

The Future of the Health Care Workforce

September 22, 2012



 **ASHHRA**
THE HUMAN SIDE OF HEALTHCARE

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Founded in 1964, ASHHRA is the leading voice for HR professionals in health care - linking people and organizations to leadership practices, best practices to patient outcomes, and outcomes to business results. Headquartered in Chicago, IL, the society has more than 3,600 members and services the needs of over 50 chapters throughout the United States. For more information about ASHHRA, visit www.ashhra.org.

Vision

By joining together, by raising our skills and by speaking with one voice, we, as ASHHRA members will enhance the well-being of our employees, our health care organizations, and the communities we serve.

- ◆ ***Our purpose:*** To establish the expertise of health care HR through our ability to learn and share knowledge, build relationships, and exemplify excellence.
- ◆ ***Our power:*** To influence and impact the future of the health care workforce and those they serve.
- ◆ ***Our promise:*** To keep in our minds and hearts the passion and commitment we have for our profession.

Mission

ASHHRA leads the way for members to become more effective, valued, and credible leaders in health care human resources administration.

Guiding Principles

Collaboration * Service Excellence
Integrity * Innovation * Passion

Value Proposition

We offer high quality and effective resources, educational programs, and networking opportunities to human resources professionals in the health care industry.

The American Society for Healthcare Human Resources Administration (ASHHRA), a personal membership group of the American Hospital Association (AHA), held its seventh Thought Leader Forum on Saturday, September 22, 2012, in Denver, Colorado.

Bob Walters, Corporate Director, Human Resources Operations, Health First, Inc., and ASHHRA immediate past president, chaired the proceedings. The discussion was moderated by Larry Walker, president of The Walker Company Healthcare Consulting.

A select group of health care executives participated in the Forum, a two-hour session titled, "The Future of the Health Care Workforce."

As one thought leader noted, "I don't honestly think we know ten years from now who we need to recruit, because we're going to have to change what we're doing at the bedside in a pretty fundamental way." Another thought leader reiterated the important role that HR will have in proactively redesigning the future care environment, saying "We need to get closer to the caregiver role, and why we are all here. The economics, payer mix, and changing reimbursement will not allow us to afford to have the structure we have today, so we need to make fundamental changes. That's where HR needs to be at the table and lead the redesign process."

This Thought Leader Forum executive summary is a strategic overview of the dialogue, discussion, and recommendations about the future of the health care workforce in America.

The Future of the Health Care Workforce

As the future health care workforce landscape changes due to a combination of a changing population in America, a new generation of workforce caregivers, new technology, and changes in health care regulations, health care human resources (HR) leaders need to better understand the challenges and prepare their organization for the future health care workforce to ensure that quality delivery of patient care endures now and in the future. A panel of nine health care executives discussed the critical role that human resources leaders play in shaping the future health care workforce, with the goal of informing practices, policies, and care delivery associated with recruitment, sourcing, retention, retirement of older workers, and onboarding of hospital and health care employees.

As the thought leaders explored the critical role that the health care workforce plays in the future of health care in America, their discussion focused on the following areas:

- The impact of health care reform and the field's transformation on the future workforce in America
- Preparing for health care workforce challenges related to education, potential shortages and unions
- Ensuring success in future workforce recruitment and retention
- Advice for other human resources leaders about the future of the health care workforce.

The Transforming Health Care Environment and Its Impact on the Future Workforce

Although many components of the recently passed Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (the ACA or reform) are still in the beginning stages of implementation, there is much speculation about how reform, and general trends in the health care field, will transform the health care environment. Thought Leader Forum participants discussed health care reform broadly, thinking about not just the ACA but the broader impact of delivery system transformation as a force for change in the health care workforce, and the potential impacts they foresee in the next five to ten years.

There will be Greater Care Collaboration. The future of health care in America will require the various caregiving disciplines to work together in a more coordinated effort than they do today. Because care will be more coordinated, continuing education will be critical to ensure effectiveness as the roles of each discipline change and evolve.

