Ophthalmic Technicians, Part 3: How to Hire Exceptional Pediatrics Support Staff

Earlier this year, *EyeNet* shared tips on recruiting technicians (May), as well as training and retaining them (June). This month, the focus is on hiring the pediatric tech.

Look for Five Key Traits

Look for job applicants who are eager to learn and who exhibit the following traits.

1. Enjoys working with kids. A genuine interest in working with children is indispensable for a good pediatric technician. At times, children can be funny and cute; at other times, scared and upset. Someone who loves working with kids will be able to appreciate the situation and adapt without feeling overwhelmed. Previous experience working with children, whether in health care or another setting, is a big plus.

2. Loves to have fun. I recently asked a new hire to hold a toy at the end of the room and bark like a dog. The technician, thinking that I was joking, met my request with a blank stare. I quickly picked up the toy and demonstrated barking and other animal sounds, as a means to gain a child's attention. This may not come naturally to everyone, but if staff are willing to get out of their comfort zone, these distraction techniques can go a long way toward helping children feel comfortable.

3. Projects a calming presence. An eye exam can be anxiety-provoking for children. A technician with a gentle and calming demeanor can often make a child feel more comfortable, and this can help them to be more coopera-tive during the exam. When placing eyedrops or obtaining clinical measurements, a gentle approach will be better tolerated by the child and much appreciated by the parents.

4. Looks for the creative solution. With adult patients, many technicians follow the same routine when they obtain the history and perform the preliminary exam. With children, however, creativity and flexibility are often required to obtain the needed information. Some kids may need to start with an exam right away or play games for vision testing, while others may need to sit with parents for a few minutes while a history is being taken.

5. Takes the initiative. Fully engaged technicians play a crucial role on a well-functioning pediatric ophthalmology team. Because so much of the clinic flow and patient experience falls to the role of technicians, it is essential that technicians be willing to actively look for ways to improve efficiency.

Training Your New Tech

In our practice, all new technicians receive training in the pediatric clinic regardless of their final clinic designation. This training includes didactic sessions, exam practice with peers, and pediatric clinical rotations. Adequate cross-training for all technicians enables our practice to provide competent coverage when our core technicians are unavailable. Our pediatric physicians periodically review the didactic education and provide feedback for new technicians who are rotating through the clinic.

BY **BRAD S. HENRIKSEN, MD.**

Retaining Your Techs

Retaining a good technician depends on multiple factors, including providing support and opportunities for growth. Support means listening to and addressing their concerns, and treating them equitably with their peers. Growth opportunities can include pursuing certifications, continuing education, and taking on training or management responsibilities. The goal is to provide the job satisfaction and fulfillment that will lead to retention.

Dr. Henriksen is a pediatric ophthalmologist at Excel Eye Center in Provo, Utah. *Financial disclosures: None.*

MORE ONLINE. For a list of technician-related courses at AAO 2021, see this article at aao.org/eyenet.

ONLINE RESOURCES

See the new pediatrics page. The new practice management page for pediatric ophthalmology includes further advice on techs (aao.org/pm-pediatrics).

Use the Ophthalmology Job Center. Advertise online (ophth jobs.aao.org).

Join the discussion at AAOE-Talk. AAOE members can crowdsource advice on technician-related issues at aao.org/practice-management/listserv).