is at the front desk to greet or assist them. The phone rings several times before your assistant dashes to answer it. When she finally does, her greeting is simply “Ya?”

“Hey, I was in the backroom, and I didn’t hear the phone,” she snaps at the caller. “If you don’t like it, stop calling!”

“That’s no way to talk to patients—or to anyone else,” you tell her. She looks at you in stony silence. You ask “Where’s Mary?” and you are informed that she’s not feeling well and won’t be in today.

“That’s the third time she’s called in sick this month,” you think and immediately begin to doubt your ability to hire good, reliable, qualified people! Your mind flashes back to the interview you had with Mary, when she seemed warm, friendly and reliable. You think that you probably should have checked her references!

Welcome to a difficult, sticky, unpleasant office situation. Does this story have a familiar ring to it? If so, read on.

Staff changes can be stressful for everyone. When you don’t hire the right person the first time:
• Service suffers because staff is generally not focused on the patients.
• Staff morale suffers.
• Staff productivity drops.
• Referrals ask aloud, ‘What’s going on over there?’
• Patients wonder, ‘What kind of practice is this?’

No management function is more critical than the ability to hire qualified, competent people. Here are some steps you can take to ensure that you match the best employees to specific job requirements. Following these seven easy steps to successful hiring should increase your chances of a better hiring decision.

STEP 1. DEVELOP A JOB DESCRIPTION
Sit down with your staff and define this new person’s job responsibilities and develop a job description. This will serve as a benchmark and help you develop a training chart later on. List the essential functions and requirements for this position. Now you are ready to start recruiting.

STEP 2. RECRUITING APPLICANTS
With your staff, brainstorm a list of all the ways to find applicants. Look at all the possibilities—whether it’s an employment agency, help-wanted ad in the newspaper, online job boards or by referrals from friends of your present staff or from suppliers and vendors. Rank every possibility in terms of the most productive and least costly. Today so much job-hunting takes place on the Internet—online listings of jobs from your local newspaper or from Internet sites (for example, Career Builder, Monster.com or Craig’s List). Online sites provide an excellent source of candidates and are quite reasonably priced. Make sure that your ad accurately describes the position so it will generate attention, interest, and action.

Start with the position title. If you are trying to attract an executive-administrator, don’t label the position “Receptionist.” Don’t call it an executive position either. That is misleading and is likely to attract overqualified people to the ad. Use words that describe the job and the practice in an appealing way: For example, “Rewarding position, caring and friendly staff, great doctor to work for, four-day work week. Must be organized, energetic, expert filer who works well with the public. Knowledge of PowerPoint and Excel essential. Great salary, excellent benefits.” In other words, market your practice to job searchers. Keep it honest—but make it look appealing. Sell the job and the workplace.
STEP 3. EVALUATING APPLICANTS
As applicants begin to inquire about the position, either in response to the ad or from a direct referral, the first screening begins. This is usually over the telephone. Ask questions regarding their work experience and make sure their answers are consistent with what’s on their resume. Answer their questions about the job and remember that their questions are one gauge of how interested they are in working for you. The phone interview can provide a hint of the candidate. Do they seem prepared to answer your questions? Do they seem to be friendly, have a good phone manner and confident style of speech? Do they seem genuinely interested in the position? Do you sense any defensiveness on their part? Ask them why they are looking for a new job. Based on these and other answers, you can decide who to invite in for an interview.

Anyone who comes into the office for an interview should fill out an application. The candidate should sign the application and provide permission for you to check references. Reference checks should be completed after the first interview.

STEP 4. INTERVIEWING APPLICANTS
It is at the interviewing stage that the process often breaks down. It is not uncommon for employers to become so eager to find someone who has expressed interest in the job that the interviewer fails to plan or prepare for the interview.

This is the time to focus on the job description. Knowing the qualities and characteristics needed for this job, you can evaluate each applicant more honestly. Start the interview by sharing pertinent information about the practice, your philosophy of care, work schedule and the job responsibilities.

Remember that your job as the interviewer is to ask open-ended questions, to listen and to observe the responses. The more the candidate speaks, the more information you gather, so be prepared to let the potential employees do most of the talking. Would this person be reliable? Would this person be friendly to patients? Importantly, how would this individual get along with other staff members?

Observe the candidates’ body language. Most people will show some tension. Arms folded in front might indicate that there is little interest in you and the position. Does the candidate stand up straight, exuding confidence, or does the candidate appear to be stiff and ill at ease? Is the individual’s clothing inappropriate or appearance unkempt?

Avoid inquiries about marital and family status, age, race and color, sexual orientation, birthplace and national origin and religion. Three questions that will give you more information without any discrimination laws being violated:
• “What additional information can you give me that I should know about you?”
• “Knowing the duties of the job and our personnel policies, do you think that making such a commitment will be a problem for you?”
• “Is there any reason why you would not enjoy or be able to satisfactorily perform any of the tasks required for this job?”

A good employee manual with a human resource component will guide you in the appropriate questions to ask and help you avoid the ones that you should not ask.

STEP 5. CHECKING REFERENCES
If you want to know how employees will perform in your office, find out how they performed in the past. Many costly hiring mistakes can be avoided by simply checking all references. You must have a signed consent allowing you to do this. Check references by making calls yourself or have an assistant help out by checking public information data. You might also contract with a security company that specializes in reference and background checks.

