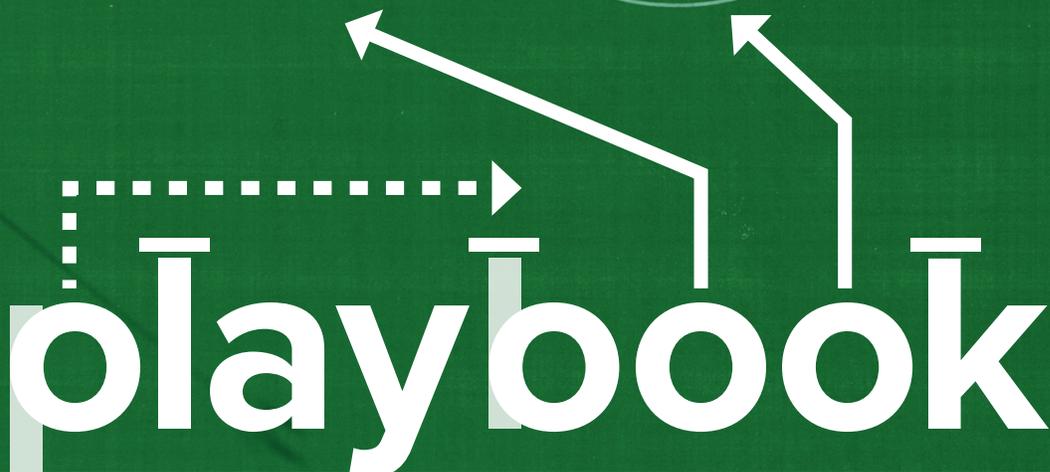




Medical Practice Staffing Solutions

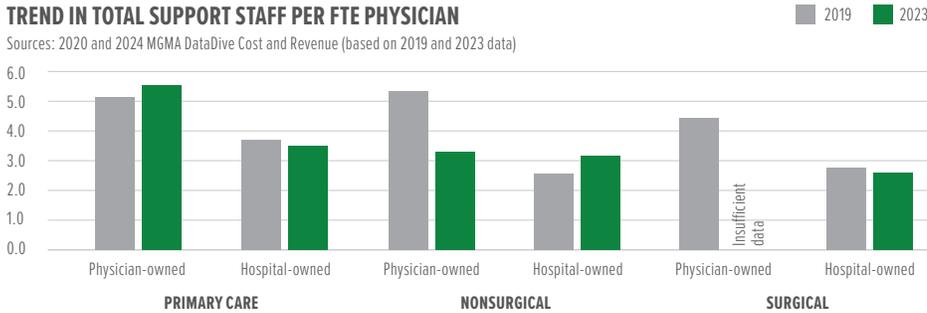


playbook

Support staff ratios per full-time-equivalent physician are trending down in nonsurgical specialties — and flat in other specialties — since 2019.

TREND IN TOTAL SUPPORT STAFF PER FTE PHYSICIAN

Sources: 2020 and 2024 MGMA DataDive Cost and Revenue (based on 2019 and 2023 data)



Patient volume has returned to pre-pandemic levels, but staffing levels in many medical practices have not. In the nonphysician ranks, many workers opted for better-paying or less demanding work at big box retail stores or restaurants, and some have not returned to the workforce at all.

Support staff per full-time-equivalent (FTE) physician took a big hit in independent practices amid the pandemic, and hospital-owned groups did not make big gains. This playbook brings together MGMA’s best data, tools and resources to help you address the entire lifecycle of employment, from job postings to long-term retention, to ensure you have the right talent ready to support physicians and patients in the care delivery process.



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Compensation and Benefits	3
	Retention	4-5
	Recruitment Channels	6-7
	Become an Employer of Choice	8
	Onboarding	9

Compensation and Benefits

Recruitment is a competition among your practice, other medical groups and even brand-name retailers down the street. If you cannot outcompete the retailer on hourly wage, you'll have to get creative.