Thought leaders discussed the implications that care coordination will also have on HR leaders, as they need to

engage in a more proactive, forward-thinking dialogue with nurse leaders, physician leaders, and others in their organizations. As care processes and roles are re-thought to use providers more efficiently, recruitment needs and strategies will likely shift.

In addition, these changes in care coordination and provider roles will result in a fundamental change needed for management itself. Because of the opportunity to integrate more with physicians and the need for a talent pool with the flexibility to do a variety of work, the future will require shared leadership rather than the traditional hierarchical leadership. HR leaders will work with a variety of organizational managers to develop a superior talent plan for recruiting and retaining physicians, clinicians, and business partners from all the support areas to grow in new ways, and think in non-traditional ways about roles and responsibilities.

Technology will be More Heavily Used and Relied Upon. Thought leaders expect a greater use of technology in the future, including robotics, handheld devices that test employee skills, information technology, telehealth, and more. Because health care organizations spend significant operating funds on personnel, some thought leaders predict that declining reimbursements combined with rising labor costs will boost the desire for organizations to move toward more automation and other use of technology. This may reduce the number of personnel in entry level, lower-skilled jobs; at the same time, there will be new opportunities opened for a smaller number of positions, such as robot technicians.

Thought leaders also discussed the need to further invest in health care information technology (IT), and to elevate the strategic role of IT professionals. IT has great potential to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of care, and transitioning IT professionals from the “back room” to working in an integrated way with front-line caregivers has the potential to



Jennifer Stewart

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result in communication and collaboration that uses technology in a helpful way, rather than being perceived as a burden or barrier by caregivers.

Telehealth is also expected to grow, particularly in rural areas with limited resources and specialists. Thought leaders believe that telehealth will be critical for the survival of small and rural hospitals in the long-run.

Staff Reductions Are Expected, Including Turnover of Older, More Experienced Employees—Technology May Help Fill the Gap. Hospitals are the largest employers in many communities, but thought leaders believe that with more cuts coming, hospitals' need to be leaner will mean becoming more efficient, and in many cases using less staff to do so. For example, while the demand for physical therapists and occupational therapists may increase, some of that demand may be filled with robotic assistants or other technicians that execute their work.

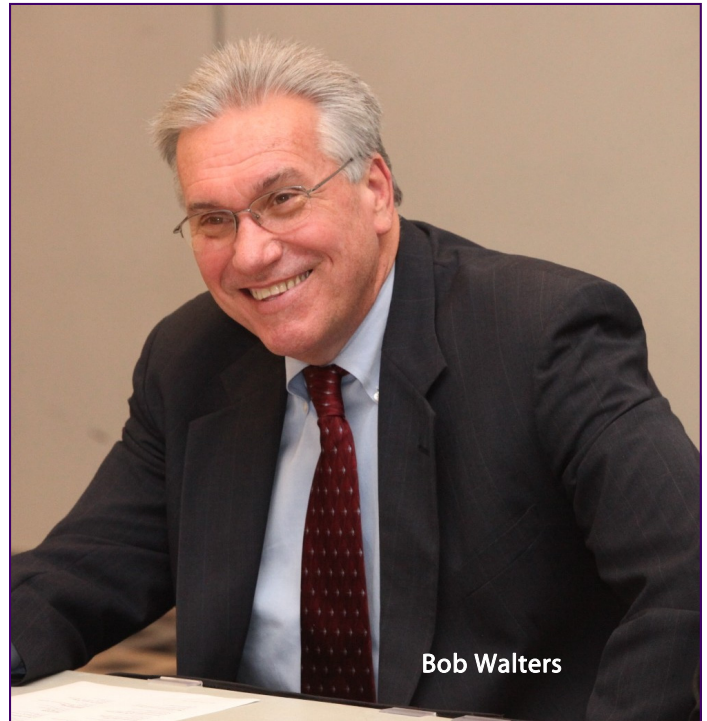
Thought leaders also discussed the anticipated increased turnover of older, experienced workers likely to take place in the next five years. This will cause a gap in experienced, seasoned talent. At the same time, thought leaders expect more advanced technology to be in place that will assist with streamlined processes and procedures, which will help experienced staff make decisions without the years of experience that had previously been required.

