

## **PAC Meeting: Workplace Stress Problem Solving Worksheet**

1. Dealing with too much work without enough time or resources seems impossible to resolve in today's overly demanding practice environments. Three possible solutions to this include:
  - A. Write out definition of tasks, responsibilities, and procedures for everything from check in to check out. What may be clear and obvious to one person may not be to everyone else. Putting it writing may help you gain clarity and identify missing links in the workflow.
  - B. Get feedback from people doing the job about what they think might make them more efficient and effective. Regular times to talk, informal opportunities to direct complaints to positive problem-solving discussions, and suggestion boxes are sometimes quite effective to help management manage.
  - C. Praise people for what they are doing well, and help them focus on their competencies, not their failings. Too often we're reminded only of our weaknesses. Focusing on what people don't do well may leave people feeling overwhelmed, frustrated, and like there is too much to do. When people become focused on what they can't do *easily*, even the easy things may seem difficult. Try to find out what each staff is great at. Then, ensure they have a chance to feel good about something they're doing on a regular basis.
  
2. Overcoming the disconnection between the work that needs to be done and having the resources needed to accomplish that work can be frustrating for everyone. Some solutions may include:
  - A. Identifying what needs to be done, developing written procedures to clarify those things, and then training everyone on the procedures. And that means everyone! Obviously, doctors don't need to understand every step in a workflow as though they were going to do each job. But leaving anyone out of the loop is a set-up for communication failure and frustration. Understanding what's happening, how, and why can help everyone work more efficiently.

- B. Create a simple mechanism for input and feedback that captures every perspective in the practice. Continuous quality improvement is vital in any sort of business, and today's medical practices are businesses in one of the most highly demanding, highly competitive marketplaces, where innovation is necessary to meet the ever-changing needs and demands of patients, staff, owners, regulatory bodies, and third-party payers.
- C. A plan for investing time and financial resources that make the practice a better place to work is often overlooked. Many small businesses live in firefighting mode, going from one crisis to the next. Tools like computers, printers, and EMRs seem like obvious priorities. But less obvious things may have a big impact on morale and efficiency. If there's only a half hour for lunch and four or five staff using one underpowered microwave, putting another machine in the break room could improve morale, help staff maximize needed down time, and reduce stress during breaks, making your practice a better place to work.

3. Role uncertainty and addressing lack of clarity about who does what tasks and when is critical to efficient and high functioning workplaces. Some solutions may include:

- A. Written and updated job descriptions and regular performance feedback – not the dreaded annual job review – are partial solutions to this problem.
- B. Supporting each staff member to own their position as an expert, with a vital role to play in practice function, is important if people are to act like professionals and take pride in their work. “I’m just a receptionist...” is a mindset the successful practice cannot afford.
- C. The vast majority of people don't quit jobs – they quit bosses. While you can't change how everyone acts in an office, you can make sure to address things that might be frustrating you in positive and professional ways. Simple steps that are proven effective include things like praise in public and criticize in private; offer constructive criticism sandwiched between two praises – and example might be, “I appreciate the way you've been.... I do need you to start .... But I know that won't be a problem based on the way you've been handling ... so well lately. Great job on those things!”