

GUIDE

Seven Strategies to Solve Staffing Shortages

For Practices



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If your practice has been impacted by staffing challenges in the last few years, you're not alone. The healthcare industry endured the worst the pandemic could dish out only to be faced with crippling labor shortfalls in 2021 that appear to have no end in sight. According to the MGMA, 88% of medical practices have had difficulties recruiting front-office staff.¹ Almost 60% of practices are forecasting that staffing shortages will continue to be their biggest challenge heading into 2023.²

Understaffing not only puts a strain on your entire team but it also severely impacts your productivity and the quantity of appointments you can schedule. A recent poll found that 30% of medical groups were below their productivity³ goals for 2021, with many citing a lack of staffing keeping them from attaining higher productivity. This trickle-down effect impacts your patients who can be left waiting months to get an appointment. That increases the risk that frustrated patients will be more likely to switch practices to get in sooner for a visit.

Despite these conditions, there are several proven ways to alleviate staff recruitment challenges, help your practice operate more efficiently with fewer staff, and boost your practice's production. In this guide, we'll look at some of the causes of labor shortages, contributing workplace factors, and identify strategies, best practices, and tools to enable your practice to thrive.

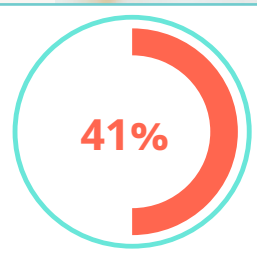
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of practices are forecasting that staffing shortages will continue to be their biggest challenge heading into 2023.²

What's Driving Staffing Issues at Practices?

A strong economy and record unemployment in recent years made it difficult to fill lower wage positions. When COVID hit, its intensity and duration left healthcare workers stressed, burned out, and bolting for better-paying, less stressful positions, a situation further exacerbated by “the Big Quit” in 2021. Practices were left high and dry and have struggled to gain minimum staffing levels ever since.

Currently, 41% of healthcare workers plan to leave their job by 2025.⁴ While these professionals are demanding higher wages to stay put, soaring inflation is creating a financial conundrum as offices struggle to pay team members more. Confidence is low among practices that staff shortages will be resolved any time soon.



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What Workplace Conditions are to Blame for Staff Leaving?

As a practice manager, you're well aware that a bigger paycheck isn't the only reason for someone to jump ship. Several workplace variables factor into an employee's decision to stay or move on to perceived greener pastures.

First, excessive workloads continue to take a mental, physical, and emotional toll on your team. Over 80% of healthcare leaders reported their level of stress or burnout increased in 2022.⁵ "Demand on our providers exceeds their ability and capacity," one practice leader told MGMA. "They are asked to show up in ways that limit their ability to feel successful at work."⁶ Second, healthcare professionals are demanding better overall compensation to stay at their practices. Though 90% of practices have increased wages in the past year, not every practice can continue to take that route given inflation.⁷ And finally, 58% of employees quit a job due to a toxic workplace environment.⁸ Your practices' workplace culture can help you attract new talent—or it can make employees head for the exit.

How Can My Practice Overcome Staffing Challenges?

It starts with finding creative ways to take more of the load off of your team. One effective way to do that is to adopt **patient communications technology**. These next-gen tools are designed to give relief to your front office team by automating many of their mundane and repetitive tasks. Digital tools help you end the insanity of burying staff under mountains of patient phone calls, emails, and voicemails.

Instead, empower your team with solutions that enable them to automatically send personalized visit reminders, recall notices, and other key messaging at the click of a mouse. A more manageable workload translates to happier, more productive staff who can give their full attention to in-office patients, tackle priorities, and still have time to enjoy well-deserved breaks. Let your staff work smarter instead of harder in helping your practice book more visits.

“ In today’s healthcare environment where practice workflow and patient experience are paramount, the use of technology is more instrumental than ever in helping providers enhance operations and overall patient care ”

Halee Fischer-Wright,
M.D., president and CEO of
MGMA⁹

What Tools and Strategies Can I Use to Retain More Staff?

1 Automate and Digitize Monotonous Tasks

Reminders & Recall:

Having your team spend the bulk of their shift on calls, emails, and voicemails is a recipe for burnout, and turnover. **Digital reminder and recall tools** streamline the workflow, enabling your team to automatically send multiple visit reminders and recall notices to minimize no-shows. This efficiency allows them to cover more important tasks, gives them a more varied workload while ensuring they can still catch their breath. A more manageable workload enables your staff to perform

at a higher level, increases job satisfaction, and bolsters employee morale and retention.

