

Multifaceted Approaches to Increase Employee Retention

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1. Background

The Clinical Research Services (CRS) department at the UPMC Hillman Cancer Center historically had been plagued by double-digit staff turnover. In calendar year 2022, the CRS annual termination rate was 26.48 percent, with a termination rate for staff in the department less than one year equaling 29.83 percent. These rates were not only financially costly, but costly in terms of increased risks associated with decreased protocol compliance, data quality and timeliness, increased staff burnout, and loss of tacit knowledge. Results from anonymous institutional and departmental surveys illustrated that the greatest risks related to staff satisfaction included staff growth, development, and well-being, and a departmental culture of safety.

2. Goals

A multifaceted approach was implemented to address staff turnover and satisfaction. Building upon ongoing initiatives, efforts were directed towards approaches which would allow staff to feel that their voices were heard and that they played an active role in developing solutions and processes.

3. Solutions and Methods

The CRS Quality, Education, and Compliance team increased educational opportunities through continued daily office hours and implementation of a refresher series on topics identified through a staff survey. Manager one-on-one touch base meetings and weekly office hours were implemented, and an anonymous feedback link was created for staff to voice concerns and offer suggestions without fear of retaliation. In addition, a series of staff driven feedback surveys and multidisciplinary working groups provided opportunity for staff to provide feedback on common issues, be involved process improvement strategies, and regularly communicate with peers and leadership on topics of concern. Increased scrutiny of staff exit interview surveys identified factors driving dissatisfaction with the organization. Staff development concerns were addressed by further expanding career ladders while maximizing staff promotional opportunities. Staff also benefitted from various flexible work arrangements, including 4–10-hour shifts and work from home opportunities. Increased awareness of staff workload distribution through the use of the departmental workload analysis tool (**Trial Workload Assessment INSTRUMENT**) helped address staff well-being. Ongoing, regular, and direct communication with senior leadership was maintained through monthly senior leadership office hours, weekly rounding, quarterly town halls, and monthly All Staff meetings. Biweekly meetings with human resources facilitated ongoing conversations regarding career ladder development and allowed for employee relation issues to be addressed swiftly. Peer interviews were implemented for all roles prior to hiring a candidate which gave the staff a voice in the decision-making process.

4. Outcomes

With the successful implementation of the methods described, the overall annual term rate in calendar year 2023 decreased by 52.6 percent to be 12.55 percent, with the term rate for staff in the department decreasing by 89.7 percent to be 3.07 percent overall.

5. Lessons Learned and Future Directions

Reducing staff turnover takes a multifaceted approach and an investment in staff from senior leadership and management. Future directions include further analysis of staff surveys and exit interview data to determine the greatest opportunities to increase staff satisfaction. Staff working groups will continue to be leveraged to increase staff satisfaction and engagement in departmental processes, with the goal of further reducing staff turnover to less than 10 percent.