

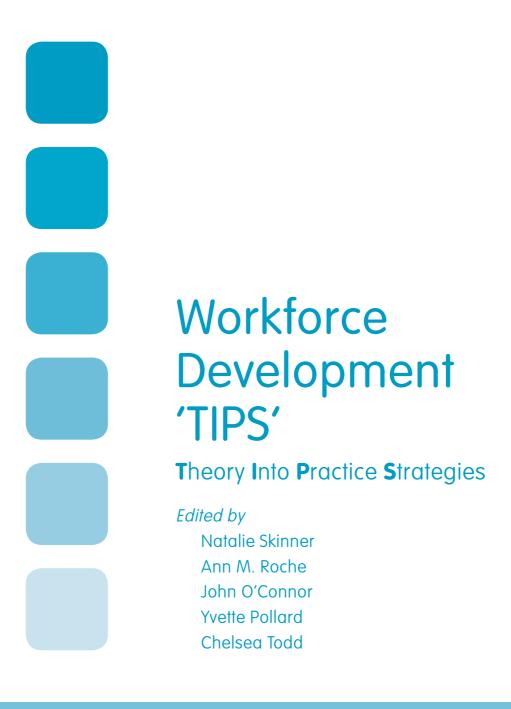
Workforce Development 'TIPS'

Theory Into Practice Strategies

A Resource Kit for the Alcohol and Other Drugs Field

RETENTION





RETENTION

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Department of Health



ABOUT THE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT TIPS RESOURCE KIT

This Resource Kit aims to provide straightforward and practical guidance, tools and resources to support workforce development activities and initiatives in the Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD) field.

The Resource Kit comprises 14 chapters: an introduction to workforce development and 13 workforce development topics relevant to the AOD field. Each chapter contains evidence-based strategies to address a particular workforce development issue, as well as resources and tools that can be used to implement the strategies. Each chapter can be treated as a stand alone section, however, as workforce development topics are inherently interrelated, links between chapters are identified throughout the Kit.

Retention is the 11th chapter in the Resource Kit.

CHAPTER

- 1 An Introduction to Workforce Development
- 2 Clinical Supervision
- 3 Developing Effective Teams
- 4 Evaluating AOD Projects and Programs
- 5 Goal Setting
- 6 Mentoring
- 7 Organisational Change
- 8 Performance Appraisal
- 9 Professional Development
- 10 Recruitment and Selection

11 Retention

- 12 Worker Performance
- 13 Worker Wellbeing
- 14 Workplace Support



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RETENTION

Vinita Duraisingam

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Resources and Tools



Case Study: The nexus between workplace support and retention



Guidelines: Exit Interviews



Recommended Readings

RETENTION

Overview

Retention is a central issue for the AOD workforce. It serves a range of important purposes. It ensures:

- An available pool of mentors and supervisors exists
- The organisation receives a return-on-investment for formal and informal training of workers
- Development of cohesive work groups and teams
- A highly skilled and effective workforce exists.

Factors that affect turnover / retention

Although a range of factors may influence a worker's decision to leave, there are three key issues:

- 1. Inadequate salary and remuneration
- 2. Lack of career development opportunities
- 3. Work-related demands and stress.

Turnover costs

Turnover can be costly, particularly when it involves the unplanned loss of workers who leave voluntarily and whom employers would prefer to keep.

In addition to the direct costs of recruiting a replacement, indirect costs of turnover include:

- Lost productivity
- Decreased worker morale
- Increased stress
- Reduced quality and availability of services.

Note – reducing turnover is not necessarily an optimal outcome. Workers who choose to remain in their jobs but are disaffected and do their job poorly can be just as costly to productivity as having high staff turnover.

Strategies to retain effective workers

Eight strategies that have received strong support in the research literature are:

- 1. Maintain good supervisor-worker relationships which allow for open communication
- 2. Provide professional development opportunities to give workers the chance to develop their knowledge, skills and abilities
- 3. Provide challenging and varied work to workers
- 4. Ensure adequate clinical supervision
- 5. Offer rewards and recognition for good work
- 6. Support workers' capacity to balance work and family life
- 7. Provide new or potential workers with realistic work expectations in regard to:
 - Promotion opportunities
 - Professional development opportunities
 - Career mobility
- 8. Conduct exit interviews to identify organisational issues or problems.