Digital Intake:

Paper forms are the bane of your staff's existence. Instead of working through priorities on their to-do list, your team is relegated to deciphering illegible handwriting and doing mind-numbing data entry that increases the chances for errors and potential claim denials. Let your team focus on more meaningful, rewarding work by adopting a **digital intake tool** that simplifies form intake. Patients vastly prefer digital intake because they can complete forms conveniently from home prior to the visit and it helps reduce their wait times. Your staff will love the feature because it lets them do the job they were hired to do rather than them being a data entry clerk.

Payment Reminders:

40% of medical practices did not hit their revenue goals in 2021, many of which cited staffing issues holding back their ability to work

claims.¹⁰ Helping frustrated and angry patients reconcile their outstanding balances is the last thing your staff wants to do.

Complicated and confusing manual billing processes can lead patients to argue with your staff. Minimize the migraines by switching to an **online bill pay tool** which drastically streamlines the payment experience for patients and staff. The solution reduces the number of billing calls your staff takes by automatically sending patients texts with a secure link to easily make a payment. You'll collect more outstanding balances while your team will get fewer calls from discouraged patients.



Pre-Visit Messaging & Post-Care Instructions:

Lighten your staff's manual call burden for getting important pre-visit and post-visit messages to patients. A **digital messaging tool** enables your team to automatically send personalized pre-visit instructions such as to complete lab work, fast, or to provide wayfinding instructions so patients arrive prepared and on time. And since most patients don't remember the care instructions they receive, the tool can be used to automate sending personalized post-appointment care messages which boost adherence and help them book important follow-up visits.

Message Templates:

With the volume of patients you serve, your staff doesn't have time to create unique messages for every patient communication. A **messaging tool with a template library** enables your team to reach more patients for reminders, recall, intake, and mass messages. Your team can connect with more patients simultaneously instead of trying to compose the perfect text or email. Keep your patient messaging consistent and on-brand while allowing your staff to concentrate on greeting patients and booking visits.



2 Get Your Team Off the Phones

Non-stop calls can inundate and overwhelm your staff and prevent them from completing other important duties and tasks. Dial down the call volume by adopting patient communications tools that streamline patient interaction and allow patients and staff to connect more conveniently. Digital communication features help take the pressure off of your staff while ensuring you fill your waiting room.

- **Two-Way Texting:** In today's texting-centered world, there's no replacement for the ability to send and receive text messages from patients. An average phone call takes 4 to 8 minutes while sending a text averages only 30 seconds. Patients don't want to be hassled by phone calls and voicemails—and neither do staff. A real-time, **two-way texting feature** gives patients the ability to ask questions, reschedule, etc., without ever having to make a call.
- **Online Scheduling:** Minimize incoming phone calls with an **online scheduling solution** that offers easy 24/7 online access to patients to book a visit. More practices are moving to online scheduling because it gives patients yet another convenient option to access appointments while minimizing incoming calls for staff. It also gives you an appealing way to attract new patients while ensuring you retain complete control of your schedule.



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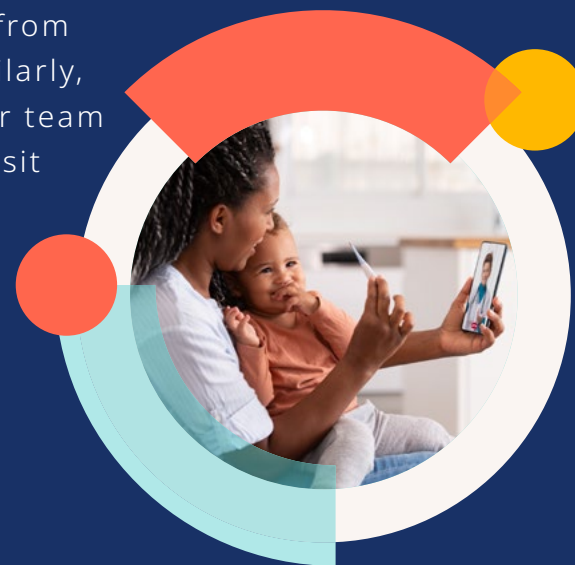
3 Enhance Practice & Staff Flexibility

It's no secret that jobs in many sectors have gone remote. And though for obvious reasons not all healthcare providers can follow suit, it doesn't mean that certain functions can't be completed outside the office. A recent poll revealed that 29% of medical practice leaders stated flexible schedules were a key retention tactic.¹¹ There are plenty of use cases in which patient communications tools can give you the flexibility to complete administrative tasks and interact with patients from home or after hours. Extend your staff's ability to conveniently reach patients through their smartphone to get more done, even with a smaller team.

