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WHA Workforce Council Explores How to Leverage Technology to Support the Health Care Workforce

The WHA Council on Workforce Development focused on technology supporting and supplementing the health care workforce at its May 27, 2022, meeting.

With increasing demand and a shrinking workforce, and the added challenge of patient surges the past two years, growing Wisconsin's health care workforce faster, enabling teams to work to their full potential and truly leveraging technology are more vital than ever before.

WHA Vice President of State and Federal Relations Jon Hoelter and WHA General Council Matthew Stanford provided an update on WHA's Telehealth Forum. Stanford noted key areas of policy focus, such as final implementation of Wisconsin's Medicaid telehealth parity statute, avoiding additional and unnecessary telehealth rulemaking by Wisconsin's regulatory licensing boards and sustaining payment policy flexibility and parity for digital care. The council provided feedback that will help shape the Telehealth Forum's efforts going forward, noting the advancement of technology to improve access and outcomes and, importantly, save the workforce time and effort.

Building on the telehealth discussion, council members shared how their organizations are leveraging or hoping to leverage technology to support their workforce, especially in frontline positions, where shortages are most acute. Council members are already utilizing technology such as self-driving robots that staff can control remotely and utilize to complete rounding, exams and admission interviews. This technology is being explored to provide a resource for new entrants to the nursing field to connect to experienced counterparts to guide them through new procedures or offer expert consult.

Technology, in the form of tug-robots, is also freeing up staff from food service, environmental services and food delivery. Hospitals, clinics and health systems are also working to support admissions and registration processes with online patient access or entrance kiosks, so those staff can be freed up to assist in direct care and service to patients and their families.

Council members closed out their technology discussion by discussing how they are building the flexibility desired by post-Baby Boom generations into their workforce efforts by utilizing technology. One health system had members of its workforce living in three-to-four states and working remotely, pre-pandemic; it now has staff from more than 20 states in its workforce. Another hospital is utilizing a "Door Dash" model for staffing. Its software allows patient care staff to sign up with multiple employers and pick up shifts at different sites.

The Wisconsin Department of Safety and Professional Services (DSPS) is also truly leveraging technology to improve health care licensure processes and save DSPS staff time and effort. DSPS Assistant Deputy Secretary Dan Hereth joined the group to provide an update on the May 16, 2022, launch of DSPS's new licensing software LicenseE. Hereth noted, "So far, so good," with the software vendor helpline only receiving an average of 18 calls for assistance in the first two weeks of implementation. Hereth also discussed the incorporation of the 2021 Act 10 credential into the new process, noting that employers may submit their verification form by email or via the new system, as the law specifies that employers can notify DSPS of an individual licensed in good standing in another state starting to work in Wisconsin, prior to that individual applying via the online process.

Hoelter and WHA Senior Vice President of Workforce and Clinical Practice Ann Zenk diverted from the technology theme to provide an update on state and federal issues. Hoelter updated the group on the expected extension of the Federal Emergency Declaration and on WHA's continued advocacy efforts on licensure barriers, post-acute care bottlenecks and payer initiatives that are draining workforce time and effort. Zenk focused on the impact of the end of the 1,135 nursing home waivers that allowed emergency training programs for nurse aides and for the employment of temporary nurse aides. These programs will end June 6, 2022. Nurse

aides trained under emergency training programs must complete certification testing by Oct. 7. Temporary nurse aides may only continue working after June 6 if they are employed full-time and enrolled in an approved, traditional nurse aide training program.