

Dear Mary Pat: What Is the Best Way To Hold Staff Meetings?

☒ Why are staff meetings important?

They are important because face-to-face communication is important to people and bi-directional communication is important to people. In other words, they want to see your face and they want to have a dialogue with you. They want to hear what you're thinking and they want to voice their opinions.

Teams that don't have staff meetings where they can be face-to-face and dialogue usually get frustrated. Conscientious staff care about the practice, and want to know what's being done to fix problems. Without regular communication, staff will make assumptions and speculate on things you probably don't want them to speculate on. Remember this: when you don't inform employees, they will make something up. Believe it.

Team Building During Staff Meetings

Staff meetings are also a great time to do team building. Whether you give an update on universal precautions then split into teams to play Universal Precautions Jeopardy, or do a brainstorming session on what should be included in your new patient brochure, you are giving staff a voice, letting them be themselves, and helping them get to know employees they might not work beside on a daily basis. You are building a team.

I like to have two staff meetings a month, even if they are only 20 or 30 minutes long – I find the ideal length to be about 45 minutes long. I have the meetings on a standing date

(2nd and 4th Thursday of every month, for instance, and make sure everyone is perfectly clear when the meeting will take place. The first meeting of the month is typically a department meeting, so that clinical staff and clerical staff can each meet to discuss issue specific to them. In a larger office, you may have more than two departments that will need to meet. The second meeting of the month is an all-staff meeting and at certain times of the year, the meeting may actually be a “meeting for eating” and this time can be used for a holiday breakfast or luncheon. It is easy to cancel a meeting when there is nothing on the agenda, but it’s hard to get one scheduled on short notice without messing up everyone’s schedule.

The Oreo Cookie Method of Agenda-Setting

Prepare an agenda and invite everyone to add topics that they would like to have addressed. Make sure you understand their items and can address them, as some staff will not want to be identified as being the ones who asked to have “the policy on making personal calls at work” reiterated. Use the Oreo cookie method of setting an agenda – start with something pleasant (welcome new staff members, congratulate the staff on specific accomplishments), then put in any very serious or uncomfortable topics next (raises are frozen, overtime is not allowed or mandatory overtime is in effect), then finish with something pleasant (the quarterly employee event is upcoming, we will sing Happy Birthday and have a cake after the meeting for Susie.) Some staff do well with a roundtable to finish the meeting, others will not say a word when asked if they have anything to bring to the group – this is entirely dependent on what kind of office you have. Every office has its own culture and that culture will show itself in staff meetings!

Here are some ideas for your staff meetings:

Annual Training:

- OSHA, Infection Control, HIPAA, Fire Safety, Disaster Communication
- Computer – Practice Management, EMR, Office, Outlook, Lab
- Diversity Training
- Benefits Enrollment & Ask the Expert
- Retirement Plan Enrollment & Ask the Expert
- Customer Service

Team Building:

- Brainstorming
- Who Am I? (find out interesting facts about each employee and have them ask each other questions to identify the person)
- Jeopardy, Pictionary, Family Feud about any office topic
- Breaking into cross-departments teams and choosing one problem to focus on solving over the next 3 or 6 months

In-services:

- Have your physicians give talks on illnesses or problems they address in their practice – most staff really like to learn more about the medical issues the patients face
- Invite physicians from other practices to speak with the office about their specialties
- Invite staff from practices you refer to, to speak about the tests or procedures they perform on your patients
- Stress Management
- Personal Safety
- Advance directives, living wills

Holidays:

- Decorate pumpkins, gourds, or papier mache eggs to look like the physicians and invite the patients to vote on the closest resemblance
- Give the staff a Halloween theme (scarecrows, witches, black cats) and award prizes (have the nearest office

- come over and judge) for decorating or costumes
- Invite someone from the community to come and talk about a holiday that no one on the staff celebrates
 - Provide the goodies for valentines and have the staff send thanks and letters to hospitalized soldiers
 - Sponsor a needy person or family at the holidays and use staff meeting time to plan for purchase, wrapping and delivering gifts

Some specifics about staff meetings:

1. Announce the meeting date and time well in advance. Place reminders on the doors that staff enter and exit the practice from, especially if the time is earlier than they usually arrive to work.
2. Post an agenda, or more informally, let staff know what some of the topics are that will be discussed.
3. Have everyone sign in, and place the sign-in sheets in a folder documenting that staff meeting were held. This may be needed for annual evaluations, accreditation surveys, etc.)
4. Include enough time for Q & A, or roundtable.
5. If everyone seems stiff and uncomfortable, plan something fun early in the meeting, or bring something good to eat, or do something that relaxes everyone (put on marching music and have everyone march around the room to get some smiling going!)
6. Produce brief minutes from the meeting and include any new policies or guidelines that were introduced. Place these minutes either in a binder centrally located or online so that anyone who missed the meeting can find out what happened.

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