

You're off!

How to help recruit your successor

Accountant James Gransby lists the ideal skills required for the demanding role of practice manager

If you've had enough and are about to retire, or if you're looking for a new challenge in life and are leaving the practice for pastures new, you may be asked to help recruit your successor.

You know more than anyone what it takes to do the job – but as an accountant I get to talk to practice managers all the time and have my own perspective on the skills I would include in a job specification for the role. Indeed, I would encourage practices to invite their practice accountant to get involved in the recruitment process, too, either at interview stage or for informal meetings with potential recruits.

1 Patience

You know how many people you deal with who put demands on your time. The list is endless and your colleagues would be surprised by some of the people you are asked to liaise with and some of the jobs that you are asked to do.

Some people may not have a good understanding of the priorities practice managers have to give to the endless list of jobs that need to be got through every day. Inevitably, people try to 'jump' their job up the priority list and this will need to be managed.

What is needed here are the core skills of good communication, and most of all, patience. The new practice manager will need to patiently explain when they will be able to do the task, or give help and support so that people are able to solve their own problems themselves.

Poor application will lead to the practice manager potentially getting the wrong reputation, even if their motives are sound – and this could backfire on the practice in the long run.

2 Organisational and problem-solving skills

There is often more than one way to solve a problem. In choosing the best method lies the skill.

A practice manager isn't just expected to organise their time. They will also be charged with organising other people's, too – some of whom may be disorganised.

Clear systems with built-in flexibility are important and the new practice manager needs to be able to adapt to the system, or be able to design a system from scratch.

3 Strong data entry

Many of the systems used by GP practices are fit for some purpose – just not the purpose of running a busy medical practice. Therefore, the challenge of data capture and entry needs to be overcome. Practice managers need to be able to get to grips quickly with how to get the best out of systems and understand their inherent weaknesses.

A background of dealing with these, or similar systems might be something to ask at interview stage as this will be one of the first hurdles to overcome on day one of the job.

4 Competence and level-headedness

A multitude of characteristics come into play here; dependable, reliable, competent and good under pressure are all words and phrases to watch out for in a reference from a previous employer. The practice manager is often the pillar of the practice who people turn to for guidance and assurance. If the practice manager is flustered or out-of-control, then the whole organisation may be too. Keeping one's head while all around are losing theirs is a good way of describing this essential quality.



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5 Standing ground under pressure

I come across this a lot. The scenario might be GP partners wanting to take extra drawings despite there being no money in the kitty. Or a staff member who might want to work flexitime but the surgery isn't set up to allow it.

Making well reasoned yet unpopular decisions can sometimes prevent a calamity further down the line. If the recipient of the news can't see the logic then it needs to be explained to them.

Making popular decisions all the time is not an option for a long career. The only way this would be possible is if everyone's requests were always reasonable ...

6 Adapting to the unexpected

Some sugar-coating may take place during the interview to convince the new practice manager to join the practice. Office politics, together with the odd skeleton in the closet are bound to be unearthed once the new practice manager starts work. Look for a positive attitude and signs of being able to adapt to the unexpected. The person taking on your role should have the skills you have developed yourself during your career as a practice manager – a multi-tasker who is ever-patient, with the data assimilation skills of an air traffic controller and the people skills of Mother Teresa. Wish them well before you disappear over the horizon! **PM**