Creative thinking on compensation

Here are some creative ways of incentivising prospective employees outside of raising the hourly pay rate:

- Signing bonuses have proven effective in getting people in the door. If an employee quits within a month, the signing bonus may be withheld from their final check, if contractually defined.
- Retention bonuses, if made clear during interviews or at the offer stage, can entice prospective employees to sign on.
- Childcare support, either on-site or as a potentially tax-deductible contribution.
- Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) for personal and mental well-being. Some programs even help teach employees financial planning.
- Dollars for unused benefits. An employee may opt out of your organization's health plan for any reason (the most common being that they are covered by a partner's employer). Can the budgeted money the practice would have spent on that employee be paid to the employee at the end of open enrollment?

If these ideas seem financially unfeasible, have you considered partnering with a nearby practice to pool your resources and make these possible?

For more on compensation and benefits, see [MGMA Staff Compensation and Benefits Playbook](#).

Non-monetary compensation

Aside from pay, workers at all levels and in all industries are increasingly motivated by flexible time off and remote work opportunities. [Widely shared research by Theresa Agovino](#) showed that 70% of employed Americans prefer to work remotely, and 35% said they would accept a salary reduction in return for work flexibility. Businesses that have adapted onboarding and remote monitoring protocols have realized some productivity and retention gains. This isn't realistic for all employees at all times in a medical practice, but you can gain a competitive hiring advantage by instituting the type of flexibility that retailers and restaurants cannot.

Quality of life

- Can you help provide housing/transit/benefits?
- Some employees, especially lower-level or younger employees, lack financial literacy. Can you create or onboard respectful training that can help them? Wouldn't a worker with greater understanding of their financial situation be more likely to stay?
- Can you make Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) for personal and mental wellbeing available? Have you looked into these? Some require no financial investment from you.
- Can you provide child care support, either on-site or as a potentially tax-deductible contribution?

For more on remote employee strategies, [see the MGMA Managing Remote Employees Playbook](#).



Note: MGMA members are constantly experimenting with other creative approaches to Compensation and Benefits. [Join the MGMA HR Member Community](#) to interact with other members about this. This is a key benefit of membership.

Retention

An employee retained is a staffing problem solved, but staffing problems have been intense following the pandemic:

MEDICAL STAFF TURNOVER RATES*

BENCHMARK	2020	2022	CHANGE
Business operations support staff	12.50%	16.67%	33.33%
Front office support staff	25.31%	33.47%	32.21%
Clinical support staff	20.76%	23.84%	14.85%
Ancillary support staff	16.03%	28.57%	78.29%

* For multispecialty with primary & specialty care, medians reported
Source: 2021 and 2023 MGMA DataDive Practice Operations (2020 and 2022 data)



As medicine becomes more patient-centric, employment is becoming more employee-centric. If your retention problem persists despite your quarterly staff pizza parties, you may need to reflect more intentionally on the culture you have created and are sustaining.

TO CALCULATE TURNOVER, HERE'S THE EQUATION:

$$\frac{\text{Number of Employees Who Left During the Period}}{\text{Average Number of Employees During the Period}} \times 100 = \text{Employee Turnover Rate}$$

As medicine becomes more patient-centric, employment is becoming more employee-centric. If your retention problem persists despite your quarterly staff pizza parties, you may need to reflect more intentionally on the culture you have created and are sustaining. Aside from the all-important monetary compensation, long-term retention strategies should focus on culture, namely by creating a sense of belonging and creating an environment for positive development.

'Retention' continued on next page »

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Creating a sense of belonging

Belonging begins at onboarding (more on that below), but it must be sustained throughout the year. Retention strategies should include regular celebrations of milestones. All staff, including — crucially — physicians, should express appreciation for all other employees' crucial role in the patient care process.



If you have not developed a mission, vision and values (MVV) statement, you should. It should be centered on excellent patient care.

If you have not developed a mission, vision and values (MVV) statement, you should. It should be centered on excellent patient care. Consider enfranchising employees to help develop it, then recognize when an employee has lived it. Simple gestures like straightening up the waiting room can go a long way toward patients' having a good experience and making employees adopt the owner vs. the renter mentality.

Some practices have adopted policies of teamwide financial transparency to varying degrees. This can increase employees' sense of shared ownership and, along with proper training, can have measurably positive effects on front office collections.

Developing employees

Most employees want a raise on Day 1. This is impossible, but what is not impossible is making them understand routes to advancement. Professional development opportunities and the practice's willingness to provide or support such self-starting initiatives should be mentioned frequently.

