

WHA Inaugural Workforce Forum Provides Participants with Workforce Tools and Strategies

Meeting rising health care demand with a workforce that can't grow fast enough

WHA hosted the inaugural Workforce Forum in Madison on Sept. 28. The focus of the forum was the critical topic of health care workforce, which brought in health care leaders from across the state.

The day started off with WHA President and CEO Eric Borgerding and WHA Senior Vice President of Workforce and Clinical Practice Ann Zenk providing an overview of the demographic, supply and demand challenges facing Wisconsin employers and the Wisconsin health care workforce. Borgerding set the stage, noting, "**COVID exacerbated and accelerated existing challenges and weaknesses, putting them on the table all at the same time.**" Zenk built on that theme: "We've been warning of a Silver Tsunami that will shrink the workforce and increase health care demand, and it's here," adding "COVID has created an additional urgency to grow the health care workforce faster, leverage teams and technology, and reduce regulatory burden."

Keynote speaker Lisa Walden, co-founder of Good Company Consulting, provided her expertise and recommendation on building teams that work. She identified some common, and sometimes surprising, barriers and broke down the key ingredients required to build strong, truly trusting teams. Lisa provided the audience with action steps for building trust through vulnerability and creating psychologically safe teams.



WHA President and CEO Eric Borgerding provides an overview of WHA's analysis and advocacy for the myriad of workforce challenges facing Wisconsin's hospitals and health systems.



Lisa Walden engages with the audience to provoke insights into building trust.

In the "Growing the Workforce Faster" session, front-line

leaders from education and health care described how they're working together to recruit and retain new members to health care career pathways. WHA members shared how Wisconsin hospitals and health systems are expanding training and clinical opportunities in Wisconsin through grants.

Eric Hill, regional career pathways coordinator at CESA 1, shared how Wisconsin school districts and health care partners are utilizing career planning and patient care pathways developed by Wisconsin's Department of Public Instruction to expose students to health care career options in middle school and high school.

WHA members Kristie McCoic and Megan Wopat from Gundersen St. Joseph's, and Theresa Braudt and Jenny Dax from Gundersen Boscobel, talked about their application for and utilization of a [Wisconsin "Grow Our Own" grant](#), encouraging forum participants to, as Braudt put it, "apply for these grants so you can create partnerships with your schools and tech colleges and try new solutions."

Growing the workforce faster is contingent on recruiting more new entrants into health care fields and equally important retaining those we recruit. WHA welcomed American Hospital Association's (AHA's) Vice President of Clinical Affairs and Workforce Elisa

Arespacochaga, who spoke on the many stressors on hospitals and the hospital workforce and provided a wealth of AHA resources for hospital and health system leaders working hard to protect and retain their workforce.

Zenk opened the next session by noting that “truly leveraging technology means not just ensuring access and outcomes, which is very important, but also actually saving time and effort for the health care workforce.” Zenk provided examples of how technological gains have enhanced access and care, but also actually increased the workload for health care teams. Zenk also noted recent advancements that are harnessing technology for the benefit of the health care workforce. WHA Vice President of Education and Marketing Leigh Ann Larson then facilitated a conversation around harnessing technology to support the health care workforce. Attendees answered questions about utilizing technology, successes and barriers, and strategies to consider. Participants learned about efforts underway across the state including patient portals, registration kiosks, home monitoring and delivery-bots, just to name a few.



Forum attendees compare notes on leveraging technology to support the health care workforce.

WHA Vice President of Federal and State Relations Jon Hoelter rounded out the day by describing WHA’s advocacy efforts to break down regulatory barriers to entering and remaining in the Wisconsin health care workforce. Hoelter highlighted Wisconsin 2021 Act 10, which allows health care professionals licensed in another state to begin immediately working in Wisconsin while their Wisconsin license is being processed, and WHA’s work to break down other licensure barriers as part of the Wisconsin Legislative Council Study Committee on Occupational Licensure.

Thank you to all who attended and participated in the forum. Contact [Leigh Ann Larson](#) for WHA educational opportunities and [Ann Zenk](#) for workforce issues and solutions.

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