

Risk Tip: Encouraging Generational Understanding

Today's healthcare environment employs people that span the generations. We see physicians practicing into their 90s alongside people born in the 1990s. The diversity has benefits, but the frustrations that sometimes arise can impact the satisfaction of your workforce and ultimately affect patient safety.

Medical practices can help build supportive workplaces that benefit employees and patients by learning about the attitudes and styles that each generation exhibits and adapting strategies aimed at improving intergenerational communication.

Here's how:

1. Provide training and resources to help individuals understand the values and beliefs associated with each generation.
2. Ensure people understand that such information should be used to promote general understanding.
3. Encourage people to understand their own generation's traits and how these traits are perceived by others.
4. Discuss how the generational cohorts of patients might impact the practice in terms of safety, professionalism, communication, and privacy.
5. Help staff recognize their own "knee jerk" reactions to circumstances in which another person's values or behavior differs from their own.
6. When discussing conflict, focus on behaviors and avoid personal attacks.
7. Encourage flexibility as it relates to communication styles and methods. Don't force communication methods, but help everyone understand situations that may warrant using a method that goes against their tendency.
8. Develop strategies for retention and mechanisms of reward/recognition that support a diverse workforce.

The healthcare environment is more diverse than ever. While this diversity can be enriching for patients and providers alike, the potential for conflict between generations looms. By examining the generations at work in your practice, you can go a long way toward keeping your workforce— and patients—happy and healthy.

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