Retention – A key issue for the AOD field

Retention of workers has been identified as a central issue for the AOD field.¹⁻³ Retention of effective workers serves a range of important purposes. These include ensuring:⁴

- A highly skilled and effective workforce exists
- The organisation receives a return-on-investment for formal and informal training of workers
- Development of cohesive work groups and teams
- An available pool of mentors and supervisors exists.

Short-term and insecure funding arrangements can make retention of valued workers a significant challenge for many organisations in the AOD field. For example, many AOD organisations can only offer workers short-term contracts for positions in which long-term funding is uncertain.

A range of factors may impact on a worker's decision to leave an organisation, including circumstances unrelated to work (e.g., illness, spouse's new job). However, three factors are consistently linked with retention in general, and are particularly relevant to the AOD field:^{3, 5, 6}

- Inadequate salary and remuneration
- Lack of opportunities for career development
- Work-related demands and stress.

These factors can lead to low levels of job satisfaction and organisational commitment, both of which have been identified as the strongest predictors of turnover.^{7,8}

Surveys of AOD workers have identified a range of factors that can contribute to high turnover in non-government organisations (NGOs) and other sectors including:^{3, 5}

- Short-term funding on a project-by-project basis
- Low remuneration
- Stressful working conditions
- Use of the NGO sector as a "stepping stone" to more attractive jobs in the government sector
- Poor people skills of the manager / supervisor
- Difficulties of working in rural areas (e.g., isolation)⁵
- Lack of adequate funding
- Difficult working environment (e.g., inadequate premises, lack of resources for infrastructure, lack of training, stigma associated with AOD issues).

In addition, the challenges of managing conflicting role requirements and responsibilities (e.g., administration and clinical work) can contribute to turnover in the AOD field.

Turnover can be costly, particularly when it involves the unplanned loss of workers who leave voluntarily and whom employers would prefer to keep.⁹ In addition to the direct costs of recruiting a replacement, indirect costs of turnover include lost productivity, decreased worker morale, and increased stress.⁹ High turnover rates may also impact on the quality and availability of treatment services.^{10, 11} It can also contribute to long waiting lists and add to the workload of remaining workers thereby increasing the risk of burnout.

Retention is therefore necessary to reduce turnover costs and increase productivity within the organisation. However, having a high retention rate is not necessarily an optimal outcome. Workers may choose to remain in an organisation because of the lack of better alternatives but they may remain highly disengaged from their work. Workers who are disaffected and do their job poorly can be just as costly to productivity as having high staff turnover.

UNDER THE MICROSCOPE



Functional and dysfunctional turnover

Not all turnover is detrimental. In some circumstances, turnover can lead to increased organisational effectiveness.⁷

Turnover can be functional when:7

- Poor performers leave
- People who create conflict and / or turmoil leave
- New recruits result in new ideas and increased enthusiasm
- New recruits bring in new skills and higher levels of competencies.

On the other hand, dysfunctional turnover occurs when:7

- Valuable, high-performing workers leave
- Numerous workers leave at the same time, resulting in staff shortages and additional demands on remaining workers
- Workers who are difficult to replace decide to leave
- Competent workers in important positions leave.



The wellbeing of workers is important in promoting retention and engagement. The *Worker Wellbeing* chapter discusses strategies to enhance job satisfaction and prevent / reduce stress and burnout.

UNDER THE MICROSCOPE



Minimising the damage from layoffs

Organisational change can result in voluntary or involuntary termination of employment for some staff. This can be a distressing experience for all staff. There is increasing evidence that perceptions of the justice or fairness of the termination process exert a strong influence on the wellbeing of those who leave and those who stay.¹²⁻¹⁴

A fair and just termination process is characterised by:12-14

- Providing clear and rational explanations as to how termination decisions were made, and why the decisions were made
- Opportunities for workers to voice opinions, concerns and needs
- Opportunities for workers to provide input into the decision-making process (i.e., if large scale downsizing is necessary)
- Support provided for "victims" of terminations (i.e., career and / or interpersonal counselling, assistance with finding a new position, severance packages)
- Treating those affected by layoffs with dignity, respect and sensitivity.

Strategies to improve retention

There are many strategies that can be implemented to improve the retention and engagement of workers within an organisation. Eight strategies that have received strong support in the research literature are:

- 1. Establish and maintain a good supervisor-worker relationship
- 2. Provide professional development opportunities
- 3. Provide challenging and varied work
- 4. Ensure adequate clinical supervision
- 5. Offer rewards and recognition for good performance
- 6. Support work / family balance
- 7. Ensure new (or potential) workers have realistic job expectations
- 8. Conduct exit interviews.

