Reboot Your Practice
Post-Covid-19 Recovery Roadmap for the Ophthalmic Practice

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Reboot Your Practice: Post-COVID-19 Recovery
Roadmap for the Ophthalmic Practice

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Introduction

In response to COVID-19, the AAOE® Recovery Taskforce developed *Reboot Your Practice: Post-COVID-19 Recovery Roadmap for the Ophthalmic Practice* to get your practice ready for reopening. The tactics and resources outlined here are based on those shared by the AAOE Recovery Task Force and Academy and AAOE members. It includes strategies, tips and pearls as well as links to online resources, such as practice protocols, policies and other forms, that you can adapt for use in your practice.

When completed, the *Recovery Roadmap* will consist of 10 modules and will be continually updated as the pandemic situation changes. It is available in downloadable PDF format and also accessible online.

The first five modules of the Recovery Roadmap are as follows:

- **Module 1: Consider Financial Impact**
- **Module 2: Focus on Improving Profitability**
- **Module 3: Identify Financial Relief**
- **Module 4: Nurture Positive Employee Relations**
  - 4.1 Stay Connected and Communicate with Your Staff
  - 4.2 Employee Guidance On Operational Safety and Protocols
- **Module 5: Rethink Your Operations and Develop Reopening and Recovery Strategies**
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  - 5.2 Develop Reopening and Recovery Protocols
  - 5.3 OSHA Considerations
  - 5.4 HIPAA Policies, Requirements and Temporary Suspensions

The coronavirus has caused a lasting shift in the American subconscious. We will always remember this time, much as the country dealt with the new realities after 9/11. For months after we are given the green light to leave our homes, patients, practices and health care systems will be sensitized to cleanliness and the risk of infection. There is also the reality that until we have proven vaccines against the coronavirus and treatments for COVID-19 infections, we will not return to “normal.” In addition, we must prepare for the potential of future pandemics.

In the reopening and recovery era, there will be cultural norms that will become less normalized and quarantine technologies that will continue to evolve. Telemedicine will likely remain a modality of screening patients for the foreseeable future. Practices that are built for the long-term will have to adapt to a post-COVID reality of social distancing, transmission risk minimization, and telemedicine.

These changes should be reflected in practice protocols and all key stakeholders should contribute to their creation. While the ophthalmic practice will need to continually evolve, the process to adapt can be an opportunity to respond with improved efficiencies and a culture of versatility. The *Recovery Roadmap* is intended to help your practice adapt, respond and thrive in the new normal of future pandemics.

*AAOE® Recovery Taskforce*
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Module 4
Nurture Positive Employee Relations

4.1 Stay Connected and Communicate with Your Staff

Statement of Purpose

Many practices have laid off or furloughed staff that will be critical to their practice recovery following the pandemic. The remaining staff are no longer working with their colleagues and may also be working in alternative positions. These changes may impact each employee differently and some may feel unsettled. Ongoing communication with all employees is central to retaining staff, managing survivor guilt, and avoiding burnout. When managed well, the recovery process can be an opportunity for personal growth for your staff and boost their morale.

Practice Challenges

- Facilitating communication with all staff regardless of current employee status and during recovery.
- Providing support for and connecting with furloughed employees.
- Communicating the constant changes to office procedures and protocols.
- Effectively encouraging education for furloughed staff.
- Anticipating which staff may not want to return, either due to fear or financial reasons.

Action Items

1. **Identify a platform for communication.**
   Communication platforms can be group text, e-mail, private Facebook page, Google Hangouts, Zoom meetings, Yammer, etc.

2. **Facilitate activities and communication.**
   Connect frequently so all staff feel included and not forgotten. Encourage them to share how they are managing at home. Challenge staff to participate in scavenger hunts, photo competitions, cooking challenges, etc.
3. **Rapidly share with all staff any protocol changes that you are implementing in response to the new challenges presented by the pandemic.**

The following protocol changes should top your recovery checklist:
   a. Schedule protocols for your phone scripts, identifying urgent and emergent patients, and schedule template changes.
   b. Involve employees in the creation of procedures and protocols. Invite input and share sources for guidance (CDC, CMS, Academy, state government).
   c. Develop an effective training system for all protocols.
   d. Update your social media and website to convey to patients the measures your practice is taking to ensure safety for all.
   e. Document changes in your physician preferences.
   f. Develop telemedicine-specific protocols for scheduling, screening, and required documentation.
   g. Determine reassignment of tasks within the office.

4. **Acknowledge fears and frustrations.**
   a. Working staff may experience survivor guilt and feel compassion for their furloughed co-workers.
   b. Some may fear exposure to the virus.
   c. Some may be frustrated that their co-workers can relax at home, often earning more than what they earned while in the office.
   d. Address these concerns promptly and work to resolve individually. Offer solutions and continue to share appreciation all staff members.

