

FAQ

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



Staff performance development and management

Staff performance management in general practice is often done in an ad hoc manner because it is viewed as awkward or stressful. However, ongoing formal performance reviews promote communication and useful feedback about job performance, better working relationships and professional development.

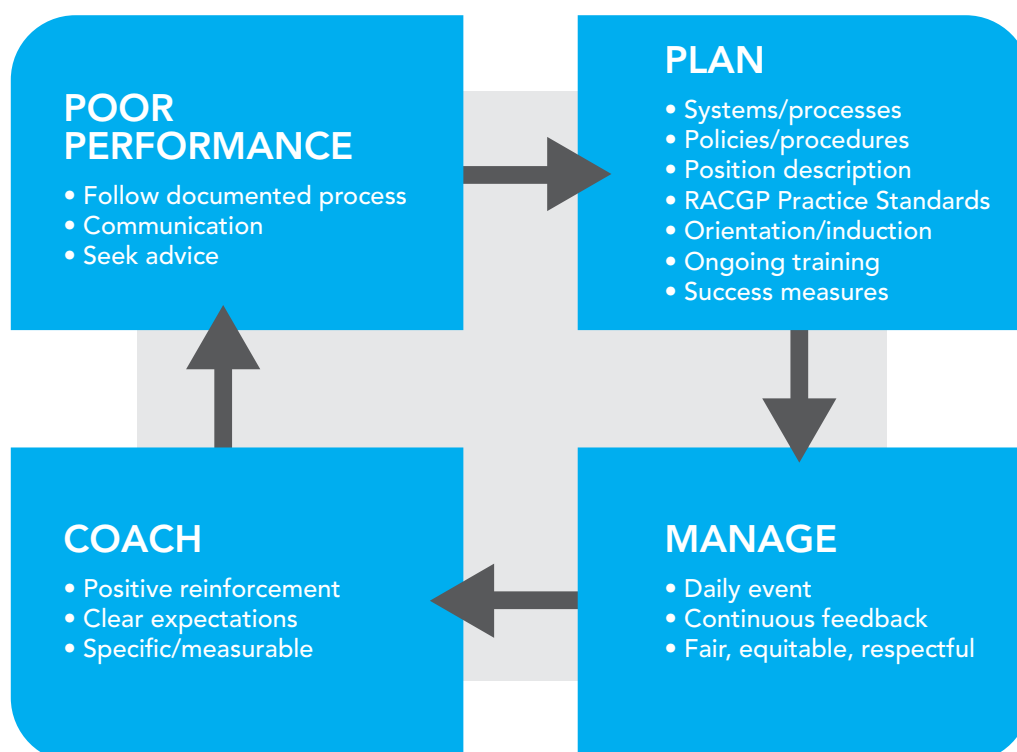
With a framework in place, staff performance development and management can be regular and an opportune experience for all parties – ensuring a productive, happy workforce committed to quality healthcare.

How often should our practice carry out a formal review of staff performance development and management?

Your practice size and location will determine how often you need (and are able) to carry out a formal performance review. Smaller practices may only require an annual review, because informal performance and development management is likely to occur more frequently within a smaller team. However, in a larger team where you do not know your staff as well, you should consider scheduling a six-monthly review. Whether your practice schedules annual or biannual reviews, it is important the process is structured and periodical.

What elements should my practice put in place for a staff performance framework?

Your staff performance framework should be a cyclical process of elements which support ongoing staff management, including: planning; managing; coaching; and dealing with poor performance.



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PLAN

Firstly, consider what systems and processes you already have in place to support ongoing staff management. Your practice should already have HR policies and procedures as part of your documentation standards, but do these systems and documents actually inform what happens within your practice? Are they relevant to your practice? Are you doing what they say? And if not, why not, or do your policies and procedures need to be updated?

Position descriptions should identify staff roles, responsibilities and authorities: this is a key document to effectively managing staff performance, and should be one of the first documents every new employee receives when joining your practice. You must abide by RACGP Standards, and clearly outline what will be expected of your new employee during the orientation/ induction of staff. This needs to be supported by ongoing training and clear identification of what the success measures or the key performance indicators (KPIs) are going to be.

MANAGE

The formal annual or biannual performance management review should be part of a system which supports daily management. Look after your employees by identifying their strong and not-so-strong performance and provide as constructive, continuous feedback. Providing ongoing feedback should be underpinned by fair, equitable, respectful relationships and approaches.