There Will be Changes in the Way and Places that Care is Delivered. Like most experts, thought leaders expect less inpatient care to be provided in the future, replaced with more outpatient and home-based care. Although some of this trend will be driven by the ACA, leaders agreed that this shift would happen regardless of reform regulation.



Chris Bieseimer

As care transitions to a wider variety of settings, thought leaders believe that hospitals need to place a greater emphasis on holistic health and health care, rather than inpatient volume. This focus on holistic health will expand the



Bob Walters

role of nurses, who are likely to deal with broader health issues rather than limiting their care to specific medical treatment of an acute issue. This will elevate the role of nurses to play an even more valuable role than they do today. Examples discussed included a "life coach" helping retirees, midwives visiting new mothers at their home, and caregivers traveling to meet with people where they live to provide more well-rounded, coordinated care.

Future Care Will Place a Greater Emphasis on Evidence-Based Practices. Research, and the use of information technology to demonstrate proof of value, is expected to drive many decisions in the future of the health care workforce. This is supported through comparative effectiveness research included in the ACA. Thought leaders agree that hospitals and other key stakeholders are looking for proof of better outcomes, and the value that each potential treatment or provider brings.

Thought leaders discussed the importance of encouraging nurses, physicians and other employees to look for opportunities to improve their practice and impact on patient care, using evidence to support their ideas and suggestions. Collecting data about the impact of care, and using information technology to better coordinate care, will have a significant impact on the future of medicine and the required workforce. Thought leaders also expect evidence-based practices to emerge that rely on technology to encourage the right decisions. For example, when a specific patient

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condition is identified (such as a pressure ulcer), the local nurse's computer screen may flash every time action is needed to address the unique patient need with a proven practice (such as rolling a patient over).

Hospital Partnerships, Affiliations and Other Forms of Coordination will Increase. There was a general sense that without partnerships and alliances, most small and rural hospitals will not be able to survive independently in the long-run. Smaller organizations will position themselves for long-term success by partnering with larger facilities to have greater access to telehealth and information technology. Integration strategies are expected to be significantly driven by workforce shortages in critical areas, and the high cost of information and medical technology.

There was a concern expressed by some thought leaders that organizations considering partnerships receive pushback from hospital boards of trustees that don't want to give up "local control." Thought leaders expressed that the current health care system is no longer sustainable, and highlighted the critical role that HR leaders of small organizations can play in making the business case to boards of trustees for the need to find new and creative ways to meet community needs, and ultimately to remain viable.

Thought leaders discussed the importance of patient-centeredness taking priority over traditional staffing decisions. They expect that in the long-term, local control will be given up, to some extent, for the sake of better patient care.

Medical Tourism Will Not Have a Significant Impact on the Transforming Health Care Environment. Thought leaders do not believe that medical tourism will play a major factor in the future of health care in America. While medical tourism is growing, it still exists on a relatively small scale. Thought leaders agree that the combination of the aging population and the anticipated increase in demand for care combined with the projected decline in uninsured as a result of the ACA, will prevent medical tourism from becoming an urgent issue for hospital leaders to address.

Preparing for Health Care Workforce Challenges Related to the Transforming Environment

In light of the anticipated changes in the health care workforce environment, thought leaders discussed the critical role that HR leaders can take in preparing their organizations for delivery system transformation. They also explored potential shifts in the traditional roles of health care providers, ways provider education may need to change, and ideas for address challenges related to unionization.

Human Resource Leaders Can Take the Lead

Thought leaders believe that human resource leaders can play a critical role in redesigning the future work environment to best respond to the transforming health care environment. Thought leaders also discussed the potential for HR leaders to be elevated to a new role in hospitals and health systems, serving as a consultant and mentor in helping to improve workplace satisfaction and eliminate "waste."