5. **Respond with safety and well-being solutions.**
   a. Ensure that appropriate PPE is available for working staff and that protocols are developed for both patient and staff safety.
   b. Consider bonuses or rewards for those continuing to work during the crisis. Other options include increased vacation, paid time-off and employee recognition.
   c. Provide meals for staff either during or after the pandemic as a recognition of their hard work and dedication. Encourage healthy habits and eating by selecting healthy choices for any snacks or meals your practice provides.
   d. Provide employee training on operational safety.
   e. Create office safety protocols and train staff.
   f. Provide specialized [staff training for proper PPE use](#).

6. **Support their continued education by providing online educational resources they can review.**
REBOOT YOUR PRACTICE: POST-COVID-19 RECOVERY ROADMAP FOR THE OPHTHALMIC PRACTICE

7. **Identify projects for downtime.**
   a. Update your practice forms. You don’t need to start from scratch. A multitude of practice forms can be found in the [AAOE Practice Forms Library](https://www.aoae.org/practice-forms).

8. **Assemble a task force or committee to identify solutions during recovery.**
   a. Challenge employees to proactively identify problems and work together to implement new protocols or changes within the practice.
   b. Task employees to monitor any new safety concerns or patient-related issues and to communicate to supervisors.
   c. Present the practice goals for implementing telemedicine and ask for feedback and how this new process will impact each department.

9. **Poll staff at home frequently to determine their anticipation to return to work.**
   a. Determine if any of your staff need assistance with applying for unemployment or are struggling financially as a result of the pandemic. Seek resources for them in their community as you are able. Text individually or e-mail the group. Understand the individual concerns so that you can anticipate [how to return staff](https://www.aoae.org/how-to-return-staff) when needed.

**Resources**
- Stay Connected with Your Staff – Platforms to Use and Activities to Lead
- [Employee Template Letter to End Furlough](https://www.aoae.org/template-letter-to-end-furlough)
- [How Poor Diet Contributes to Coronavirus Risk](https://www.aoae.org/how-poor-diet-contributes-to-coronavirus-risk)
- [When Duty Calls, and Menaces](https://www.aoae.org/when-duty-calls-and-menaces)
- [Going Back to Work: Coronavirus Rights](https://www.aoae.org-going-back-to-work-coronavirus-rights)

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Module 4
Nurture Positive Employee Relations

4.2: Employee Guidance on Operational Safety and Protocols

Statement of Purpose

Due to the ever-changing climate of the pandemic, practice employees will need constant guidance and training. Developing protocols and reviewing them periodically will provide training and consistency. As expectations change, prompt review and clear communication will facilitate employee support.

Practice Challenges

- Maintaining structure and consistency in an ever-changing climate.
- Identifying the best resources for operational and safety protocols.
- Developing protocols promptly and as necessary.
- Staying educated on local and state requirements and CDC guidelines.
- Train staff on protocols typically outside their job description, (e.g., PPE use), and new protocols related to safety and reducing exposure.

Strategic Considerations

- Create an internal COVID-19 Employee Guidance for Operational Safety protocol and an agreement form based on your unique practice considerations as well as CDC, state/local government and public health guidelines.

  ![Demonstration of staff using PPE.](Photo courtesy of Brittney Wachter, CEO Excel Eye Center, Provo, UT.)

- Schedule training sessions with employees based on office protocol. Due to the pandemic and evolving public health official guidance, expectations may be constantly in flux. Communicate to staff that they may need to prepare for daily or weekly changes and prepare them to anticipate the next change. Send staff reminders frequently to emphasize your training.

  ![Plan Do Check Act](Photo courtesy of Brittney Wachter, CEO Excel Eye Center, Provo, UT.)
• Involve employees and physicians in the development of your practice’s guidance for operational and safety guidelines. Request that staff direct their new contributions to your practice protocols to either their supervisor or an internal task force.

Action Items

1. **Book mark and regularly review CDC resources.**
The CDC provides a wide variety of important practice information including clinic preparedness and staff training and preparation.
   a. Ensure that staff understand proper use of PPE.
   b. Teach staff how to recognize the symptoms of COVID-19.
   c. Train staff on triage and screening techniques.
   d. Stress the importance of hand washing and cough etiquette.
   e. Ensure that sick staff stay at home or are sent home when identified.

2. **Identify state and local government and public health resources.**
   a. Understand the guidelines unique to your community.
   b. Know the public health department guidelines for reporting positive COVID-19 employees or physicians.

3. **Frequently review Academy coronavirus resources for relevant updates to employee guidance protocols.**
   a. **For ophthalmologists and clinical resources**
   b. **Practice management** related resources
   c. **Reopening and Recovery**

Resources

• COVID-19 Employee Guidance for Operational Safety
• Personal Protective Equipment (PPE): Provide Staff Training and Optimize Your Supply
• Staff Reminders

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