

Coping with Staff Shortages and Turnover

by Laura Hess, FHFMA



Laura Hess

Staff shortages and turnover are a big concern. Gaps cause work to fall behind and increase costs, ultimately affecting the bottom line of the organization. I explored this subject with some HR professionals to get their perspectives on the issues, and to learn about their experiences with and strategies for dealing with problems related to staff turnover, ways organizations are retaining and recruiting staff, and related issues that are being seen in the healthcare industry.

Thanks to Tammy Hopson, Vice President, Human Resources with Regional Cancer Care Associates, and Susan Ballestero, Director of Human Resources at Med-Matrix, for sharing some of their time and insights.

The Nursing Shortage

We all know about the nursing shortage, and that continues to be a problem that is expected to worsen with the aging baby boomer population and shortage of nursing instructors.

Tammy: “At Regional Cancer Care Associates, we have begun to develop a two-tiered plan to address the nursing shortage:

- “We began to take nurses from other specialties not just oncology, and have begun to develop our own training program. Our ultimate goal, although we are a community-based large practice, is to develop a training program that is comprehensive and will allow us to hire and train new grad RNs.
- “Additionally, we consistently look at policies, procedures and processes to make sure we are using our staff in the most effective way. If there is a task or function that could be possibly moved away from our RNs, we do that. This prevents burnout, and also gives the other team members an opportunity to grow and expand their skill sets.”

But staffing challenges don't just apply to nursing. There is a shortage of qualified people in other areas too, especially in reimbursement and charge capture. Additional challenges arise with the low level of complexity within EMR systems. What are your thoughts?

Tammy: “As it relates to revenue cycle, we have broken the various components of each position and their duties down to its basic tasks. By doing so this allows us to bring in interns,

recent grads, and career changers. We start them at lower salary rates and give them the opportunity to increase their pay by learning and training to do the more advance functions of revenue cycle.”

Susan: “Staff turnover and retention are obviously a concern. High turnover results in additional expense and disruption to operations, time spent in training, etc., and we are seeing a tighter market for qualified hospital billing staff. The baseline is competitive compensation and a reasonable benefits program, but those are just expected.”

Are continuing education and career advancement opportunities issues for your staff? If so, how are you addressing them?

Tammy: “Continuing education and advancement are in my eyes the “keys” to holding on to great employees. The more education and advancement you can provide where staff can grow professionally, the more that ensures greater retention, and instead of changing companies, that great employee now just changes job titles reducing turnover.”

What issues are important to your workforce, and how do you keep staff engaged?

Tammy: “In my view, now more than ever work/life balance is key to having a happy and healthy successful employee. While everyone appreciates that dedicated worker who stays late and rarely takes a vacation, this employee can also cost your organization money. This “overly-dedicated” worker misses annual physical appointments, and often later develops stress-related illnesses, and we all know how that impacts health insurance premiums for our respective organization.

“Having an employee that takes time to refresh their mind and body is also as important as the classic over-achiever.”

Susan: “Here are a few: meetings with the CEO regarding the status of the organization, an exit interview program with

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follow up to managers, management providing positive recognition and fun staff events, ability to advance internally, and the perception and knowledge that all staff will be treated fairly. Creating this culture in the organization works to keep staff engaged.”

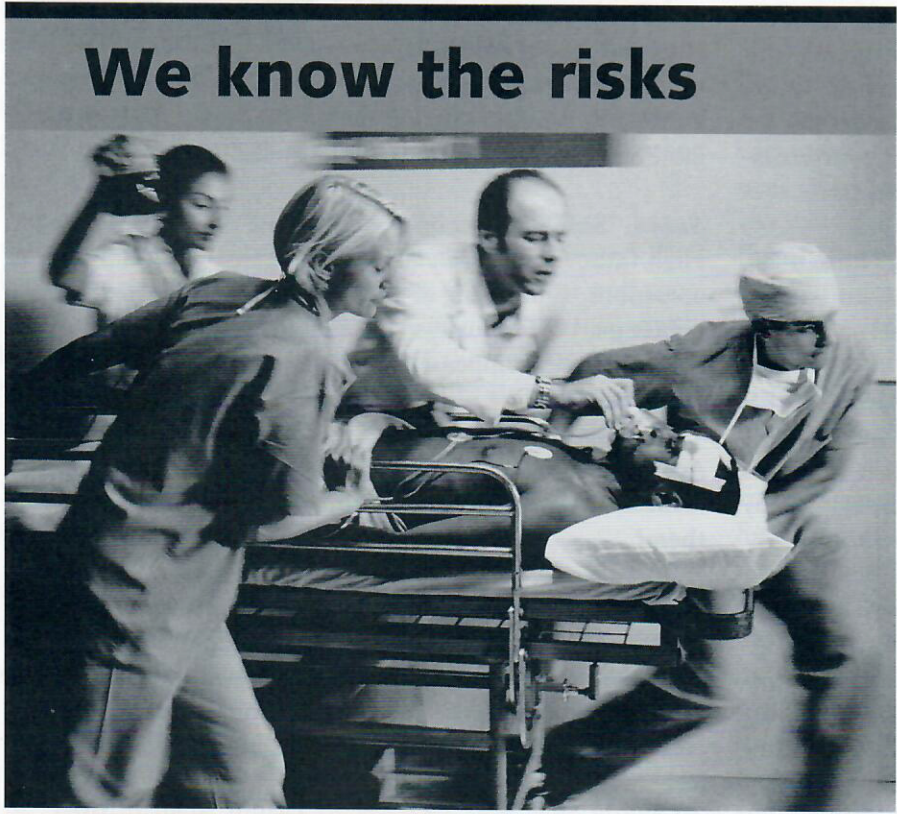
Please share your insights on how all this impacts your bottom line.

Tammy: “The changing landscape of healthcare, reimbursement rates, and value-based care is changing how we hire, staff, and source employees daily. Positions like a “Scribe” have become vital in a large group practice; they free physicians from long days of charting to see more patients. Additionally, you are seeing the creation of positions in the “Quality” arena, now more than before. This requires an unprecedented number of people with leadership skills, and a focus to manage projects, where previously clinical skills mattered the most.”

In summary, today organizations need to work harder and engage their employees a little more to make them feel valued. It is important to think a bit more “out of the box.” Make an investment in your people and you will reap the rewards...all the way to your bottom line.

About the Author:

Laura Hess has been the Chapter Administrator for the New Jersey Chapter of the Healthcare Financial Management Association for 17 years. She is also a Top 10 Search Consultant for the international firm, Global Recruiters Network. Laura can be reached at NJHFMA@aol.com.



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