Laura Caramanica

The Role of Human Resources in Redesigning the Work Environment. Thought leaders agree that human resource leaders can have an immense impact and provide great value to their organizations by helping redesign the work environment of the future. HR leaders can pull together leaders from across the organization, gathering their ideas and helping to construct the future work environment from a fresh, open perspective. Thought leaders believe that the lack of a structured framework embedded in the thought processes of many HR leaders enables them to "think outside the box" as they assist their organizations to rethink how to use their workforce most efficiently and effectively in the future.

In order to be successful in facilitating workplace redesign, thought leaders agree that HR leaders need to understand more about the details of specific roles in the organization, and how they can be best used. They also need a solid understanding of health care economics, as they evaluate potential changes with an economic perspective that includes value, quality, effectiveness of care, and ultimately how to assign the right staff to provide the right care at the lowest possible cost, without sacrificing quality.

Elevating the Role of HR. As human resource leaders help lead the redesign of the traditional health care workplace, they are elevating their role beyond traditional human resources functions such as recruiting, hiring and employee evaluations. Thought leaders agree that elevating the role of HR beyond this traditional role brings many potential benefits for hospitals and health systems.

There are many challenges faced by today's health care workforce above and beyond what human resource leaders have historically addressed. Providers are working faster,

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multitasking more, and are getting “burned out” more quickly. HR professionals can become mentors, working alongside managers to improve the workplace environment, helping manage stress, build skills, and rethink work processes.

Human resource leaders can work as consultants to help eliminate “waste” in health care organizations, identifying and suggesting improvements for greater efficiencies. They can play a role in cultural changes, encouraging a team-based, collaborative environment rather than cross-department competition. And they can provide much-needed, forward-thinking training and development for emerging leaders and staff. As a consultant helping organizations to be better prepared for the future, HR leaders can and should focus on providing employees with the tools they need, empowering them to do what they do best and helping the organization to be as “lean” and efficient as possible.

In order to make these changes, HR “consultants” need help from department leaders to better understand the roles and opportunities, and to work together to ensure that employees don’t see the changes as just “another mandate from leadership”. Changes made to the work environment, structure, and education and training should be made in partnership with managers to ensure they are the right fit, and have management support and buy-in as they are implemented.

Changes in the Roles of Health Care Providers

Thought leaders agree that in the future some positions will be relied on more than they are today to complement care traditionally provided by physicians. Thought leaders also discussed the importance of capitalizing on the critical role that nurses play in hospitals and health systems, and HR’s

role in ensuring that employees work to their maximum capabilities.

Some Positions Will be Used More Heavily in the Future Than They Are Today.

Thought leaders discussed the important role that allied health professions will likely play in the



Amy Barry

future, particularly as shortages of traditional physician caregivers intensifies. They agree that down the road there will be new methods of care delivery, and there will be more integration among the various professions.

The concept of working at the “top of license,” or “top of license practice,” was repeatedly brought up by the thought leaders. Many believe that skilled caregivers such as advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs), physicians assistants (PAs) and certified registered nurse anesthetists (CRNAs) will be more widely used in the future. Today there is a tendency to resist using these professionals to their maximum level of education (for example, independently caring for patients or prescribing medication without physician oversight), however, using these providers more independently has significant potential for increasing efficiency and access to care.

There was a concern that in some instances physicians are struggling to define their value as these professions elevate the scope of their practice. At the same time, thought leaders believe there is misunderstanding about the great value they can bring to care, and to meeting patient needs in the long-term. Ten years from now the projected demand is significantly higher in many care areas than it is today, and there are not enough projected providers to cover that demand. HR leaders have an opportunity to take the lead in finding new and creative ways to meet that challenge. For example, one organization discussed challenges associated with Registered Dietitians, and a demand that is greater than



Bruce Stickler

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Marit Brock

can be met with current caregivers. The organization is working to meet that demand with a new baccalaureate degree credential.

Capitalizing on the Critical Role of Nurses. Thought leaders agree that typical nurse role has to change, focusing more on what nurses do best—bedside care. There is concern that nurses today spend too much time on paperwork and other activities that detract from their core purpose of caregiving.