Cross-training employees for others' roles can both increase respect for others' positions — and, consequently, the others themselves — and can add variety to an employees' week.

Anthony Schier, executive director at Cheyenne Obstetrics and Gynecology, LLC, emphasizes annual performance reviews for all employees, and encourages managers to look for talent that can be developed further. During annual reviews, Schier's managers discuss employees' career goals and identify growth opportunities. Managers are encouraged to help employees develop growth aspirations and act on them. This may include specialized training or credentialing or sending staff to local community college programs that cover topics like conflict management and leadership development.

The investment has helped foster a culture of continuous learning, knowledge sharing, practice improvement, and retention. "The whole team [then] gets to discuss what they learned," said Schier.

For a deeper dive on retention, see the more resources section at the end of this playbook.



Tool: For skills training and the development of customer-facing employees into emotionally intelligent, mission-driven workers, **get Ed Plus**, the customer-service and compliance platform from MGMA.

Recruitment Channels

Your recruitment channels should include (in order of priority):

- Incentivized word-of-mouth/refer-a-friend
- Local job fairs, community colleges
- Digital: Glassdoor, Indeed, LinkedIn, Facebook

Incentivize word-of-mouth/refer-a-friend

Research from *Harvard Business Review* and other publications show that friends who are coworkers — or coworkers who become friends — stay at an organization longer than those who do not have a friend at work. Creating social time or outings at work can help nurture friendships between colleagues, and encouraging good employees to recruit from their social networks can pay back dividends in retention. Offering a recruitment bonus to staff who successfully refer a friend can help tremendously. To mitigate risk, you can offer a referral bonus to be paid out after the new hire completes a certain number of days, usually 90 or 120.

“ We had great success with sign-on bonuses for local colleges and we partnered with a few Community Colleges for upcoming graduates to come into our pipelines. Getting into the community is important so they can connect on a more personal level rather than just seeing a name on a commercial or Hospital.”

– **Martine Garner, MGMA Member,**
Practice Performance Consultant Quality, Advent Health

Consider local job fairs and community colleges

When exhibiting at a job fair or community call, you are planting your practice’s employment brand in the minds of early careerists. Remember: Chick-fil-A, Home Depot, and your local hospital enjoy much stronger brand awareness than your practice. Here is what you must have to successfully recruit at these venues:

- A good, emotionally intelligent speaker
- A flyer, website page, and/or social media property highlighting the benefits employees can expect
- An easy way to apply

‘Recruitment Channels’ continued on next page »

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Maximize digital recruitment through customization

Digital channels remain popular, especially Indeed, Glassdoor, LinkedIn, and Facebook. MGMA also has a [Career Center](#) on which you can post open positions. This is a benefit of your membership.

If your digital platform allows for customization or personalization, like allowing a leader at the practice to write a personal note, use those features.

For more on Recruitment, [see the Medical Practice Staff Recruitment Playbook](#) and [see the Digital Recruitment Channels Playbook](#).

Make the application process easy

If you are using an automated application process, when is the last time you reviewed it? Is it easy to use? Do you have data on how many applications are started but not finished?

Does your electronic form require applicants to fill in the physical addresses of their previous employers? Do you really need that information at this stage of the process? Tracking down this kind of information is the kind of ordeal that can make a prospective employee abandon the application. This is not a sign that they are undisciplined: the practice has given them a subtle hint that it will not

Become an Employer of Choice

If your offer is not better than your competitors' offers, you're not thinking about it right. Your offer is better. Maybe your practice offers better benefits or more flexibility. Maybe it is ennobled because of its mission. Maybe it offers a faster route to advancement. Maybe the people are great. Maybe they won't come home smelling like grease. Something is better about working in your practice than working at big box retail or chain restaurants.

But do your recruits understand this? Convincing them of this is your responsibility.



If your offer is not better than your competitors' offers, you're not thinking about it right... Something is better about working in your practice than working at big box retail or chain restaurants.

An orthopedic practice in the Midwest lost a promising front office candidate because the candidate did not understand that a "4% 401(k) match" was better than what a nearby big-box retailer was offering. The retailer had called their retirement benefit "a match" but left out the 4%, so the recruit assumed the retailer's offer was better. The offer communication could have attempted to educate the candidate on how to understand the unfamiliar terminology and make a more-informed choice.