Mobile App: Top patient communications software partners offer practices a **versatile mobile app** so your staff can interact with patients and your schedule after hours or out of the office. Catch those last-minute confirmations or cancellations so you

can nail down your schedule for the next morning. For doctor illness or a weather event, don't mobilize your entire team to frantically make calls to affected patients. Instead, use the mobile app's mass messaging feature to quickly and effortlessly notify scheduled patients.

Telehealth: For certain appointment types like follow-up visits and medication management, staff can conduct visits anywhere from their smartphone via a robust **telehealth tool**. It's huge for patients with distance or transportation barriers to be able to meet their provider from the comfort of their home. Similarly, telehealth capabilities give your team greater flexibility and reduce visit times for some appointments.



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4 Provide Proper Onboarding & Training

Nothing damages new hires' morale more than getting a lousy onboarding and training experience. Forty percent of employees who don't receive adequate training leave their job within a year.¹² Properly training your team is critical to increasing employee retention. Effective onboarding reinforces a positive workplace environment, sets clear expectations, and integrates new hires into your practice's culture. Make sure to connect new hires with existing team members to ensure a smoother onboarding process.

An experienced, dependable patient communications partner provides you with the right software training to get new employees up to speed with tools within a week. The partner should also offer reliable support and expertise that staff can access whenever there are questions or when the unexpected occurs.

5 Adopt Reliable, Easy-to-Use Solutions

Overly complex patient communications software can be frustrating and stressful for your team. Choose technology that is easy to use for providers, staff, and patients. You'll want a customizable, user-friendly solution that easily integrates with your existing electronic health record (EHR) or practice management system. Ensure you choose a platform from an established leader in patient communications technology. Adopt a solution that gives you the best combination of automated tools, service reliability to minimize outages and downtime, and dependable, on-demand support.

What Can I Do to Improve My Staff Recruitment Efforts?

6 Monitor Your Practice's Online Reputation

We all know that acquiring glowing online reviews is essential to attracting new patients, but we often forget that potential employees also check out these reviews. Seventy-five percent of job candidates will research a company's online reputation before applying for a job opening.¹³ If your practice gets poor ratings and reviews that mention unfriendly staff, poor communication, and long wait times, it can be a major red flag to applicants.

Investing in an **online reputation management tool** is a win-win for attracting and acquiring both new patients and staff. It offers features to help your practice get rave reviews and quickly respond to reviews to boost your ratings. The tool can also be used to help you monitor and reward staff who earn positive feedback in reviews, and

to identify team members who may need more guidance or training.

And don't forget social media. Sixty-two percent of job seekers use social media channels to evaluate an employer.¹⁴ Utilize your social media channels as a way to showcase and recognize staff members. Not only will it help boost morale and performance, but it will also promote your practice's enthusiastic culture to potential employees and patients alike.

Cultivate an Inviting Practice Culture

It's difficult to recruit the best talent if your workplace culture is lacking or perceived as toxic. Flip that perception by creating meaningful ways to celebrate your staff, recognize their contributions, and boost morale. The following

are but a few examples of possible activities to help you express your appreciation to your team while engaging better with patients:

- Host a staff appreciation day and share photos on your social media.
- Reward individual employees monthly with a prize for their contributions.
- Record a birthday wishes video featuring staff to send to patients on their special day.
- Make a fun recall video starring your staff to remind patients they're due for a wellness check.