Nurses of the future need to be better educated, and HR leaders must ensure that nurses have the necessary tools, resources, and continuing education to be as effective as possible. In some cases the scope of practice may need to expand for nurses, but in others it could be that providers haven't "hit the ceiling" on what they can do because they are spending time on non-essential tasks. Human resource leaders have the capacity to look at current staffing roles and redesign work processes that are pulling clinicians away from their core competencies. Doing so can help elevate individual practices so that they are actually working at the top of their practice, and will simultaneously improve workplace satisfaction and help organizations become more lean and efficient.

Ensuring that Employees Work to Their Maximum Capabilities. There was a concern expressed by some thought leaders that many caregivers in hospitals and health systems work full-time, but they are not able to devote their full-time efforts toward patient care due to a variety of

distractions. Thought leaders believe that significant changes can be made if HR leaders engage employees to find ways to increase the access they have to patients on a given day.

Employee engagement is necessary to make these changes, and in order to have an engaged workforce, leadership must also embrace the concept. Thought leaders agreed that disengaged leaders result in disengaged workers. HR leaders can partner with other organizational leaders to build employee engagement, helping employees to brainstorm and implement concepts that change the organizational culture.

Ensuring Employees Have the Training and Education Necessary for Success

As the future health care environment evolves, thought leaders believe two of the most important areas to focus on include preparing caregivers for personal caregiving and other practical on-the-job skills, and strengthening relationships and communication between caregivers.

Preparing Caregivers for Practical On-the-Job Skills.

Thought leaders agreed that one of the greatest opportunities to help organizations cope with the technology and cultural changes taking place in the workplace is education and training. While academic performance is important, there was a sense that a greater emphasis should be placed on practical skills, including interacting with patients and family members, delegating tasks and responding to orders, and the importance of collaborating with other caregivers.

One thought leader mentioned that some students want to go to nursing school after high school, but a lack of preparedness for the rigorous college atmosphere results in the need for significant remediation. As a result, their hospital is working with the state to create a nurse residency program called "The Rhode Island Nurse Institute," a middle college model for students interested in pursuing nursing degrees. Similar to a prep school, students come into the program in the 10th grade. They spend one year at their local public high school, and then enter the new public charter high school. They attend the charter school for four years, but the last two years are the equivalent of the first two years of college. The program more successfully prepares students for the next step of college, where they spend three years and receive a B.S. degree. Students participating in the program have more hands-on experience with other care providers than the typical program, teaching them to work with respect and dignity, and value every person in the health care system.

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Strengthening Relationships and Communication Among Caregivers. Thought leaders believe that negative interactions and poor communication between caregivers is one of the greatest challenges that impacts workplace morale and retention. One thought leader mentioned the impact that negative and demanding physicians can have on young nurses, while another mentioned physical therapist dissatisfaction resulting from poor interactions with nurses. There is a negative undertone in the perceptions and communication between various types of caregivers that significantly impacts workplace satisfaction, and more importantly, patient care.

HR leaders must take the lead on changing the workplace culture to emphasize humility and respect for all professions. They must change the culture so that negative interactions and “collateral violence” are no longer an issue. In the past human resource leaders have tended to be reactive to negative workplace situations. Moving forward, thought leaders believe HR must be more proactive, acting as a leader and motivator in cultivating respect and collaboration in the workplace. HR leaders must create opportunities for various departments and disciplines to understand the value that others bring, and then instill a zero tolerance culture for harassment, bad behavior, and negative communication.

Preparing for Growing Union Representation

There was strong agreement amongst the thought leaders that because health care jobs cannot be outsourced, the health care field is an ideal candidate for union organizations. Many hospitals already have a union presence, and thought leaders predict that unions will become increasingly prominent in health care in the future.

Thought leaders agreed that one of the primary challenges in working with unions is that their goal is to obtain more members, and to negotiate for better pay and benefits for those members. Thought leaders believe that the challenges associated with unions can and should be addressed through efforts led by HR executives, including a continual focus on workplace engagement, employee recognition, shared governance, and other strategies to elevate employee satisfaction.