STEP 6. TESTING APPLICANTS
Testing can be used to screen out unqualified candidates and select the best applicant for the job. There are tests to show aptitude, physical ability, psychological and emotional stability, and personality traits that would be important to do the job well. Available resources include:
• Employment Screening Resources – http://www.esrcheck.com
• Wonderlic Personnel Test – http://www.wonderlic.com

STEP 7. DECIDING TO HIRE
Because good people don’t stay unemployed for long, make your decision as quickly as possible but don’t rush into it either. Avoid involving your staff in this final decision. They may not always want what’s best for the practice but what’s most comfortable for them. Get the offer down on paper, outlining salary, benefit package, vacation days and holidays you pay and observe. Now the ball is in their court. If they accept, you are ready to set up a training program. If they don’t, you will have to review more of the applications or begin the whole process again.
So there it is, an easy straightforward plan with seven basic steps that, when followed, should help you hire the right person the first time. Just keep in mind hiring is only the beginning of the journey to establishing good employees. Now you must invest the time and resources to train this person.

On the first day, they should be given the following information: practice philosophy, job description, training chart and the employee manual that includes guidelines and expectations of working in your office.

Most practices prefer to have a 90-day training period before the employee is hired permanently. It’s best to break up the training chart into 30-day segments. This will give you a tool to monitor and evaluate the learning curve, and you can be more specific in adjusting the time and attention needed in certain areas. Assign someone on the team who is well organized to be responsible for walking the new employee through each task. Each week, select three learned tasks. At the end of the week, evaluate how well the training program was accomplished. Very often new employees pick up much more than the three tasks shown to them. Still, they are accountable for learning the specific three on the training chart. Your decision on whether to retain the employee should depend on performance during the training program. Providing weekly feedback on what is being done well and what needs improvement is essential during training.

Another aspect to an effective training program is to teach the person who will be doing the training how to be a good coach throughout the process. The objective of the training program is to end up with a well-trained and enthusiastic new team member.

Here are eight easy steps to follow:
1. Determine the level of knowledge regarding the task. How much do they already know about this?
2. Explain the purpose and importance of the task.
3. Explain the ideal finished task.
4. Demonstrate the ideal way to accomplish the task.
5. Observe while the person practices the process.
6. Provide immediate and specific feedback (Coach again and reinforce success).
7. Express confidence in the person’s ability to be successful. Compliment them on doing something well—but always be honest.
8. Agree on follow-up action (Should include practice time).

High performance hiring requires an investment. Like all good investments, it pays off in the long term with an excellent employee who understands your practice philosophy and is well trained to care for your patients.

IT’S MORNING AT THE OMS OFFICE
Now imagine that it is Tuesday morning after another three-day holiday weekend. Two patients are waiting for you in the office when you arrive. One is filling out a form, and the other appears engrossed with a magazine provided by your office.

Your office assistant is checking the form and searching for an answer to one of the patient’s questions about insurance. The phone rings, and the assistant answers it on the first ring. “Hello, this is Dr. E. Fishent’s office. Martha speaking. How may I help you?”

Your entire staff has reported to work on time, apparently renewed and refreshed after the long weekend.

It’s the start of another great day at the office.

This issue of Practice Management Notes was authored by motivational management and business consultant Betsy Wheat. For additional information and resources on hiring and more resources to use, contact Betsy Wheat at wheatipm@aol.com or call 972/208-4911.
Compliance and Reimbursement Strategies for the OMS Office
originally presented on August 30, 2006
Stacie L. Buck, RHIA, CCS-P, LHRM
This virtual seminar provides a discussion of documenting medical necessity as well as common E/M documentation deficiencies and tips to correct them. The session wraps up with how to identify and audit “hot spots” and ways to implement an effective auditing and monitoring program to protect your practice from overpayments. Code: AOM—11596

Keys to Hiring and Maintaining Quality Staff
originally presented on May 17, 2006
Crystal Reeves, CPC, CMPE
This virtual seminar provides step-by-step guidance to developing an organization and building a staff that functions smoothly and efficiently. The practical tools and techniques discussed prepare the participant to take a fresh look at staffing, hiring, training and assessment. Participants will be better prepared to identify problems and develop solutions within their OMS offices. Code: AOM—11595

Electronic Transactions in the OMS Office: They’re Easier Than You Think
originally presented on March 15, 2006
Alan H. Feldman
Electronic transactions have grown beyond simple claim submissions. This seminar explores the many ways to use technology that allow OMSs and their staff to be more time-efficient and improve the efficiency of the office. Electronic Data Interchange (EDI), Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT), costs of implementing electronic transactions, electronic attachments, and HIPAA’s National Provider Identifier (NPI) are discussed. Code: AOM—11530

OMS Buy-Ins and Pay-Outs: Structuring the Right Deal for You
originally presented on November 9, 2005
Sandra E.D. McGraw, JD, MBA
This seminar provides an overview of what it means to make your associate your partner, and the obligations that you have to each other. Valuing the hard assets, accounts receivables, good will, structuring the buy-in and pay-out, and alternatives and options that should be considered are discussed. Concrete examples are used, as they pertain to OMS practices. Code: AOM—10850 (Available through November 9, 2007)

Rebirth of the Referral Network
originally presented on July 13, 2005
Scott McDonald
This program teaches OMSs and their staff how to prioritize referral sources, identify new referrals, and patch-up lost relationships. This program is especially useful for new associates, newly relocated practices and others hoping to grow their practices quickly. Build your practice through internal marketing outside the office, create a referral network plan with staff, and employ specific dialogues to persuade potential referrals. Code: AOM—10671 (Available through July 12, 2007)

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