

PHYSICIAN RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION:
ORGANIZATIONAL CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

As the healthcare industry faces a growing physician shortage, it's vital that organizations take the necessary steps to retain their physicians and recruit new ones.

FierceHealthcare set out to find out the main reasons why physicians leave their organizations, so hospitals, health systems and physician practices can take action to create competitive compensation and benefit packages, develop an encouraging and cooperative culture, and provide leadership opportunities for physicians.

Money talks

Healthcare professionals report that the top reasons physicians leave their organizations are for better pay, a more desirable location and greater prestige.

More than half of the 106 individuals surveyed said physicians typically left for more lucrative positions. Other reasons for breaking ties included a more appealing location (nearly 40 percent) and more prestige (almost 25 percent).

But individual respondents also wrote in other factors, such as lack of internal development and administrative role opportunities. One in 10 respondents said their organization does nothing to promote leadership development.

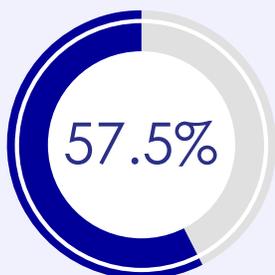
Few organizations, whether large or small, make leadership development opportunities readily available. Although about one-third said their organizations set established performance expectations, only a small portion (17 percent) have some sort of leadership academy, and even fewer (12.3 percent) have a formal leadership succession plan or provide doctors with executive coaching.

In a survey, "How to retain physicians," *FierceHealthcare* asked 106 senior executives (presidents, CEOs, chief medical officers), department or division heads, practice owners, administrators and staff--what their healthcare organizations do to recruit and retain quality physicians.

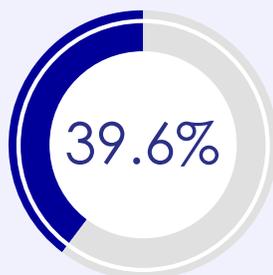
Thirty respondents (28.3 percent) worked in large hospitals (300 beds or more), 33 worked in medium-sized hospitals (100-299 beds), 12 worked in small hospitals (1-99 beds), 16 worked for integrated health systems, and 15 worked at physician practices.

Respondents' specialties spanned primary care, family physician, general internal medicine, surgical, medical, Ob/Gyn and general surgery.

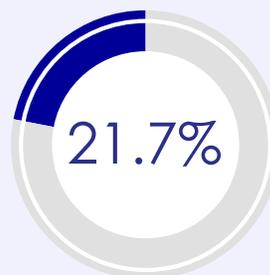
Top reasons physicians leave their organizations



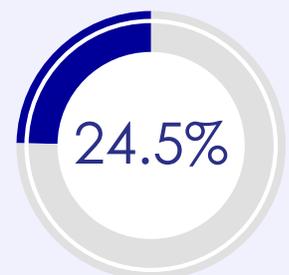
Pay



Location



Better shifts



More prestige

Integrated health systems were more likely to offer leadership academies at their institutions than hospitals or physician practices.

The seven-year itch

But doctors aren't necessarily in a hurry to leave their current positions. More than half of the organizations, regardless of size, retain physicians for an average of seven years or more, while nearly 19 percent said their physicians stick around between five and six years.

Almost one-quarter reported that physicians stay at their organizations for three to four years

and six respondents said docs only work at their organization for one to two years. No one reported that doctors work for less than a year before leaving their organization.

Integrated health systems tended to retain the doctors the longest, followed closely by small hospitals.

Perks count

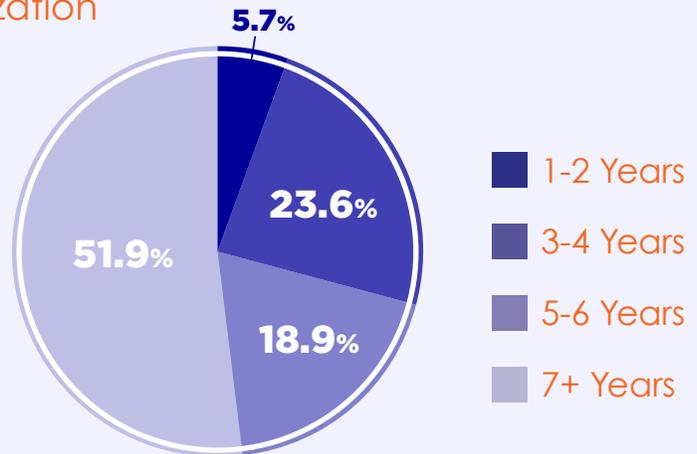
To entice doctors to stay, half of the respondents said their organizations offer doctors paid leave, malpractice insurance and retirement plans.