Preparing for Potential Future Unionization. Thought leaders noted that hospitals that are not currently unionized are likely to become targets in the future. Unions in many parts of the country appear to be getting stronger, larger, and more sophisticated in their strategies that target health care organizations.

There was general agreement that the most important strategy to prevent unions is the same strategy that should be used when unions are in place—treat employees with

dignity and respect, and include them in decision-making as the health care landscape transforms. Strong and close relationships with employees are essential.

Thought leaders noted that nurses are often targeted for union representation, and discussed the important role that HR leaders can play in working with nurse leaders to ensure that nurse time at the bedside caring for patients is maximized. Hospital caregivers tend to seek out and are loyal to leaders that truly care about their employees and patients. Employees that can confidently answer the question “does my manager really care about me?” are more likely to be loyal to the organization and less likely to seek out or be interested in unionization. HR managers play a critical role in providing front-line managers with the tools and resources necessary to support and build relationships with their employees.

Focusing on Relationships. There was agreement amongst thought leaders that unions have the potential to stand in the way of efforts to redesign the workplace, including current efforts in many organizations to integrate processes, eliminate silos, and expand the scope of practice in some professions. For organizations that already have a union presence and are facing union “pushback” to change, the importance of employee relations is even greater. One thought leader noted that “the problem is not unions, the problem is relationships.” Hospitals cannot transform the care environment unless they have the right relationship with and buy-in from their staff. Employees must continually be engaged, and feel valued and appreciated for the work that they do and their contribution to the patient care experience.

One way that organizations can strengthen employee relationships and deepen their contribution to the organization is through shared governance. Several thought leaders noted that while shared governance is helpful in all



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organizations, it can be particularly beneficial in unionized environments. Interdisciplinary shared governance helps caregivers do what they do best, which is focus on patient care. Particularly for unionized nurses, though leaders discussed the importance of remembering that “they are nurses who just happen to be union members.” They will thrive in an environment where they are given opportunities to impact and shape the patient care experience.

In addition to shared governance, thought leaders discussed the importance of HR leaders’ relationship with union leaders. It is important for HR leaders to have a relationship with hospital employees who are the union delegates and union stewards. That relationship should be centered around working together to improve patient care, and the workplace environment in general.

The Workplace Environment: Ensuring Success in Future Workforce Recruitment and Retention

Thought leaders discussed the importance of on-boarding and offering future career development opportunities as hospitals and health systems strive to ensure that employees are well-trained and prepared to not only be effective health care providers, but to be confident and satisfied with their role, resulting in reduced turnover and higher employee satisfaction. Thought leaders also discussed the opportunity for HR leaders to serve as key communications liaisons to help create a positive workforce environment that hears and responds to employees’ concerns, requests, and ideas.

Ensuring Ample Opportunities for Career Development.

Providing career development opportunities is essential for building employee relationships and loyalty, and also for organizational succession planning. Not only are many employees interested in career growth opportunities, but most hospitals are facing a future where even greater shortages of caregivers and critical positions are predicted.

Thought leaders discussed several practical ways that organizations can offer career development opportunities to their employees. One thought leader talked about meeting with employees on their first day of work to discuss potential growth opportunities, including offering a mentor and additional education. Another thought leader talked about using employees’ annual performance evaluation as an opportunity to create an annual development plan with each employee. Subsequent annual evaluations are then an opportunity to review goals, and assist employees in accessing the resources, mentors, or additional education necessary. By helping employees achieve greater long-term career goals, organizations are communicating that “we want you to succeed, and we will invest in you to succeed.”



Human Resource Leaders as a Communication Liaison.

Thought leaders talked about employees’ desire for someone to listen to their ideas and concerns, and to provide assistance in helping them to better meet patient needs. Particularly for nurses, there is a strong desire to improve outcomes, strengthen quality of care, and enhance the workplace environment. With the proper resources, this desire can be harnessed to have a profound impact on the organization and community.

Thought leaders described this role as an employee “communications officer,” or a person that listens to and builds relationships with nurses, PAs, dietitians, and other employees. HR can fulfill this role, which will be particularly important with the next generation of workers who tend to desire a greater personal impact on the care environment, as well as the ability to balance their time between work and their personal life.