Another candidate was intrigued by Chick-fil-A's "Ascent" program that promises periodic reviews of employees' career trajectory. Can your offer letter or phone call do something similar? Consider:

- Taking top candidates to lunch or coffee to show them your investment in them upfront
- Allowing candidates to speak with an employee you trust before signing on
- Revising your offer letter to reflect the care you give to patients and employees
- Educating your candidates on how to understand Explanations of Benefit?
- Follow up with good candidates who chose another employer. If you interviewed a candidate that you thought was a great fit, there is no reason you can't reach out to them after 90 days or so to ask, "Are you happy with your choice? We'd still love to have you."

Onboarding

The best first step to retention is understanding that each employee needs more than just a single-day orientation: A thoughtful onboarding period needs to give them the understanding of their workplace and the confidence to do the job. Keep in mind:

- Some roles and responsibilities are more complex than what you can convey in the job description. Work with a new hire to clearly define how roles fit into the practice and the performance expectations.
- Thoughtfully space out the volumes of information new staff need to understand: An introduction to the EHR and other crucial practice management systems is certainly important, but also make room to remind a new hire about the organization's mission, vision, values, policies and procedures.
- Ensure you can document compliance with all required new-employee trainings, such as HIPAA, OSHA and more.
- Training on diagnostic tools, phone systems, email protocol, your practice management software, etc., may need to be spaced out to avoid information overload.
- Mentors or peers to pair with new hires during onboarding helps to establish a support system, answer questions and address challenges, and provide hands-on training as it is needed.

Day One

Here is what must be covered on day one:

- The basics — break and lunch times, check-in and check-out procedures, etc.
- Vacation, sick days, and emergency policies
- If you offer career development opportunities, whether immediately or after a milestone has been reached, make that clear on Day 1 to mitigate new job flight risk.

Ask yourself and a current trusted employee what a new hire will go home and say to their family after day one. Will it be, "I just sat there all day and didn't know what to do"? Will it be, "They threw 100 things at me. I'm completely overwhelmed. I'm going to fail." Or will it be, "Everybody was really nice. They gave me a peer who is showing me around. And they said that after a while they'll give me additional training which could lead to a promotion."

For more on Onboarding, [see the MGMA Onboarding Playbook.](#)

Resources

RECOMMENDATIONS IN THIS PLAYBOOK



Online Training

Ed Plus includes a 3-hr, interactive, customer service and front office training to make new employees comfortable and kickstart your revenue cycle



MGMA Member Community

Human Resources. Connect with peers to share tips, tricks, and support in a topically segmented digital community with a live component



Book

“Advanced Strategy for Human Resources Management” covers forward-thinking strategy for experienced leader



MGMA Playbook: Digital Recruitment Channels



MGMA Playbook: Staff Compensation and Benefits



MGMA Playbook: Managing Remote Employee Strategies



MGMA Report: Onboarding

ADDITIONAL TOOLS AND PERSPECTIVES



Tool: Medical Practice Staff Onboarding Checklist and Orientation Timeline

covering orientation, compliance training, professional development and review of HR items, to prepare for your newly hired employees first days on the job



Partner Solutions Directory

For outsourced solutions



MGMA Stat Article:

Find even more of what MGMA members have to say in our June 2024 MGMA Stat data story exploring how most practices' benefit offerings went unchanged this year



Insight Article: “Retain your team through onboarding and training academies”



Insight Article: “Beyond hierarchies: Pushing the limits of empowerment in your medical practice”



MGMA Podcast with guest Marie Eslick

For more great insights on culture, onboarding, engagement, benefits, and compensation



Podcast episode: Prioritizing culture through strategic HR Insights



Podcast episode: “Optimizing onboarding strategies for advanced practice providers”



playbook

MGMA Playbooks collect MGMA's best data, tools and resources to help you solve your problems and prepare for future sustainability and growth. Playbooks are currently for MEMBERS ONLY.

To discuss your membership or benefits, contact
MGMA Customer Service Team at 877.275.6462 ext. 1888
or service@mgma.com

See also mgma.com/membership

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