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GUEST COLUMN: Three Strategies to Combat the Health Care Labor Shortage

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Health care has always been an industry apart. While other sectors are just now realizing the full effects of the war for talent and scrambling to implement new strategies for talent attraction, health care organizations have been facing this challenge since before the pandemic.



This much is true: it's too late for health care organizations to use talent attraction as their only labor strategy. Forward-thinking health care organizations are looking beyond solutions that simply require more employees—today's innovators are focused on strategies that increase efficiency and productivity among their current full-time and part-time employees.

Three Strategies to Combat the Health Care Labor Shortage

Workflow Efficiencies

First, health care providers must seek out ways to streamline their internal processes in order to continue to scale without a workforce that is readily available for hire.

Now is the time to take a look at what has "always been done" and reconsider the reasoning behind those choices. Are meetings always scheduled for one hour time blocks when they could really be 30 minutes, or even an email? Could some tasks be delegated from management roles to entry-level roles to free up more time for strategic work?

When you start with a process that identifies inefficiencies in workflow (Are materials too far away from spaces where patient care takes place? Is the onboarding process unnecessarily condensed into the first few days of employment?), you can then implement solutions that truly work for your organization.

Consider putting together a work group of direct care staff and leaders to identify potentially wasteful or duplicative tasks. Conducting a time study could be an effective way of determining where inefficiencies lie. A best practice here is to involve your team in both the original identification of inefficiencies, as well as identification of solutions. This way, you'll have team buy-in to new processes, and employees will see the ways in which new procedures add value.

Technology

Hear us out—technology can make a significant impact in health care's quest to combat the labor shortage. Though health care is reliant on person-to-person interaction and relationship building, technology can automate administrative tasks that typically take providers away from those patient interactions, making your overall operations more efficient.

With technology on your side, your staff can focus on the areas that matter: strategic initiatives, quality care to clients and creating a positive workplace culture.

Technology solutions that can help your organization combat the labor shortage include:

- Predictive artificial intelligence models for clinical decision making
- App-based menus
- Digital billing solutions, workforce management systems and staff training platforms
- Robots that can distribute meals and medication, manage linens, remove garbage, handle admission intake and even provide ultra-violet cleaning

Outsourcing

While many providers pride themselves on handling all of the traditional HR tasks internally, outsourcing some aspects of HR can lighten the load for your team, provide a more balanced work environment and prevent you from having to attract fresh human resources talent to your organization.

Some areas that are ripe for outsourcing in a health care environment are:

- Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) management
 - FMLA administration is a complicated responsibility that HR professionals are often tasked with along with day-to-day benefits management and employee engagement. However, due to the nature of a human resources team member's role, it can be difficult for these individuals to objectively make a decision about whether an employee's situation qualifies for FMLA. Outsourcing this task to a third-party can better ensure compliance with FMLA, as well as accurate recordkeeping, removing internal HR from this complex scenario.
- Unemployment claims management and administration
 - Like FMLA management, unemployment can be a complex system to navigate. Health care organizations looking to maximize the efficiency and productivity of the staff that they already employ may consider outsourcing this task to better track claims.
- Enrollment solutions
 - Open enrollment is a busy time of year for a health care organization's HR department, and innovative employers may consider outsourcing one-on-one benefits consultation to a third-party enrollment expert. These "benefit counselors" can answer employee questions and provide unbiased information regarding benefit choices.

Join M3 at WHA's Rural Health Conference, where M3 will highlight strategies to reduce labor needs and keep up with the demand for health care.

Key Takeaways

The health care industry is unlike any other commercial sector. While other industries are ramping up talent attraction efforts (some for the first time), health care providers must go one step further and consider strategies that allow them to provide quality care and scale their organization with the number of staff they currently employ. The strategies in this article are just the beginning—an industry-focused broker like M3 can help you identify unique solutions for your organization and help you win the war for talent.