UNDER THE MICROSCOPE



Avoidable and unavoidable turnover

It can be a useful exercise for an organisation to analyse turnover patterns to identify:⁷

- The extent to which turnover results from controllable or uncontrollable factors
- Organisational strategies to address (avoidable) turnover.

For example, from the matrix below, organisations can address turnover by taking measures to improve their own conditions (as much as possible) to prevent workers from leaving in the future.

		Employee Control					
		Yes	No				
Organisational Control	Yes	Better working relationships (e.g.,	Dismissal				
		between coworkers, with supervisor)	• Layoff				
		Better work arrangements (e.g., flexi time)	Forced retirement				
		Planned retirement	Spouse receives work transfer				
	9	Career change	Severe illness				
		Stay home to care for family member					

Turnover Avoidability Matrix⁷

The manager / supervisor plays a significant role in influencing workers' commitment to the organisation and retention. ¹⁵

1. Establish and maintain a good supervisor-worker relationship

The relationship a worker has with his / her supervisor is one of the most important factors that impacts on retention. Supervisors are the "human face" of an organisation. A worker's view of the organisation is strongly influenced by their relationship with their supervisor. This includes their commitment to staying with the organisation. Workers are less likely to leave an organisation and be more engaged if they have a good relationship and communicate openly with their immediate supervisor.



Providing adequate workplace support is a key strategy to ensure retention of effective workers. The *Workplace Support* chapter discusses strategies supervisors can use to support workers.

2. Provide professional development opportunities

Opportunities for professional development are highly valued by most people. Organisations that provide workers with opportunities to develop their knowledge, skills and abilities are more likely to retain valued workers. Organisations can use a range of strategies to support workers' professional development (e.g., mentoring, work placements, study groups, conference attendance).



The *Professional Development* chapter discusses a range of strategies to enhance workers' knowledge, skills and confidence.

3. Provide challenging and varied work

Opportunities to work on important, challenging tasks and projects that can be clearly linked to the success of the organisation is valued by most workers, and has been linked with increased retention.¹⁶⁻¹⁸

4. Ensure adequate clinical supervision

Adequate clinical supervision has many benefits including increasing job satisfaction and worker retention.^{19, 20} Clinical supervision can be a valuable tool for AOD workers to develop professionally under the guidance of more experienced practitioners.



A clinical supervision program can address a range of workforce development challenges including worker retention and engagement. The *Clinical Supervision* chapter provides helpful strategies on how to implement an effective clinical supervision program in your organisation.

5. Offer rewards and recognition for good performance

Providing appropriate rewards and recognition for good performance is crucial for keeping workers satisfied and motivated. If financial rewards are not possible, giving praise or other forms of appreciation may be just as effective. Ultimately, workers want to be appreciated and recognised for the work that they do.

PRACTICAL TIP



What can supervisors and managers do to reward workers?

Developing a valued and effective reward system can be a challenge. Financial rewards are often not an option in the government and non-government sectors. Alternatives to financial rewards include:

- Public recognition of effort and contribution
- Opportunities to work on preferred activities (and / or a break from less desirable work)
- Time off or flexi-time
- Support for professional development activities (e.g., financial contribution, time off)
- Opportunities to act in higher duties
- Attendance at workshops / conferences.

Don't forget – you can also ask the "experts" – the workers themselves. Developing reward systems that are based on workers' needs and preferences is likely to be most effective. Remember – what one person may find rewarding and satisfying may not appeal to another.

6. Support work / family balance

Balancing work and family commitments is an important priority, and a significant challenge, for many workers. Organisations that support workers' capacity to balance work and family life are more likely to retain valued workers.^{4, 10, 21, 22}

A range of strategies are available to provide individuals with greater flexibility in their working hours. Common strategies include flexi-time, compressed or extended working weeks, job sharing, and working from home.²³

7. Ensure new (or potential) workers have realistic expectations

Providing new or potential workers with specific and detailed information regarding employment conditions is also likely to enhance retention.²⁴ For example, information should be provided on:

- Promotion opportunities
- Professional development opportunities
- Career mobility
- Starting salary and pay rises
- Organisational policy in regards to recruitment and Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) procedures.