One thought leader talked about how they use a Chief Communications Officer to build and maintain these critical employee relationships. Their Chief Communications Officer continually interacts with employees and presents issues and challenges to address to senior leadership, including holding quarterly leadership meetings. Because human resources has “tentacles” in every corner of the organization, they are the logical and ideal department to take on the “communications officer” role.

Advice for Human Resource Leaders

In addition to the other areas already discussed, Thought Leader Forum participants offered advice for health care HR leaders as they strive to understand and best prepare for the future health care workforce:

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- If HR leaders are to transition to a heightened role in facilitating redesign of the future care environment, they need a greater understanding of all the key roles in the caregiving process. HR leaders also may need additional training in health care economics, providing a greater understanding of the whole picture as they help rethink ways that caregivers and other employees may best be used in the future.
- Proactively brainstorm with other organizational leaders what the future of health care may look like, and use that to determine what the organization's future workforce needs will be.
- Use organizational development and human resource leaders to develop the training necessary for emerging leaders and staff. As the health care work environment changes and roles morph, employees need the tools that empower them to be successful in their new roles.
- Look for opportunities for human resource leaders to focus on relational communication. Consider the role of the human resources leader as a "communications officer."
- Human resource leaders are well-positioned to be a convener for conflict resolution, and to help employees find a shared purpose.
- Take the lead on implementing shared governance. Shared governance has the potential to positively impact the work environment, build employee loyalty regardless of the presence of unions, and ultimately positively impact patient care.
- Understand that transformation from a hospital to a holistic health enterprise that sells "life services" may reshape how Chief Human Resources Officers operated, how they see their jobs, and how their success is measured.
- Continually look for opportunities to demonstrate to employees that the organization cares about their personal well-being and career goals, from giving managers the tools and resources to show employee appreciation to offering career development opportunities to employees.
- Facilitate opportunities to hear staff concerns and ideas, and take action based on the feedback.
- Look for new ways to use social media to build communication and rapport with employees.
- Keep a thick skin. Hospitals are facing pressure from many angles at the same time, including, but not limited to, financial incentives for efficiency and effectiveness, pressure from unions, and new regulations. With so many constituencies with varying motives, human resources leaders must have a "thick skin" to be effective in an increasingly tumultuous environment.

Conclusion

Health leaders across the nation face massive changes that are reshaping the health care environment. As the health care field changes and new regulations intersect with demographic shifts in both the workplace environment as well as the patient population, there is no question that tomorrow's workforce needs and composition will be vastly different than they are today.

Forward-thinking human resource leaders have an opportunity to elevate their role in enabling their organizations to rethink future possibilities for care, including the role of caregivers, and overall workplace redesign to better maximize resources and strengthen patient care. HR leaders can play a larger, more prominent role in their organizations as they form a greater understanding of the various employee roles and their potential, invest more in hearing employee ideas and responding to them, and learn from best practices across the country to ultimately be an invaluable resource in improving the workplace environment and the overall patient care experience.

Thought Leader Action Ideas

for Understanding and Preparing for the Future Health Care Workforce

Elevate employee on-boarding to a whole new level, focusing on career development, mentoring and succession planning. The typical on-boarding process includes describing the employee position, policies and procedures, and the reporting process. What if the process instead began with a description of the employee's entry level position, followed by a diagram of all the different positions they could move to in their career? Offering a mentor, growth opportunities, and additional education if desired changes employees' mindsets from the first day of work. It is an opportunity for organizations to give back to their employees from the first day they come to the organization, communicating "we want you to succeed, and we will invest in you to succeed."

Use the annual performance evaluation as a springboard for employee development and goal-setting. Employees' annual performance evaluations are an opportunity to create an annual development plan that is the first step in mentor goal-setting. It should include asking questions like "where would you want to be?", "are there new patient groups you want to work with?", and "would you like a job shadow experience somewhere?" It is also an opportunity to discuss employee development opportunities, such as a degree or certification they would like to work toward.