But every perk counts. Less than half of respondents' organizations offer access to fitness facilities and leaves of absence or profit sharing. A handful of respondents mentioned their institutions offer bonuses or housing allowances, while others provide relocation assistance, community event and membership support, research opportunities and library services.

Although one in four respondents said location played a role in physicians' decisions to leave, there are several ways to create an atmosphere to encourage doctors to stay:

- Play up the positive aspects of their city or town and help integrate doctors to make them a part of the community.
- Offer support to foster a good work/life balance and help with community events and membership.
- Create a positive culture of cooperation by minimizing organizational politics or disagreements over the direction the organization. Seventy-five percent of respondents from smaller hospitals said their physicians left for that exact reason.

Average length of time doctors stay at one organization



Most common perks offered to physicians



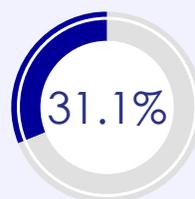
Paid leave



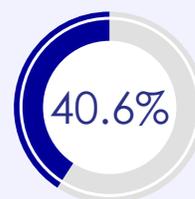
Retirement plans



Access to fitness facilities



Profit sharing



Leaves of absence



Malpractice insurance

Roll out the welcome mat

Another way to hold on to physicians is to make sure they feel welcome the moment they join the organization.

The large majority of survey respondents said their organizations use introductions, facility tours and welcome packets with key policies and procedures as part of their onboarding process. However, less than a quarter of them follow up with weekly calls and check-ins with their new employees.

Mentoring programs, orientations and retreats are typical methods organizations use to acclimate new hires to the organizations. More than half of those surveyed said their organizations have a culture of participation that involves physicians in decisions, changes and their overall mission.

Leadership visibility and employee social events are also essential parts of the onboarding process at the majority of organizations.

Offer more administrative support

Organizations could do more to minimize the administrative burdens placed on physicians.

More than one in 10 respondents said their organizations do little or nothing in the way of specific initiatives to reduce administrative tasks, while about 20 percent of respondents said physicians delegate the work to administrative staff, personal administrative assistants or nurses.

One senior executive said his organization has a departmental coordinator—a relatively junior physician who handles most administrative duties. Technologies, such as well-developed electronic medical records, and IT training also assist physicians, respondents said.

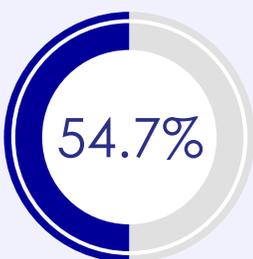
Provide professional development opportunities

Many organizations also offer continuing medical education opportunities and incentives. The majority (63.2 percent) of respondents—particularly those who work at integrated health systems (81 percent)—said their organizations offer physicians paid time off to pursue CME opportunities.

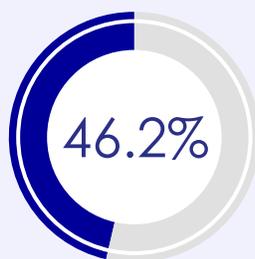
About 63 percent of all respondents also said their organizations reimburse physician travel expenses and 58.5 percent report their organization also pays for class tuition as part of the CME packages. One department head noted her organization also covers the cost of licensing and specialty association dues.

But not all healthcare organizations are so accommodating. One senior executive, for example, reports his hospital does not provide any monetary incentive for continuing education, aside from allowing a specific number of days a year to attend outside workshops and seminars. However, he noted that the hospital requires each department to conduct regular CME sessions, including a hospital-wide CME activity once a month.

Most popular methods organizations use to maintain a good relationship with new hires



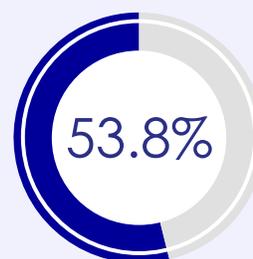
Follow-up meetings



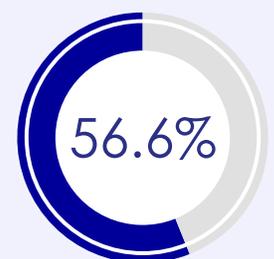
Mentoring programs



Employee social events



Senior leadership visibility



Culture of participation