It is important that workers have realistic expectations regarding their work. Discrepancies between actual and expected working conditions and arrangements can result in dissatisfaction and may contribute to turnover.⁶ Presenting realistic job previews is one strategy that can be used to ensure new workers have realistic job expectations.¹¹



Realistic job previews can be given during selection interviews with potential workers. The *Recruitment and Selection* chapter discusses ways to present realistic job previews.

8. Conduct exit interviews

Conducting exit interviews is a good retention strategy for the longer-term.¹⁰ Information that can emerge from open and honest exit interviews may help organisations to recognise and address issues or problems, and hence increase the likelihood of retaining staff in the future.

PRACTICAL TIP



Conducting exit interviews

What?

An exit interview is a brief interview with the worker who has decided to leave or has left the organisation.¹⁰

Why?

The main purpose of an exit interview is to obtain honest feedback from the worker regarding the organisation and his / her reasons for leaving.

Who?

Exit interviews can be conducted by a HR person or an objective third party.

Where and when?

Exit interviews can be done on-site before the worker leaves or via a follow-up phone call shortly after leaving. If the interview is conducted on-site, ensure that a neutral, private location is chosen.

How?

- Make sure that the exiting worker is as comfortable as possible and does not feel intimidated.
- Be clear about your purpose i.e., you are there to learn about the reasons that the worker
 is leaving so that you can implement changes to decrease further turnover and improve the
 workplace.
- Allow sufficient time for the worker to share his / her information.
- Remember that the exiting worker may want to be reemployed with the organisation in the future.
- · Avoid arguments.
- Resist making assumptions with the information that is provided.
- Listen carefully.
- Ask about their positive and negative work experiences.

What next?

Use the information obtained from the interview to extract underlying problems and devise ways to solve them. For example, organisations may need to provide feedback and guidance to a supervisor who is experiencing a high turnover rate amongst their subordinates.

UNDER THE MICROSCOPE



Strategies to retain effective staff in an AOD agency

Retaining effective staff is a challenge for any manager within any organisation and the AOD field is no different.

Research with AOD workers and managers indicates the following management strategies to retain effective staff: ^{25, 26}

- **Provide job autonomy** ensure that workers have an appropriate degree of authority to fulfil their job responsibilities, make decisions, and organise how they go about doing their job
- Offer appropriate rewards for effective job performance ensure that workers are getting appropriate recognition for their work. Managers need to display a strong link between providing recognition, praise and rewards (e.g., salary rises and promotion) with high job performance. If monetary rewards are not feasible, consider alternatives (e.g., increased annual leave, conference attendance, opportunities to work on projects of interest)
- Offer support and encourage creativity encourage workers to express opinions and ideas.

 Foster a supportive environment where all ideas, opinions, and beliefs are equally well received
- **Provide opportunities for training and development** opportunities for professional development are highly valued by workers in the AOD field.

Useful workforce development tools for retention

Other chapters in this Kit that provide useful strategies for improving worker retention are:

- Chapter 2: Clinical Supervision
- Chapter 6: Mentoring
- Chapter 8: Performance Appraisal
- Chapter 9: Professional Development
- Chapter 14: Workplace Support.

Summary

The retention of workers is a central workforce development issue for the AOD field. Three factors linked with retention are inadequate pay and remuneration, lack of opportunities for professional development, and work-related demands and stress. Important evidence-based strategies to improve retention in the AOD field include establishing and maintaining a good supervisor-worker relationship, providing opportunities for training and development, providing challenging and varied work, ensuring adequate clinical supervision, offering fair rewards and recognition for good work, supporting the work / family balance, ensuring new or potential workers have realistic job expectations, and conducting exit interviews with workers who leave the organisation.

Resources for retention

This chapter includes the following resources and tools to support retention of AOD workers:

- Case study on the nexus between workplace support and retention
- Guidelines for conducting exit interviews
- Recommended readings.

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Case Study

The nexus between workplace support and retention



Guidelines

Exit Interviews



Recommended Readings



The Nexus between Workplace Support and Retention

This case study is also provided in the Workplace Support chapter however it has particular relevance to retention.

Overview

A Caregiver Support Program (CSP) targeting frontline workers and managers was implemented in group homes for developmentally disabled or mentally ill clients in Michigan, United States. The program aimed to improve workplace support for workers, including workers at risk of turnover.

The CSP aimed to improve workers' coping abilities and wellbeing by addressing:

- Individual workers' coping resources
- Work teams' coping resources
- Workers' capacity to apply coping resources to job demands.

