# Stay in School (Based): Increasing Retention for School Based Therapists

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EST. 1970

Ozark Guidance

# Objectives

- The participant will be able to describe the benefits of decreasing turnover rate among clinicians
- The participant will be able to list three strategies to decrease turnover rate of clinical staff
- The participant will be able to demonstrate one strategy to decrease clinician turnover

# Impact of Field-Based Services on Mental Health Professionals (MHPs)

- A challenge of school-based counseling that is unique from other counseling settings is that it can be isolating to work in this setting

- This isolation, as well as the other challenges of working in a school-based program, can lead to counselor burnout and frequent turnover of counselors

- In NWA, many school based counselors are new clinicians to the field which can become overwhelming very quickly especially when working off site from the agency

# Financial Impact of MHP Turnover

- Turnover rates in mental health agencies are high, approximately 25%–50% per year

- The average cost of employee turnover for those making $75,000 or less is 20% their annual salary (Boushey &Glynn, 2012)

- For MHPs making $50,000 the financial impact of turnover to the agency, can be as much as $10,000 per employee

# Financial Impact of MHP Turnover

- This cost increases according to level of education and experience needed for the position and salary

- Employee turnover costs are calculated at 5% of the annual operating budget, not including the costs of decrements of treatment quality (Brandt, Bielitz &Georgi, 2016)

- For an agency operating on a 5 million dollar budget, the turnover impact could be as much as $100,000

# Client Impact of MHP Turnover

- One of the biggest impacts of high employee turnover involves access to behavioral health services (Vanover, 2017)

- This can lead to higher caseloads and increasingly complex cases which limit an employee's time with people in need (Vanover, 2017)

- Turnover leads clients and their families to repeatedly building rapport with different clinicians, while trust is being established, the client may not feel comfortable enough with the new MHP to share important and potentially life threatening issues or symptoms (Vanover, 2017)

# School Impact of MHP Turnover

- Unmet needs including having someone on site to help with crisis situations.
- Time spent to build rapport with new clinicians
- The relationship between the agency and school can be impacted by staff turnover.
- Certain schools may be impacted by turnover more.

# Ways to Decrease MHP Turnover

- Ozark Guidance decreased MHP employee turnover from 44% in 2015 to 19% in 2017

- Several strategies have been implemented over the last few years to work toward decreasing the turnover rate of MHPs.

- These strategies have focused primarily on support for newly hired MHPs and work/life balance for all clinicians

# Focus on New Hires: Common Complaints

- The first year is the hardest
- The "paperwork" is overwhelming
- How do I balance seeing clients with the other things my school wants me to do?
- There's so much to do!
- Crisis, crisis, **crisis**
- I'm out here by myself

# Focus on New Hires:
# Support, Training and More Support

- …and a little bit of money never hurts
  - Sign on bonus
  - Continuously review your salaries against the market
- Extensive training within the department
  - 1 week of orientation with HR followed by department specific training on documentation, relationships, work flow, etc.
  - Training specific to working in a school
- Assigned a mentor
- Shadowing
  - Throughout departmental training new hires are sent to shadow current clinicians
  - Neither shadowing nor training occur for more than 4 hours per day in order to protect against information overload
  - Shadowing focuses on skills and ways to connect with the school and with other MHPs

# More on New Hires

- Ramp up
  - Productivity expectations grow month to month for the first 6 months with continued support and training throughout
- Weekly new hire support meetings
  - An hour and half dedicated each week to new hire cohort having the undivided attention of a member of leadership
  - Cohort creates connectivity
- Manager on-call
  - Feedback, reassurance, noticing accomplishments

# School Input is Essential

- Introductions to key school personnel
  - Work to ensure fit and set up for success
- Follow up with the school after the clinician has been there for a few weeks
  - Address any concerns
  - Changing the MHP's placement is an option if the fit isn't working
  - Educate the school on turnover impact

# Work/Life Balance

- Most common compliant of MHPs working in school based…**STRESS!**
- Continuing education
  - In house trainings; live and on-line
- Increase connection
  - Weekly status updates
  - Monthly staff meetings
  - Quarterly newsletter
  - Employee highlights
  - Twice yearly all staff meeting for team building

# Work/Life Balance

- Staff development
  - Helping to realize and cultivate growth including leadership or specialties
- Time off!
  - Working with the school schedule
  - Earning additional days off

# Retaining Long Term MHPs

- Implementation of a Recruitment and Retention team
  - Review feedback from staff that are resigning, noting any trends
  - Develop improvement plan for identified areas
- Invest in the professional development of staff
  - Individualized
  - Opportunities for further education
  - Finding ways for staff to grow professionally that is not always about promotions within the agency (presentations, mentoring, supervision)

# Show Appreciation

- Make sure showing your staff appreciation for their work on a regular basis
- Seek feedback from schools and share that feedback
- Encourage staff to share about their own and each other's accomplishments
- Food, candy, and small prizes never hurt!
- Yearly, personalized appreciation notes on work anniversary
- Never underestimate how leadership's timely response, support of their work, etc. shows appreciation

# Other Thoughts

- Retention is a process. Be sure this is something you are reviewing frequently and making changes as needed.

- Look at the culture of your department/agency for employee satisfaction (open door policy, email etiquette, timely responses, skip level meetings, personal connections)

- We know not all staff will remain long term. Developing strong partnerships with your staff in new roles they take on can be mutually beneficial.

# Questions?

# References

* Brandt, W., Bielitz, J. & Georgi, A. (2016). *The Impact of Staff Turnover and Staff Density on Treatment Quality in a Psychiatric Clinic.* Retrieved from https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4814510/

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* Vanover, J. (2017). *The Impact of Employee Turnover on Service Delivery in Behavioral Health.* Retrieved from https://www.relias.com/blog/impact-of-employee-turnover-on-service-delivery-in-behavioral-health