COACH

How often do you celebrate the successes within your practice? Remember, performance management should also include positive reinforcement of achievements and clear expectations of specific/measurable outcomes. So, take an active approach to highlighting the good things which happen in your practice. While many practices celebrate milestones with birthday morning teas and Christmas get-togethers, it is equally valuable to let staff know you appreciate their skills and input when things go right, which of course, is most of the time.

POOR PERFORMANCE

A formal approach is required for addressing poor performance in order to set and track performance expectation. Follow a documented process, use effective communication, and seek advice externally (circumstances pending) to guide you along the process.

What steps need to be taken to set up a staff planning performance system?

1. Undertake further training

Staff management is tricky and makes many people feel uncomfortable, so it is important to commit to ongoing training in managing performance. Listen to podcasts and avail yourself to courses, for example a Fair Work Managing Performance course. GP supervisors can also access registrar-specific advice from General Practice Supervisors Australia (GPSA) and your Regional Training Organisation (RTO).

2. Create a framework for performance management, and implement it

Determine whether your practice's policies and procedures need updating, or if they are ready to action. Do the policies and procedures make sense for your practice? Are amendments needed for the inclusion of registrars? Implement the framework as soon as possible: it can be refined and amended over time, so don't delay the process.

3. Involve your staff

Advise staff of the systems which are going to be changed or implemented.

4. Think of terminology

Consider the terminology you use surrounding the review. For example, "Staff Performance Review" may be perceived as threatening, or punitive, while "Staff Development Review" has a more positive, inclusive tone.





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What components are needed in performance planning?

The key is to review and update position descriptions and inform staff about policies, procedures and performance expectations during induction and training.

REVIEW AND UPDATE POSITION DESCRIPTIONS

- Refer to policies and procedures
 - Keep updated and staff informed.
 - Include professional behaviours and standards.
 - Include how to manage grievances/complaints.

INDUCTION AND TRAINING

- Explain performance management system and expectations
 - Explain to all employees, including registrars, these conversations are a normal process within the practice.
 - Follow through by ensuring you do have the informal and formal conversations to provide feedback.

What is important to remember about Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for staff development and management?

- Performance can be measured informally and formally.
- Keep KPIs updated through policies and procedures.
- Reference KPIs in position descriptions.
- Specific role KPIs need to be identified and documented.
- Some KPIs are easy to measure
 - Concrete targets such as the number of patients seen, punctuality, outstanding Medicare rejections, etc.
- Some KPIs are difficult to measure
 - Soft skills such as attitude, communication manner, flexibility, etc.



What are common KPIs in general practice?

Some KPI examples for general practice include:

- Professional behaviour/attitude.
- Teamwork.
- Punctuality.
- Performance.
- Patient/client/staff feedback.
- Adherence to organisational values.
- Error rate.
- Feedback from previous review.
- Presentation.

Is there more work to do on performance planning once the basic framework to assess staff performance is established?

Yes, as mentioned earlier, the plan must be implemented and can be amended and updated later for the practice's specific and changing requirements.

However, once the basic framework is set in motion, you can extend your performance planning by:

- Using a business plan.
- Creating staff performance goals in line with business goals.
- Creating a performance agreement template. Download a template example at <https://www.fairwork.gov.au/ArticleDocuments/766/Performance-agreement-template.docx.aspx>

How can a business plan help to extend performance planning?

Business planning is a new addition to RACGP Standards (5th Edition) for general practice accreditation. It requires documentation and review of goals, and implementing pathways to achieve these goals.

Establishing a business plan will help give your practice renewed focus. For example, will it be business as usual, or are changes needed to the way you operate? Will new technology be introduced, and what does that mean for your staff? Are you developing new services, and if so, what behaviours or activities do your staff need to be involved in to achieve these goals?

Involving your staff in the conversation about position-specific performance goals which are in line with business goals increases the likelihood of achieving these business goals.

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How can my practice minimise the amount of staff management which needs to occur during a formal review?

Managing staff performance should occur daily, usually within an informal framework; this in turn, minimises the amount of potential issues and management which would otherwise need to be addressed during the formal, periodical review.

The benefits of informal, daily management include:

- Immediate feedback on positive and critical areas.
- No surprises at the formal review.
- Share management with other team leaders.
- Development of trustful relationship.
- Fair, equitable and respectful.

Feedback during daily management should include:

- Specific action(s) you want to give feedback on. For example, what, when, where.
- Impact on work, co-workers, customers, business.
- Desired outcome.
- Continuum from informal to formal feedback.

The degree of any infraction should determine the level of formality needed for daily management. That is, you need to keep in perspective what/how matters need to be taken into account. For example, a trivial, temporary infraction may require no action, or a minor infraction may only need brief, informal feedback; while negative feedback of a more serious nature should follow a process and be documented.

