

Recruiting and Retaining Staff: A Midsize Hospital Experience

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Mr. Parker has been Director of the Pharmacy and I.V. Therapy Departments at Lawrence Memorial Hospital (LMH), Lawrence, Kansas, since 1984. He was recently named Director of Oncology Services at LMH as well. LMH employs nine full-time and three part-time pharmacists and three full-time and six part-time pharmacy technicians. Pharmacy students rotate through the department.

Recruiting and retaining good pharmacists and technicians at LMH involves seven steps.

1. Recruit the right person.
2. Design satisfactory work.
3. Create an empowered environment.
4. Focus on developmental excellence.
5. Provide education and pathways for growth.
6. Be involved in professional organizations.
7. Be involved with schools and colleges of pharmacy.

1. Recruit the right person.

The difference between filling a slot with *a* pharmacist and recruiting *the* pharmacist who is best qualified for a position begins with a discussion of needs. A fundamental decision at this point is, Do we hire a new graduate, knowing that a substantial investment in training may be necessary, or do we chase after someone with experience?

Once this decision is made, the position is advertised. Parker screens all applications. He, the clinical coordinator, and two staff members then form an interviewing team. Two-hour behavioral interviews are scheduled with the most promising candidates. The team decides what skills or traits are needed for the position and develops questions designed to reveal how the candidate would perform in certain situations. The questions are pragmatic, not hypothetical. For example, interviewees are asked what they have actually done in specific situations rather than what they would do in a hypothetical case. The team explains the LMH values during this session. "We tell them who we are and what we believe," said Parker.

2. Design satisfying work.

The LMH pharmacy department sets high performance standards for all employees. To ensure that work is done well and to optimize worker satisfaction, the department distinguishes clearly between the work of pharmacists and technicians. Because technicians are

LMH Pharmacy Department Vision

- Recognize and help meet the medication, drug education, and drug information needs of LMH patients, the lay community, and health care practitioners.
- Using high standards of professional and caring communications, the pharmacy staff will work in cooperation with the other hospital and medical staff to meet the above needs by providing innovative and cost-efficient distribution, education, and clinical services.

given a wide range of responsibilities, they feel satisfied. At the same time, pharmacists can become extensively involved in clinical activities. All pharmacists rotate through clinical and dispensing functions, and roughly two thirds of each pharmacist's work is clinical. Clinical interventions are documented, and a look at the results is extremely gratifying. For example, figures for 2002 show that pharmacists' clinical interventions avoided potentially severe or fatal problems in seven patients, prevented potential major organ damage in 260, and improved care in 6695.

3. Create an empowered environment.

A shared vision is the foundation for empowerment. Workers are empowered when they have this vision and have contributed to building it. In such an environment, there is commitment rather than compliance. In a hospital setting, creating a shared vision requires dialogue at three levels: institutional, departmental, and individual.

A vision is useless if it is not put into action. LMH pharmacy management ensures that employees are living the vision by frequently asking workers for examples of how they have translated it into reality in their interactions with patients and colleagues. The vision is also built into each employee's personal growth plan.

Responsibility is a second key to empowerment. At LMH this takes many forms, one of the most important of which is the idea that staff own the shifts. Schedules are posted, and staff members can negotiate tradeoffs as needed. Staff also handles vacation and leave requests.

Viewed from another perspective, responsibility entails "repairing broken windows." A staff member who becomes involved in a dispute or other difficult situation is expected to make a proactive effort to correct it. This practice applies across the board, regardless of who may be at fault.

Another sign of responsibility and respect at LMH is area ownership. For example, in the cart-fill work area, pharmacy techs are in charge, and they need to work without interruption. Should a pharmacist, or even the hospital administrator, intrude, the technicians know they have the right to politely request that the visitor withdraw.

4. Focus on developmental excellence.

Developmental excellent at LMH is synonymous with continuous quality improvement. It is ensured through such activities as the “tech check errors” process and the monitoring of clinical interventions, as noted above.

5. Provide education and pathways for growth.

Pathways for growth are provided internally, as all pharmacists rotate through dispensing and clinical positions. Academic growth is also encouraged. Two staff members are currently enrolled in

Pharm.D. degree programs, and three technicians have entered pharmacy school. After performing dispensing and technical functions for a year, students can become clinical interns.

6. Provide opportunities for participation in professional organizations.

The department encourages staff members to be active in professional organizations. It provides, on a rotating basis, support for members to attend meetings of ASHP and the Kansas Society of Health-System Pharmacists. It assists staff in the preparation of presentations and posters.

7. Encourage staff involvement with pharmacy school activities.

Pharmacy staff participates in lectures offered at the University of Kansas (UK) School of Pharmacy. Staff members serve as mentors to student externs from UK who are on clinical and hospital rotations.