

Best Practices for Adapting to the Remote and Hybrid Workforce in Team-Based Care



One of the largest undertakings for any health center leader or manager is ensuring adequate staffing to meet their organizational workforce goals. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has empowered management to get creative regarding where their staff works. This document provides health center leadership with ideas and best practices on how to adapt policies and procedures for a remote and hybrid workforce.

Telehealth, while not new, is used more widely than ever as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to providers who may be working remotely, other members of the health center staff, including call center and scheduling personnel, may also be working from home either temporarily or on a permanent basis. These changes to where staff work necessitate that health center leadership adapt the way they recruit, onboard, and engage their teams. Leadership must develop practices that promote engagement in diverse ways with staff, regardless of their location. With burnout at an all-time high, these engagement strategies for the hybrid and remote workforce are especially important to increase the retention of providers and staff.

Best Practices for Employee and Team Engagement in the Remote and Hybrid Workforce

Proper Onboarding

Establish expectations for those working remotely or as part of a hybrid team including the following:

- Are remote staff required to be online during certain hours or can their working hours be more flexible?
- How should staff communicate availability to others who are remote (e.g., when should someone post an out-of-office message)?
- Expected timeframe to respond to messages and how to communicate if that is not feasible.
- Provide guidance and training on how to use electronic tools such as how to set up an out-of-office message, how to share calendars, and how to use other communication tools like Microsoft Teams or Slack that are used by the health center.
- Ensure that team members have access to IT support for any technical issues that may arise.



Allow proper introductions to the health center itself and other team members:



- Encourage new employees to attend at least one day of the orientation and onboarding process onsite at the health center. Not only will this allow the new staff member to meet their colleagues but also gather any equipment they need, and see how the health center operates.
- Set up one-on-one meetings for staff to get to know their colleagues in the first days and weeks of their tenure.

Prioritize communication and transparency among teams and supervisors:

- Tools like Microsoft Teams, Monday, Zoom, Slack, etc. can be used for meetings and staying connected throughout the day as a way to have “down the hall” conversations when some or all of the team is virtual.
- Plan for almost all meetings and communication to be truly hybrid, not just having a Zoom meeting that shows the live meeting. This is important to ensure that all staff are included in meetings regardless of their status as a fully remote employee or in instances when they need to be temporarily remote. For example, in situations where staff with school-age children may require frequent out-of-office flexibility to care for their children who experience COVID-19 exposures.



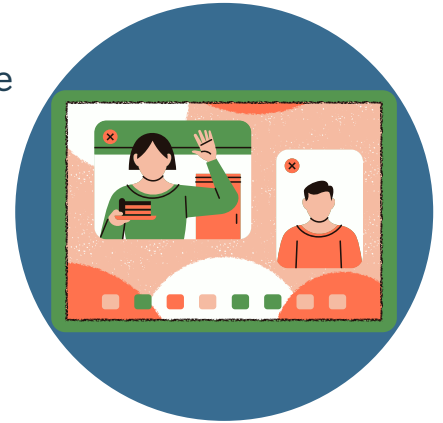
Provide regular teambuilding activities:



- Plan regular, non-mandatory, virtual check-ins or coffee chats that do not have agendas, but rather are open spaces to check in with each other. These informal get-togethers are often useful.
- Open virtual meetings with ice breakers or other personal connections that can help team members learn about and relate to each other.
- Consider ways team members can recognize each other or give kudos virtually -- this might include a process for virtual high-fives or nominating each other for small perks.

Regular check-ins with supervisors and team members:

- One-on-ones can be harder when one or both people are virtual, particularly when days may be filled with other virtual meetings. For this reason, it is important to establish expectations around check-ins and schedule them well in advance. These check-ins should be held even if there are no specific agenda items, as it is important to connect on a regular basis.
- Regular check-ins can be in the clinic or workplace, in-person but outdoors, or virtual—all can be equally effective in staying in touch and can make sure everyone is comfortable.



Leadership support:

- If teams are remote or hybrid, leaders need to account for those who are remote in all activities. For example, sharing information virtually as well as live such as by live streaming in-person meetings or sending information via email before a hybrid meeting.
- Leaders should be clear that all staff are equally valued and equally responsible, and that both those who may be working remotely and those who are in-person at any given time are valued members of the team with similar responsibilities.
- Leaders should encourage and model healthy boundaries for everyone, such as not checking email well outside of work hours, and provide clear communication around those boundaries.



Prioritizing mental health:

- Working remotely can lead to a lack of clear boundaries between home and work, which may be detrimental to staff wellness and productivity. Consider establishing working hours and ensure that staff are not compelled to work outside those hours on a regular basis. Be sure to check with staff about their preferences regarding established working hours versus flexible working hours, while maintaining an emphasis on clear, strong boundaries to create work-life balance.
- Ensure that hybrid or remote employees have access to employee benefit programs, such as an Employee Assistance Program (EAP), where they can access mental health services anonymously.



Other Resources for Health Centers with Remote Teams:

- www.hiteqcenter.org/Resources/Telehealth-Telemedicine/cybersecurity-checklist-for-health-center-staff-working-remotely
- www.hiteqcenter.org/Resources/Telehealth-Telemedicine/promising-practices-in-virtual-integrated-behavioral-health-care
- www.hiteqcenter.org/Resources/HITEQ-Resources/creating-a-plan-to-address-provider-satisfaction-with-health-it
- www.chcworkforce.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Effects-of-Virtual-Care-Delivery-FINAL.pdf
- www.nam.edu/communication-and-transparency-as-a-means-to-strengthening-workplace-culture-during-covid-19

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