What is needed for a successful periodical development and performance review?

The scheduled meeting (30 minutes to one hour) with your staff member, should have structure. To achieve this, ensure the following:

- Employee has adequate notice and preparation time (self-assessment) for meeting. He/she should be given some (templated) questions for advance reflection.
- The meeting should allow for two-way feedback – self-assessment and managerial assessment.
- Meeting should be in a private space, and uninterrupted.
- The development and performance review is not the occasion for raising new and important/critical feedback. That is, this meeting is an overall performance review of the past six or 12 months. (If there is really important/critical feedback it should have been given prior to the periodical performance review).

- The two-way conversation needs to cover achievements against goals that were set at the previous review, and identify what additional training should be implemented to help the staff member achieve those goals. (This discussion is important to avoid cynicism). And finally, establish new goals and what training will be required.
- Conclude the meeting with an agreed and documented outcome of the meeting, and provide a copy to the staff member.

How can I prepare for difficult conversations with a staff member about behaviour or performance?

You should not surprise a staff member with initial conversations about poor behaviour or performance during the periodical review. Early intervention should already have occurred, before ongoing issues can be re-addressed during the periodic review. Either way, prepare for these difficult conversations by:

- Gathering facts, so you understand different perspectives.
- Refer to documents – policy/procedure, contract, agreement, position description, evidence material.
- Obtain external advice if required.
- Be approachable, listen and communicate.
- Be specific about the problem, its impact, and the desired outcome.
- Keep an open mind – don't make assumptions.
- Consider a support person (for yourself and staff member).
- Awareness of body language and emotions.

Also consider logistics of the meeting, such as:

- Create agenda/checklist.
- Prepare what to say.
- Purpose of meeting.
- Outcome.
- Questions to ask.
- Role of support people (they are a support only, not active participants).
- Date/time/place.
- Likelihood of distress – Will you need a box of tissues?
- Avoid email/phone discussion of issue(s).
- Physical layout of meeting area – avoid barriers to effective communication.

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Allow the employee to prepare for the meeting and be considerate about how you phrase the meeting advice. For example, you could say:

- *“Do you have some time to meet today? I have some feedback I’d like to discuss with you.”*
- *“I’d like to talk about (issue) and get your perspective. Can you see me today?”*
- *“I’d like to see if we can resolve (issue). I’d like to hear your thoughts and share my perspective too. Let’s arrange a time to do that.”*

How should I manage a meeting about poor behaviour and performance to achieve a successful conversation?

- **State problem** – Be specific about what the problem is; provide evidence/examples and the impact it has had. Focus on the issue, not the person.
- **Active listening and open questions** – Stop talking and listen to the other person’s perspective; seek understanding and context; display curiosity in what they say; be empathetic and authentic about letting them respond to the issue.
- **Acknowledge** – Active listening includes acknowledging you have listened. Validating the emotional factors and understanding the impact on your staff member helps you gather information and provides clarity about contributing factors which you may not have considered.
- **Assess position** – Does the employee’s response change anything in terms of requirements? If you find you have maintained your position, and requirements haven’t changed, then you will need to decide and advise if the infraction constitutes a verbal or written warning.
- **Agree on outcome** – Be specific about the outcome of the meeting and what is required of your staff member; set a deadline around parameters of what needs to happen; agree on changes or timely training which will help rectify the issue, etc. And importantly, document the meeting and share the notes. Include who attended the meeting; what was discussed; agreements reached and training or support offered; and a date for review.

- **Review** – Schedule a review meeting. The review will ensure the agreements have been undertaken; reiterate the steps to the resolution; acknowledge the improvement and resolution; and the requirement to maintain that improvement – all of which needs to be documented again.

If the issue is not resolved, reiterate the change required, and consider if you need to seek external advice.

How can I avoid the possibility of the meeting becoming heated?

Having a structure in place, as per the previous answer, will help keep the meeting on track.

Additionally, stay calm and be aware of the following:

- Your emotions.
- Reacting to demands or threats.
- Other issues brought up.
- Accusations of blame.
- Avoid ‘you’ statements.
- Focus on impact, rather than blame.
- Assumptions – active listening will help you avoid assumptions.
- Adjourn the meeting if required – if the meeting becomes a conflict situation, emotionally overwhelming, aggressive or goes off track, reconvene when everyone has calmed down.

RESOURCES

- RACGP Standards (5th edition) <https://www.racgp.org.au/running-a-practice/practice-standards/standards-5th-edition>
- Performance agreement template <https://www.fairwork.gov.au/ArticleDocuments/766/Performance-agreement-template.docx.aspx>