

## Recruiting the Right People – November 2008

Recruiting the right practice management people to run your practice is the most important and practice defining issue you will face. They represent the face of your practice and how they behave and interact with your customers (yes customer not patient!) will shape their perception of your practice. It is a major investment so take the following points into consideration and you will begin to give yourself the best chance of getting it right.

Before you do anything, think carefully about the way you want your practice to run and be perceived by your customers. What are your strategy and your objectives for the future? Are you ambitious and want to grow your practice or are you happy to see it tick along but become more efficiently run? This scene-setting is essential before you start to think about the people or person you need to best help you achieve your objectives.

### Job description.

You must ensure you have an accurate definition of what the role entails. Practice Management can be wide-ranging so decide how far the role should go in terms of responsibilities. List all the main requirements and objectives of each one (it's not just what they do but what you expect them to achieve). To help you could organise these into four main categories – diary management and patient liaison, letter production, billing and collections, business development (marketing).

### Person specification.

This covers the hard and soft skills. Hard skills are the easy part – IT expertise, typing speed, medical/specialty terminology knowledge. Soft skills are more subtle – customer service experience, communication and people skills. Remember here that if you are recruiting for a practice manager, who you expect to multi-task through the full range of practice management responsibilities, you need to be aware that this necessitates a set of non-complementary skills. The ability to naturally relate to people, the organisational rigour and attention to detail needed for billing and then marketing skills, together represents a formidable armoury of skill-sets and it will be difficult to find someone who excels at all of them. So what's most important to you and your practice and what can be outsourced and trained? Another question to ask yourself is whether you are better going for an experienced medical secretary or broaden out your search to include candidates, who have a natural affinity for others, people lovers, with good customer service awareness and experience. Healthcare knowledge can be acquired through doing the job whereas people skills are innate. Pinpointing the right sort of character is the most important aspect of recruiting so it could be helpful to have some working knowledge of a profiling system that will help you to understand an individual's natural behaviour and whether this is likely to be compatible with the job of practice manager. We have found the DISC system to be immensely valuable in providing such insights. DISC helps to explain behaviour in terms of 4 factors – Dominance, Influence, Steadiness and Compliance – where a specific individual's behaviour depends on the relative strength of each. It has helped us to establish a "preferred" profile for our practice manager roles. For example, in highly administrative work, a successful individual will often require a high degree of Compliance (displaying high levels of precision and accuracy). Such techniques can help to introduce objectivity into the recruitment process, and will also help you to avoid mistakes such as recruiting someone with low Compliance (who could be stubborn and want to do things their own way). This is a complex area, but there is a wealth of information about DISC and other systems on the internet.

### Advertising.

We suggest that word of mouth is the best way to recruit a practice manager. However this is certainly not always going to result in a successful recruitment. Decide whether using an agency is the best way to go. An agency may incorporate profiling, will certainly perform initial screening and carry out practical tests (IT skills etc). Remember that your preparation in terms of the job description and person specification needs to be thorough to be able to properly brief the agency. You will need to weigh up the expense against the leg work an agency can do for you. If you decide to advertise directly in local papers or on the internet make sure your ad clearly states the location and salary range, the skills and experience necessary, how they should respond and by when.

### Interviewing.

Prepare properly by drawing up a list of key questions from the job description. Test the hard skills you require by asking the candidate to transcribe a dictation, prepare a letter or create a basic spreadsheet. Test their soft skills by asking probing and open questions. How they would react to a complaining patient; how they would negotiate to get you a late theatre slot at the local hospital, how they would go about organising and attracting GPs to an open evening to listen to your talk on your specialty and experience. At the beginning of the interview explain how it will be conducted, set the scene and make it clear where and how the role fits in. Then encourage them to speak, resist your own desires to talk and give them time to think and reply. At the end of the interview, make sure you give them plenty of time to ask their questions and clarify the next steps. At PHF we always conduct telephone interviews before we ask people to come for a formal face to face interview. We do this to test telephone manner, clarity, diction and their capacity to explain something clearly and simply. Most of your practice manager's work is telephone based so we would strongly recommend this.

### Respect the law governing employment.

Recruiting staff nowadays is a legal minefield. Protect yourself and your candidates by ensuring you respect the regulations. If you visit the website [www.businesslink.gov.uk](http://www.businesslink.gov.uk) you will be able to download and read useful information on what to do and what not to do when it comes to recruiting.

There are many things to remember and get right when it comes to selecting and recruiting the right people to represent and work in your practice. Our parting advice is as follows – The defining difference between the right person and the wrong person for the role of practice manager is their willingness to put the patient's needs first. We build in many customer service questions into our recruitment because we want to ensure we recruit people who have a heart for service. No-one without a heart for service should be working in healthcare