

Generational Challenges in Physician Recruitment

By Connie Mitchell

In today's recruitment landscape, physician recruiters are not devoid of unique challenges. For the past several years, we have experienced firsthand the shortage of physicians across all specialties, and the outlook for the future is daunting, to say the least.

The additional COVID exodus of physicians from the workforce has led to more physician openings, yet the issue of recruiting the "right" physician to fill these voids has become a major problem in itself.

In particular, the concept of "generational gaps" between administration and physician often causes avoidable stress on the entire recruitment process. Recruiters, physicians, and administrative leaders must work together and consider these generational differences. When left unacknowledged, problems such as lag time in placement, potential failed hires, and unhappy physicians all of which can attribute to larger physician retention issues down the road.

Generational Differences

To understand these generational differences, we must examine how they came about in the first place. The Traditionalist physicians (1925-1945) and the Baby Boomer physicians (1946-1964) have experienced the most changes within the healthcare industry. Initially, these two generational groups were the sole decision-makers in patient care and treatment. The physicians were treated with the utmost respect by their healthcare organizations and regarded highly by their patients.

Quite the opposite can be said for younger physicians. Generation X physicians (1965-1980) and Millennials (1981-1997) rely on teams to come up with collective decisions regarding the care and treatment of patients. They have been participating and solving problems in teams since they were in elementary school. The younger physician relies on nursing, techs, and other healthcare team members to assist in making decisions regarding patient diagnosis and care. **Be cognizant of these generational differences. Such factors can and will affect physician recruitment, the onboarding process and how new physicians relate to the existing practitioners in place.**

Traditionalists and Baby Boomers did not have the luxury of learning from and using the internet in their training. Paper journals, textbooks, and articles were used to obtain needed information. They did not have advanced imaging, the

variety of medications, or the treatment modalities for recommended treatment of care available today when they trained as physicians. Physicians would sometimes wait days to share testing results with their patients. Diagnosis and treatment of patients were done by memory of standardized care. The number of patients seen was often less than today due to the amount of time it took to diagnose and treat.

Today, younger physicians have little understanding of the practice of medicine in the "good ole days." Millennials and Generation X physicians grew up with information at their fingertips, receiving instant gratification through obtaining quick results from testing and lab work to quickly diagnosing and recommending methods of treatment. The wave of technology and the speed at which needed information is obtained allows the younger physician to be more efficient and effective in diagnosing and developing a treatment plan for patient care. Some recruitment teams are intimidated by the constant use of internet apps and modern technology and only want to hire the "seasoned" physician.

The belief is that the greatest generational difference is the way work is perceived. Traditionalist and Boomer physicians have made it an expectation to work long hours and spend less time at home. Patient care is seen as the utmost responsibility and commitment. It is the physician's responsibility alone to care for patients no matter the number of duration of hours needed. Families expected the physician would be working 24/7. This has changed over the years with sharing of call and the introduction of the hospitalists caring for patients, but there continues to be the expectation in our more seasoned physicians to work long hours, have extensive call schedules, and have the sole responsibility for patient care.

Younger physicians see their work responsibilities very differently. The younger physicians believe that because they survived long hours and a rigorous work schedule while in residency and fellowship, they have "paid their dues." Generation X and Millennial physicians are also looking for more work-life balance. This includes a flexible schedule and call shared equally by all. The younger physician is willing to work hard within the time frame that they are scheduled to work but spending time with family and outside activities is very important to them. There is still a sense of obligation to patient care and the organization but is a totally different way of thinking. Our more seasoned or experienced physicians need to embrace the new way of thinking and develop an understanding of what is important to younger physicians. This is critical in physician recruitment as well as retention.

Overcoming Generational Gaps

Physicians need to keep an open mind in relation to generational differences and take this as an opportunity to learn from each other. There is not just one way to become a valuable, respected physician. As physicians transition out of their practice and into retirement, it is important that they share their years of knowledge and work with their younger colleagues in a professional way. Having an open mind with great discussions about the “good ole days” and lessons learned along the way is healthy for both parties involved. This is an opportunity for the younger physician to obtain new knowledge and skills. As physicians enter the workforce, they can also teach their seasoned colleagues tricks and tips in the new wave of technology. The sharing of knowledge is a great tool in developing a collegial environment.

It is also important for physician leaders to look at work-life balance. Research clearly shows that having this balance builds proactive, productive, and committed employees that are less stressed and happier. This is now regulated by physician training and through monitoring the amount of time that residents and fellows are working. Why would we expect physicians to work longer, less flexible hours once they have started down their career path?

Given these generational differences, it is critical that there is an open mind in the hiring and recruitment of physicians. Recognizing that these differences will also occur during the search and hiring process. Position profiles, screening processes, and communication processes must all take this into consideration. It is equally important when deciding what the physician compliment will be for each specialty to be successful. At best, it is an opportunity for all to learn from each other and come together to form cohesive and effective teams. At worst, ignoring these varied traits, often leads to unhappiness and resentment among physicians, causing the need for specialized physician recruiters like Corazon to step in to assist. Here at [Corazon](#), a key component of our recruitment and consulting services is to assist our clients with opening their minds beyond generational differences and recognize today’s broader spectrum. Corazon strives to find the “perfect fit” for these hospitals while managing the full range of duties from sourcing, interviewing, background checks, compensation analysis and contract negotiation support, and mentoring services keeping current trends and expectations on the national forefront. With increasing competition and mounting challenges in healthcare services, Corazon remains determined to find the right fit for your organization.



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