Creative Staffing with Professional Volunteers

Organization:
Los Angeles Christian Health Center, Los Angeles, CA

Summary:
The Los Angeles Christian Health Center's dental clinic was started by volunteer dentists. These strategies were implemented to perpetuate and expand the volunteer’s capabilities in the face of cutbacks to the budget for staff dentists. The initial volunteer program had waned as FQHC funds were used to hire a full time Dental Director to deliver a full week of dental care. As the budget became more restrictive, we needed to rely on a volunteer schedule to cover some days while supplementing the other days with part-time dentists. Using these strategies, we were able to reduce staffing costs by 50%, and the increased enthusiasm led to more commitment toward the higher ideals and compassion within the delivery of care. The strategies below will help your Health Center develop a strong volunteer program.

1. Work with an inspiring mission statement
   a. The basic business practice of using a one sentence summary of a big vision for a service need that extends beyond the community's current capabilities.
   b. Identify the neglected community and communicate the separation from dentists' private practice communities.

2. Connect with professionals through their communities
   c. Great organizations exist, including:
      i. Professional organizations
      ii. Continuing education relationships
   d. Community organizations, such as, Kiwanis, Moose Lodge, business networks
   e. Newspapers

3. Present the needs, visually and culturally
   e. Create a presentation of needs
   f. Photos communicate emotionally and help dentists visualize how much their contributions are needed.

4. Provide excellent support staff and environment
   g. New but not always the best equipment
   h. Do not get frustrated with functional limits
   i. Scope of treatment clearly defined
   j. Systematic follow up

5. Provide constant gratuitous communication
   k. Holiday celebration at the end of the year
   l. Provide audit feedback for credibility. The audits should address commonly recognized standards of excellence in charting. Patient satisfaction reports should be used to explain large or small changes in practice management. Encourage newer material advancements that have credibility for improvement

This form has been adapted from the Association of State and Territorial Dental Directors (ASTDD) Best Practices summaries form: http://www.astdd.org/state-and-community-practice-examples/. ASTDD has taken the lead in promoting the development of best practices by state, territorial and community oral health programs to enhance oral health and reduce disparities.
of care.
m. Accountability reports on finances should explain the savings and the financial needs that can be accomplished with more volunteers, and success stories from patients should be easy to gather, document and distribute.

Whether an organization is a start up or established, every non-profit should have the inspirational capability to recruit and inspire regular professional volunteer support. Our professional cultures began and grew from altruistic foundations that can be rekindled to accomplish great goals in every community. Within the skid community of downtown Los Angeles, USC Dental, UCLA Nursing, Catholic Workers Commune, Union Rescue Mission, LA Mission, John Wesley Community Health Center, Midnight Mission, and dozens of other organizations provide a structure with some level of volunteer participation. Only the LA Christian Health Center – Joshua House Dental Department derives over 50% of its budget from volunteers and their donations. This leads to an enthusiasm that cannot be matched by grants and foundations, as critical and well-meaning as they are.

**Lessons Learned:**
Voluntary service is always deserving of gratitude and conciliatory management. The volunteer should have the freedom to cancel or reschedule at any time. A once a month schedule rotated among many is far better for lifelong giving than a weekly request. The day should be scheduled around their capabilities and preferences, especially for the long term volunteers. Young providers will often supplement part time practices with a temporary weekly volunteer role, but these should be double booked with more experienced providers for networking and camaraderie.

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