Burnout reduction through better teamwork

A partnership between the Optum National Clinical Excellence Experience Team and the Institute for Professional Worklife (IPW).

Background

A deeper look at clinician experience, burnout and intent to stay

The national clinician experience team has conducted a series of studies, analyzing clinicians' perceptions of their care team's effectiveness, how it impacts their work experience and intent to stay with the organization. This work led to the development a four-item TEAM index. The TEAM index can be used as a predictive model to determine the strength of a clinical team.

The four-item TEAM index

1. The degree to which my care team works efficiently together is poor, marginal, satisfactory, good or optimal
2. My medical group makes it a priority for clinical staff to communicate about patient care (e.g. daily huddles and other activities in clinic)
3. My team makes continuous improvements in the delivery of patient care
4. People I work with demonstrate excellence in everything we do

Well-led highly functional teams are associated with:
- Favorable clinician experience **(79% favorable vs. 24% with low TEAM score)**
- Decreased clinician burnout **(17% vs 44%)**
- Higher intent to stay **(93% vs 65%)**
- Higher likelihood for a patient to recommend a practice (NPS) by **40%.**

Utilizing data from the first manuscript, we conducted a series of focus groups with high performing clinical teams to obtain qualitative data to better understand the components of a high-functioning team.

The data identified several enduring characteristics that have been compiled into an **actionable toolkit** for you. See page 2.

Toolkit Steps

Our Clinician Experience team will guide and support you throughout the program. We will provide consult, project management, and resource support to meet your individual needs.

Step 1: Planning (time est. 2-3 hrs.)

- **Review team EXI and other supporting data**: review EXI and verbatim data to define team experience objectives. Identify current team culture and outline go-forward strategy.

- **Build team infrastructure:** select a champion for each team and a clinic team leader who are committed to planning, promoting, encouraging and implementing tactics (may be the same person in smaller clinics.) We recommend a dyad leadership dynamic.

- **Select two tactics** from toolkit menu. Tactics consist of opportunities to strengthen communication, staff training, team engagement and/or recognition.

- **Develop timeline and expectations**. The clinician experience team will develop a project plan with reasonable milestones for success once details have been confirmed with leaders.

Step 2: Program kick-off (time est. 1 hr.)

- The clinician experience team will host a kick-off call with the champion, clinic leader, and clinic staff to introduce the toolkit tactics and expectations.

Step 3: Implement tactics into practice *(time est. is variable)*

- Time to implement and execute toolkit tactics will be dependent on your selections.

- Some tactics may require little to no additional time (i.e. team huddles, recognition boards) where others might require dedicated time to execute (i.e. cross-training staff.)

Step 4: Refine and assess (time est. 1 hr. weekly)

- The clinician experience team will meet weekly (bi-weekly at minimum) with the champion and clinic team leader to review success and outcomes of tactics. Frequency of meetings subject to change based on individual needs of the team.

- We will monitor EXI and team index scores to assess for additional opportunities and success of the implemented tactics. A mini survey may be distributed to participating team members between survey cycles.

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Toolkit

Thank you for your participation! This page displays several different menu options that our research has shown to be effective tactics. Please choose **at least two options** from the tactics section that you want to focus on in your clinic over the next six months to a year.

Planning

Leader buy-in

Encourage, promote and reward leader buy-in and involvement.
Endorse accessible and supportive leaders that connect to the team by:
- Provide time for leaders/workers to attend huddles
- Allow time for leaders to listen to team members
- Maintain accessibility, approachability, and transparency (No problem too big or small to share)

Review data

Review your clinics' experience data.
- Define your team experience objectives.
- Discuss your current culture and outline what you want it to be.

Build infrastructure

Build an infrastructure, with a team champion for each team, and a team leader for the clinic (may be the same person in smaller clinics).

Tactics – *select two*

Communication

Assure continuous communication, such as **daily huddles** or **co-location of staff**[2] or end of day check out.
- Provide transparent and frequent communication
- Actively seek input from team members
- Explain *why* things (within the organization) are changing and what that means for the team
- Communicate how the team's actions directly impact patients for the better

Training

Cross train for flexing in stressful times.
- Dedicate time to cross train people to work in multiple roles.
- Be creative on how people can learn skills to help each other and advance their careers.

Team Engagement

Build an environment where employees feel involved and connected to their roles within the organization.
- Establish a mentor/buddy program for new and/or existing clinicians
- Schedule time for group meals or activities
- Introduce and drive quality culture across your team(s)

Recognition

Ensure people feel recognized, valued and psychologically safe.[3]
How leaders can make people feel valued:
- Ensure psychologically and physically safe environment
- Convey empathy and respect.(Ask leaders to be visible)
- Create an inclusive workplace that embraces diversity of thought and practice
- Recognize teammates through platforms such as BRAVO!

NOTE: At the conclusion of the trial, findings will be circulated within our Optum network. The data will be presented at meetings and submitted for publication. Teams and clinics can decide how to proceed with additional team culture modifications and plans for sustaining culture and structure made during the trial.

2. Linzer M, Poplau S, Grossman E, et al. A Cluster Randomized Trial of Interventions to Improve Work Conditions and Clinician Burnout in Primary Care: Results from the Healthy Work Place (HWP) Study. *J Gen Intern Med*. 2015;30(8):1105-1111. doi:10.1007/s11606-015-3235-4

3. Stillman M, Sullivan EE, Prasad K, et al. Understanding what leaders can do to facilitate healthcare workers' feeling valued: improving our knowledge of the strongest burnout mitigator. *BMJ Leader* Published Online First: 22 April 2024. doi: 10.1136/leader-2023-000921