Seek and share best practices. Best practices in human resources are taking place all over the country. HR leaders need to seek out best practices to implement, as well as opportunities to share their own best practices with other organizations.

Increase caregivers' time at the bedside. Nurses and other caregivers want to be at the bedside. HR leaders can work with managers to look for ways to minimize paperwork and other responsibilities that detract caregivers from direct patient care, which has the potential to greatly impact employee satisfaction, employee loyalty, and ultimately may significantly impact relationships if a union organizing effort threatens.

Elevate the role of IT professionals. Information technology has great potential to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of care. Transitioning IT professionals from the "back room" to

working in an integrated way with front-line caregivers has the potential to result in communication and collaboration that uses technology in a helpful way, rather than being perceived as a burden or barrier by caregivers.

Use shared governance to build employee loyalty and strengthen employee relations. A shared governance model enables employees to embrace change and actively participate in changing the care environment above and beyond their daily caregiving role. Several thought leaders observed that highly unionized environments tend to have union leaders that are also interested in being part of the organization's leadership. By offering shared governance, nurses and other caregivers will thrive, rising to the leadership opportunity given and also forming deeper relationships and a greater sense of loyalty with the organization.

Harness staff ideas. Employees have great ideas, and HR leaders can create venues and opportunities to listen to them and act upon their ideas. Employees need to know that organizational leaders are listening to their ideas, and have the resources and assistance necessary to implement them. One organization gave an example of an employee-led career ladder program. Employees developed the idea, and management helped implement it.

Embrace the new era of transparency and communication. Communication today is different than it once was. The combination of the Internet and social media can be used for gain or for harm. Organizations must embrace this openness and be proactively transparent before information is twisted and shared in a negative way. Organizations must be fair and consistent, and be prepared to communicate and justify decisions made.

Create meaningful relationships between HR and employees outside the traditional hospital walls. The rules of engagement for communicating with hospital employees has changed. In many instances, unions are actively using social media to engage employees in robust and sophisticated ways, sometimes

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resulting in a movement within the organization that HR doesn't even know about. HR leaders need to proactively develop those relationships with employees in the same way, forming new and different relationships that are meaningful in a virtual communication world.

Proactively work to determine what the care delivery model will look like in the future, then work backward to determine actual workforce needs and projections. The health care environment of the future will likely use providers in different ways than they are used today. Human resources leaders can take the lead on helping to understand what the care delivery model will look like in various health care settings of the future. Once they form predictions about the future care environment, they can make workforce projections. Key questions to ask include “what type of degrees will we need future clinicians to hold?” and “are schools producing people who not only hold these degrees, but who have the skill sets necessary for the future care environment?” For example, there will likely be a greater need for developing skills that result in complete patient care, including care coordination, delegation, etc.

Build leadership teams that encompass physicians, nurses, and traditional administrative leaders. Shake up “traditional” relationships and bring physicians and nurses in as part of the management team. Make it clear that physicians, nurse leaders, and administrative leaders are all working together in a partnership, and build camaraderie and a sense of true teamwork by having leaders take classes together and work on shared projects. One organization has created these cross-functional leadership teams, and is tying measurable outcomes to those teams. Results indicate that successful leadership teams lead to better financial results, and better overall quality. When given the opportunity, nurse leaders and physician leaders will rise to the top.

Consider a “communications officer.” HR can better listen to and respond to employee concerns and ideas by forming a new role focused exclusively on internal communications. A “communications officer” would continually interact with employees and present issues and challenges to address to senior leadership. The role of the communications officer would be to strengthen employee relations and harness employee ideas for a better workplace environment.

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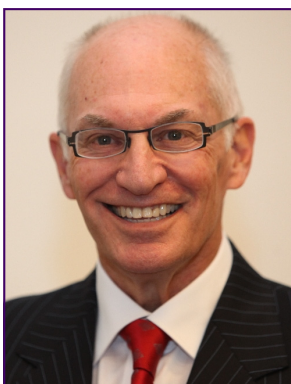
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