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# Health Care Organizations Invest in the Bottom Line

By Dawn Onley

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**H**ealth care employers are developing the skill sets of their front-line workforce to boost workers' career options and fill anticipated labor gaps. A sharp increase in people covered under the Affordable Care Act and an aging workforce progressively nearing retirement have driven this trend.

A beneficiary of this change could be the industry's rank-and-file workforce—including cooks, cleaning staff, receptionists, maintenance crew and others.

"The health care industry faces market disruption, growing consumer expectations and a changing workforce in the foreseeable future," said Dawn Onley, executive director of the National Fund for Workforce Solutions' CareerSTAT initiative. CareerSTAT is a national network of health care organizations that promote workforce development.

"In order to proactively address these issues, health care organizations must develop a resilient, competent and engaged workforce," Aiker said. "The skills and careers of front-line workers help employees grow and businesses succeed." If organizations are serious about being able to attract and retain top talent, they must invest in their workforce.

*[SHRM members-only toolkit: Developing Employees (www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/tools-and-samples/toolkits/pages/developingemployees.aspx)]*

In October, CareerSTAT published the *Guide to Investing in Frontline Health Care Workers* (www.shrm.org/learning-and-development/guide-to-investing-in-frontline-health-care-workers.aspx). The guide offers a framework for health care leaders to integrate workforce development programs to get the most benefits for business and provide a path for advancement.

Some organizations say the guidance is yielding good results.

Joyce McDanel, vice president of human resources and education at UnityPoint Health—Des Moines, a provider of clinic, hospital and home care services, said CareerSTAT with helping her company structure some of its original programs.

"What impressed me was the ability to articulate how this is the right thing for our employees but also the right thing to do for our community," McDanel said. "We've offered some of the benefits we already offered, such as tuition assistance and reimbursement, but the individuals in these entry-level positions are not getting the most out of them."

The focus on front-line workers is important for a few reasons. Talent leaders say it's a way to begin investing in their organizations now to prepare for the future. It's the right thing to do because many of the front-line positions are low wage, making it tough for families to get by. Ultimately, by investing in the workforce, organizations are increasing the likelihood for advancement.

Functioning as a self-described "career coach" at UnityPoint Health—Des Moines, HR business partner and retention specialist Emily Brown employees. With UnityPoint's rehoming program, Baby Boomer workers readying for retirement can request to be put in a different department job to see if it's a fit before he or she can be reassigned. UnityPoint also helps front-line employees with career development, which include college.

Tony Bohn, system vice president of human resources and chief human resources officer for Norton Healthcare in Louisville, Ky., said education higher-paying positions. Last year under the Norton Scholars Program, nearly 400 employees graduated from college, 60 percent of whom

Alexis Owens joined Norton Healthcare in 2011 as a medical receptionist. She enrolled in a nursing program at a community college, which earned her associate degree in nursing and is now a registered nurse in the oncology intensive care unit at Norton Hospital. In January, Owens is a care nurse practitioner.

"All of this fits into a culture of lifelong learning," Bohn said. "We have programs that support this culture. We do this because it's the right thing of our culture and strategy."

Jackie Beard, system director, talent acquisition and workforce development at Norton Healthcare, explained that the workforce development analysis program that Norton built in-house to foresee potential staffing challenges and make plans to address them, instead of reacting in

"I think it really is a holistic program from a data perspective," Beard said. "The forecasting tool was certainly a great place for us to start. No funds. We can look at a unit to see where an age cliff is forming, we can see a drop off, and that allows us to make sure we put enough new

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