Strategy

Administrators from 55 non-profit agencies volunteered to recruit group homes from their respective agencies to participate in the study. In order to determine the benefit of the CSP, half of the group homes in each agency were randomly selected to participate in the CSP and the other half did not participate (i.e., served as a control group). For homes selected for the program, the group home manager and one member of staff were invited to attend training.

The CSP involved six 4-hour training sessions over nine weeks (the first three sessions were held weekly and the latter three were held fortnightly). Training was conducted in groups (each group comprising one or two workers from 10 group homes) and facilitated by two trainers.

Participating workers were expected to transfer training to their coworkers by:

- Discussing training with coworkers
- Planning and conducting in-house training based on the CSP
- Using the group problem-solving strategy in staff meetings
- Modelling behaviours and skills learnt in the CSP.

The CSP targeted two sources of workplace support:

- 1. **Social support** workers' capacity to use existing social relationships as a source of support
- 2. **Organisational climate** creating an environment that encourages workers' involvement in, and influence over, workplace decisions.

1. Social support

To improve workers' capacity to use their existing social relationships as a source of support, CSP participants:



- Examined how social relationships could facilitate problem-solving and decrease work-related stress
- Recorded existing social support networks
- Evaluated strengths and weaknesses of existing networks
- Developed social support skills (e.g., resolving disputes, giving constructive feedback, and seeking help).

Participant involvement was a key feature of the CSP. Rather than being instructed what to do by the trainers, trainers facilitated a brainstorming of participants' workplace support strategies with which they had experienced success.

2. Organisational climate

To promote workers' involvement in organisational decision-making processes, CSP trainers:

- Facilitated discussion of advantages and disadvantages of promoting workers' involvement in decisions (e.g., policy determination, client treatment)
- · Highlighted advantages of worker involvement in decisions
- Presented a group problem-solving strategy that could be applied to the workplace
- Observed participants practising the strategy to resolve problems (e.g., prioritising problems, establishing "action plans")
- Encouraged participants to use the strategy in their workplaces on an ongoing basis.

Evaluation

To evaluate the outcomes of the CSP, information was collected from workers (from both group homes selected for the CSP and the control group) via surveys one month prior to and five weeks after the training.

Outcomes

The CSP resulted in four areas of positive outcomes for workers and the organisations that participated in the program:

Social support

Supportive feedback and supervisor support increased

Organisational support

 Work team climate improved for workers, including workers at risk of turnover

Coping ability

· Confidence in coping ability increased

Psychological wellbeing

 For workers at risk of turnover, the CSP prevented declines in wellbeing (e.g., depressive symptoms).



Conclusion

For workers at risk of turnover the CSP increased the work team climate and their individual psychological wellbeing. Workers participating in the training reported increased feedback and supervisor support, as well as increased confidence in their coping abilities. This program highlights the importance of four key strategies to support retention of valued workers:

- 1. Improvement of the supervisor-worker relationship
- 2. Providing opportunities for increased involvement in problem-solving and decision-making
- 3. Enhancing workers' coping capacities
- 4. Improving social supports within the workplace.

Exit Interviews



What are exit interviews?

The exit interview is an interview conducted with a departing worker to obtain feedback on why a worker is leaving, what they liked or didn't like about their employment, and what areas of the organisation they feel need improvement. This is usually done for people who voluntarily resign rather than those who are fired or laid off. Since the worker is leaving, they will often be reasonably open and frank in their discussion about the organisation.

Exit interviews can be a useful source of information and feedback on a range of organisational issues such as:

- A worker's attitudes towards their work environment (e.g., culture, support structures)
- The quality of supervision available within the organisation
- Potential improvements to organisational policies, procedures and systems
- The terms and conditions of their work (e.g., part-time / full-time status, flexible working hours, remuneration).

Interviews can be conducted in person, over the telephone, or using a written questionnaire that the leaver takes with them and sends back. There are significant advantages to conducting face-to-face interviews. An interview provides the opportunity to gain more detailed information from the departing worker, and clarification can be sought regarding ambiguous or unclear responses.

Benefits of an exit interview

- Vital knowledge is not lost to the organisation when people leave.
- Can be done relatively quickly and inexpensively.
- Can result in the leaver having a more positive view of the organisation.

When to conduct the exit interview?

It is appropriate to conduct the interview any time after the worker has handed in their resignation. However, the time should be negotiated so that it is appropriate for both the exiting worker and the interviewer. It is most beneficial to capture the leaver's knowledge before their departure.



