



Staff: What's Enough? What's Too Many?

It all depends upon how many services
you offer your patients.

BY LYNN HOMISAK, PRT

To Our Readers: There are no foolish questions. Chances are that if you have a question or concern in your practice, others are experiencing a similar situation. We're here to help. PM [doctor and staff] readers are encouraged to submit questions to lynn@soshms.com which will be printed and answered in this column anonymously.

Topic: What's Enough? What's Too Many?

Dear Lynn,

Why is it that some "one-doctor practices" can run an efficient office with only one staff person, while others need a team of three, four, or more?

Some doctors feel that efficiency requires more people. Not necessarily. Critical to running an efficient office is having competent people following effective systems and processes. It's as simple as that.

Of course you, as the doctor, can't be everywhere all the time. So how many staff you need will depend on how many services you offer your

patients. Let's look at different areas where this might matter.

Patient treatment: If you have invested in many of the modern technologies available in podiatry—e.g.,

protocol for their scheduled treatment. Doctors who are willing to delegate some hands-on patient care tasks to their qualified, trained staff will take valuable time off their already full

Typically, in a one-doctor practice, it is certainly not out of the question to have a 1:4 (doctor: full time staff) ratio. Part-time staff are also a consideration to help offset an over-tasked staff or staff requiring overtime pay.

shockwave therapy, laser therapy, diagnostic ultrasound, digital x-rays, stem cell therapy—it is helpful to have additional pairs of hands to assist in the preparation, scheduling, and set-ups of these procedures.

Staff Responsibilities: Extremely busy practices with overcrowded schedules benefit from having additional staff who can effectively maintain a smooth patient flow by rooming patients, taking preliminary histories and vitals, and engaging in established

plate. This time savings can better be spent providing doctor-specific services while staff simultaneously assist patients on an additional level and also contribute to increased revenue.

Front Desk: A busy schedule also means a busy front desk with duties that may include above-average numbers of phone calls and increased data entry and collection responsibilities—all while maintaining excellent customer service skills. If you have a

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robust surgical schedule, a separate scheduler would be advantageous. For practices with high volume calls, a call center is a viable option to effectively divert the congestion and confusion away from the front desk. It is wise to assess phone demand because an overwhelmed staff at the front or discharge desk can lead to unproductive multi-tasking, stress, unacceptable mistakes, dissatisfied patients, and shrinking positive attitudes.

Office Management: Would your practice benefit from someone who can fill an office manager's shoes? An office manager can monitor all things staff-related (including but not limited to the hiring, training, and performance processes, and also lift the burden of administrative paperwork, OSHA, and HIPAA requirements, etc.

to have a 1:4 (doctor: full time staff) ratio. Part-time staff are also a consideration to help offset an over-taxed staff or staff requiring overtime pay. As noted above, depending on your individual practice particulars, this number can and will vary.

Consultants will recommend utilizing a typical 20-25% payroll ratio benchmark. This is calculated by dividing your collected revenue by your total staff payroll (including benefits). While some practices falling under or over that benchmark have indeed suffered from reduced



may be better placed in a “behind-the-scenes”, detail-required role. Here they are motivated more by their accomplishments than by intermingling with patients one-on-one. Think of them as “I’s”, or Introverts.

On the other hand, “people-oriented” individuals build energy when placed in a more patient-visible, socially-related position, so they will excel where customer service is a must—at the front desk, perhaps. They are thought of as “E’s”, or Extroverts.

A successful interview session can reveal a lot about who an individual is, why they have applied for the job, where they can thrive, and if they will be a good cultural fit in your practice. While rushing to fill a vacant position is a key motivator for you, don't settle. Keep in mind that people do not have cookie-cutter personalities and the key to successful staffing is proper job placement. An inappropriate assignment will likely cause headaches and anxiety—and who wants that? Instead, strive to match the job to each person's qualities and everyone wins. **PM**



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profitability, there are others who tell a different story. Do a simple SWOT analysis of your practice and if you find areas where you can potentially increase productivity and quality service with additional staff, take the leap.

You're probably thinking, “What if I take the leap and FALL!?” A better question is, “Oh, but what if I fly instead?”

Topic: “I’s” or “E’s”—Who Are the Best Hires?

Dear Lynn,

Is it better to have a “task-oriented” staffer or one who is more “people-oriented”?

YES! Each type possesses valued characteristics, none better or worse than the other. Their individual ability to succeed at what they do is going to depend on the job opening you need them to fill. For example, “task-oriented” people tend to lose energy when they interact socially, so they

that would otherwise be your responsibility. Or do you ENJOY spending each day in a state of unnecessary decision-making and exhaustion?

Billing & Collections: If you choose to have all your billing done in-house, you don't want to skimp on a reliable, knowledgeable staff (or team) to monitor and keep up with ever-changing insurance codes and rules, patient invoice management, on-time claim submissions, appeals, and posting of patient and third party payments, etc.

Marketing: Maybe you aspire to have a steady marketing program. As advocates and promoters of the practice, utilizing clinical or office personnel seems an easy answer for some marketing efforts. Internal and external promotion takes time and energy, time that may be unavailable to your existing staff. Alternatively, you could contract an outside agency to execute or coordinate your marketing plan.

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