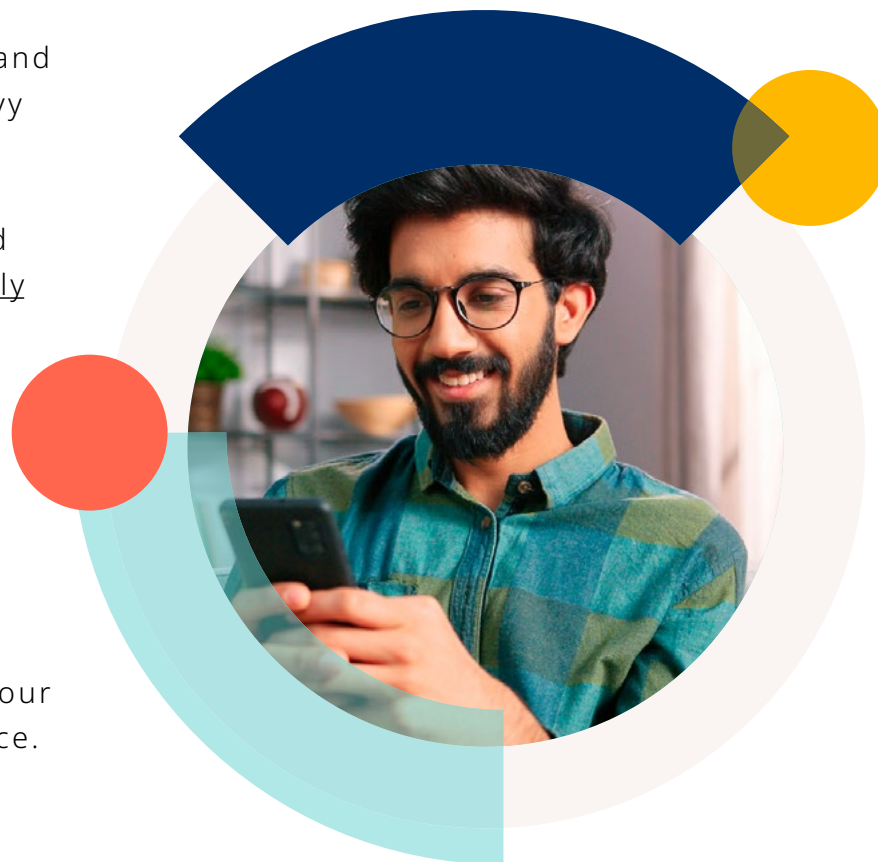
Most importantly, listen. Ask your team for feedback, create a way to solicit anonymous comments and suggestions. To make realistic progress in combating burnout and high turnover, you've got to be responsive to your team's input and perceptions. That means being empathetic to their needs and making improvements to foster a friendlier, more upbeat workplace culture.

7 Invest in an All-in-One Patient Communications Platform

Solutionreach, an industry leader in patient communications technology for 22 years, gives you the total package to energize your practice's success. Our tools enable you to serve more patients with a smaller team by enhancing your connections with every patient, boosting your appointment volume, and creating efficiencies that minimize your staff's heavy lifting.

Equipped with our all-in-one platform of automated tools and unrivaled service and support, you literally can do more with less. **Solutionreach** enables your practice to reduce no-shows, book more appointments, and use staff more efficiently.

Don't settle for a Band-Aid approach to patient communications by relying on phone calls, manual reminders, and disparate systems. Go with the leading solution that delivers **10x return on investment** and empowers you to better support your staff and generate the revenue to grow your practice.



Key Takeaways

Since staff shortages may persist, it's critical to the success of your practice to develop a long-term strategy to overcome burnout and do more with fewer staff. The best practices, methods, and tools outlined in this guide are your ticket to overcoming conditions that lead to unfilled positions and high turnover. **Unburden your staff** and create a more appealing practice workplace by applying the following:

- Give your workplace culture a makeover
- Increase team satisfaction by minimizing overwhelming workloads
- Leverage patient communications tools to automate manual staff tasks
- Identify areas (flexible work hours, paid time off, etc.) to boost compensation
- Get staff off the phones with efficient, patient-centered messaging tools
- Upgrade employee onboarding and training
- Adopt tools to boost productivity and allow staff to focus on priorities

We'd love to show you more about how **Solutionreach** can specifically benefit your practice in these key areas in a quick 20-minute chat. Reach out and we'll book a time for personal consultation that works for you.