Who will conduct the exit interview?

Traditionally someone from Human Resources (HR) conducts an exit interview, however, in smaller AOD organisations such divisions may not exist or may not be appropriate. Often a peer or a colleague in the same work-related area (e.g., counsellor) would be more appropriate. Resources permitting, interviews can be conducted by an external consultant. Differences have been shown to occur between exit interviews conducted by management and those conducted by an outside consultant. In particular, more honest feedback is likely to be obtained from interviews conducted by external consultants.

Points to consider when structuring the exit interview

- Review the job description and key tasks of the exiting worker. Make sure the exit interview questions are relevant and appropriate for their work role and responsibilities. A good "ice breaker" is "would you like us to be a referee for you?" However, do not make this offer if you would not recommend the worker.
- Save the hardest questions for the latter part of the interview. Work up to the more difficult and sensitive questions.
- Carefully select the interviewer. Select someone that listens well and is open-minded. Use a neutral colleague (i.e., not the individual's manager or supervisor) if possible.
- Choose open-ended questions that allow for plenty of discussion and expression (e.g., "How did you feel about the quality of the supervision that you received?").
- Try to find out if there were things the departing worker can suggest that may improve conditions, work practices or morale.
- Leave time at the end of the interview for general comments.

Other points to consider:

- You should not expect the exiting worker to divulge personal information such as their viewpoint on colleagues, or any personal issues they may have with anyone in the organisation. Questions pertaining to these are inappropriate and of little relevance and may put the worker in an uncomfortable position.
- Make use of information gathered. Do not simply gather information unless it will be used or considered. For example, suggestions regarding organisational practice, support or supervision should be communicated in appropriate forums or with appropriate personnel for discussion and consideration.

Sample questions for an exit interview



- What factors led you to decide to leave the organisation (e.g., higher salary, benefits, better job opportunity, travel, conflict with other workers, conflict with manager, family and personal reasons, career change)?
- What factors were most important in choosing your new job?
- What did you like the most about your position in this organisation?
- What did you like the least?
- Did you find the job challenging?
- Were your skills effectively used?
- Did you feel the job orientation was sufficient and effective?
- Did you find your work load reasonable?
- Did you find your work environment comfortable and appropriately equipped?
 Did you have any safety concerns?
- What do you think can be improved about the job?
- Were you given sufficient recognition for your achievements?
- How did you feel about the quality of supervision that you received?
- Did you feel you were given enough support in your job?
- What did you like most about the organisation and what did you like the least?
- What are your views on the way we treat our workers? How could we improve?
- Is there any way that we could improve our organisation?



Frank, F.D., Finnegan, R.P., & Taylor, C.R. (2004). The race for talent: Retaining and engaging workers in the 21st century. *Human Resource Planning*, 27, 12-25.

This article examines the role that retention and engagement of workers plays in effective organisational functioning. Issues discussed include the relationship between retention and engagement, the critical role of leaders and team members in addressing retention and engagement issues, and the efficacy of various strategies to promote retention and engagement. This paper provides readers with ideas and advice to support workforce development practice.

Knudsen, H.K., Johnson, J.A., & Roman, P.M. (2003). Retaining counseling staff at substance abuse treatment centers: Effects of management practices. *Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment*, *24*, 129-135.

This research paper examines the factors that impact on AOD workers' intention to remain with an organisation and their commitment to that organisation. The paper discusses the range of organisational and management factors likely to influence workers' intention to leave an organisation. Strategies to promote retention and engagement of AOD workers are also discussed. This paper is most suitable for readers interested in workforce development theory and research.

Abrams, M.N. (2004). Employee retention strategies: Lessons from the best. *Healthcare Executive*, *19*, 18-22.

This easy-to-read article discusses the utility of various strategies designed to reduce turnover in health care organisations. Various approaches are described including branding, formal recognition programs, partnering with training or teaching organisations, family friendly benefits, and exit interviews. These strategies are illustrated with real world examples. This paper provides practical ideas and advice to support workforce development practice.

Izzo, J., & Withers, P. (2002). Winning employee-retention strategies for today's healthcare organizations. *Healthcare Financial Management, 56,* 52-57.

This article identifies five principles important in the retention of health care workers. Each area discussed is accompanied by a description of strategies to improve retention. This paper provides practical ideas and advice to support workforce development practice.