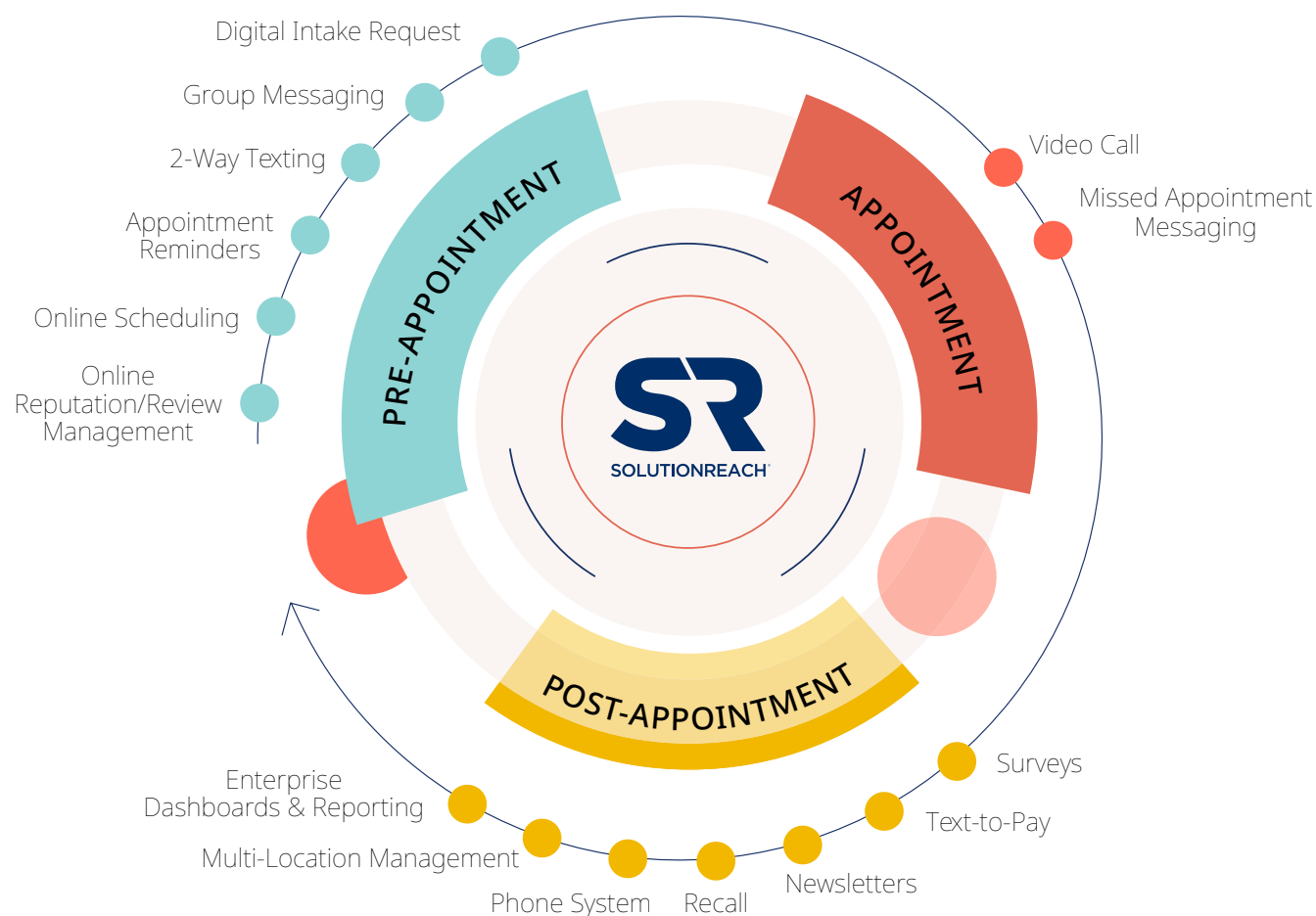
[SCHEDULE A DEMO](#)

Why Is Solutionreach the Best Platform for My Practice?

An industry leader in healthcare patient communications technology for 22 years, Solutionreach is uniquely positioned to assist you in reaching your business goals despite current financial realities. We provide an easy-to-use, fully integratable patient engagement platform that empowers you to increase revenue, gain operational efficiencies, and optimize the productivity of your front office team with tools like:

10x

Our next-level solutions have helped our clients see a **10x return on investment** from increased appointment volume and value per visit.



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