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Equitable Talent Development Strategies that Impact the Triple Aim

BY MOLLY SEALS AND KELLY AIKEN

All health care workers — even those in entry-level positions — play a critical role in advancing the Triple Aim's goal of improved patient experience, better overall population health and reduced costs. While the impact of nurses and physicians on the Triple Aim is obvious, those in frontline roles like patient care technicians and medical assistants deserve closer attention. They interact directly with patients and influence the quality of patient experience with a direct impact on HCAHP scores and thus reimbursement rates.

Frontline workers tend to be more representative of the communities an organization serves and can improve the delivery of culturally competent care affecting population and community health. Finally, frontline workers with the right skills can assist in preventing patients from returning to the ED and can improve the efficiency of primary care providers such as physicians or nurse practitioners, reducing per capita

costs. To maximize the impact of frontline workers, human resource (HR) departments should invest in strategies that develop the skills and competencies of entry-level frontline workers.

Focus on the frontline

As human resource leaders who are spearheading investments in the skills and careers of frontline workers, we know that focusing on frontline talent development can increase employee engagement, improve the quality of care and provide for a better patient experience. Together with other organizations in the CareerSTAT network, we are implementing innovative training and skill development programs that are impacting operations and organizational culture. By supporting our incumbent workers, we are seeing frontline workers pursuing additional education and moving into higher-level positions, taking on more complex and diverse

responsibilities, and helping deliver high-quality care with fewer errors.

These HR metrics acutely affect an organization's ability to meet Triple Aim goals, by ensuring staffing levels and competencies can meet patient expectations, improving quality metrics and performing more efficiently. Through the analysis of the programs and investments of CareerSTAT's 25 Frontline Health Care Worker Champions, we've isolated increased employee engagement, workforce availability and employee competency as three major outcomes from frontline investment programs.

Employee engagement

As the Triple Aim places greater importance on patient experience and per capita cost, employee engagement is becoming an increasingly important driver of success. Engaged employees provide better customer service to patients and tend to commit fewer errors, and a proven way to engage an employee

is by making an investment in his or her career. Employee training and skills investments demonstrate to frontline workers that their roles are valued and that their employer is committed to their career. As a 2016 report from Press Ganey notes, it is increasingly essential for health care organizations to meaningfully engage all employees.¹

For example, New York's Urban Health Plan (UHP) is known for supporting its frontline workers and consistently ranks high for employee engagement. In 2013 and 2014, 67 percent of UHP's 390 frontline workers participated in training programs, and UHP's employee engagement exceeds national standards while its turnover rates rank at industry lows. Eighty percent of those surveyed believed they had career advancement opportunities, compared to 71 percent of employees nationally. Ninety percent are proud to be UHP associates, compared to 84 percent nationally, and UHP's 9 percent turnover rate as of September 2014 was less than half of the 20 percent average of all health care employers nationally.²

As labor conditions tighten, health care providers are increasingly struggling to fill critical frontline positions like medical assistants and patient care technicians. In response, some organizations are developing community and incumbent "pipeline programs" to ensure a supply of talented employees in the future. Parkland Health in Dallas, Texas, operates a high-school pipeline program offering support and full tuition assistance to recent high-school graduates seeking to start a career in health care. This program supports new employees in entering the industry and ensures that Parkland is recruiting new talent. Jersey City Medical Center (JCRC), an affiliate of RWJBarnabas Health in New Jersey, looks to its incumbent workers to help address key staffing shortages. Interested workers can access up-front tuition support, onsite-learning opportunities and structured mentoring from managers to move from entry-level positions into higher-demand, higher-paying roles. These programs help Jersey City Medical Center move workers into areas of critical need while also

demonstrating commitment to frontline employees. The incumbent worker pipeline has filled high demand positions yielding significant savings compared to the recruitment and onboarding costs of about \$5,600 per new hire.

Preparing workers to succeed

The most direct way in which training and advancement affect Triple Aim goals is by increasing employee competence and performance. Organizations that prepare their workers with a range of skills are more successful at responding to new or challenging conditions and consistently providing quality care. Within our network of organizations investing in frontline workers, the vast majority are also industry leaders in innovation and performance.

Skill development and career advancement programs prepare employees to meet new performance standards and perform competently in critical roles. For example, employers such as Fairview Health in Minneapolis and Baystate Health in Springfield are utilizing different types of structured work-based learning programs to improve skill mastery and provide opportunities to gain the skills and experience needed for entry or advancement in positions like medical assistants, nursing and medical coding. "Earn and learn" models such as apprenticeships and on-the-job training offer individuals an opportunity to be paid while they master skills, gain hands-on experience and obtain any necessary coursework or certifications. Each employee receives a customized competency-based training plan to ensure mastery of necessary skills needed in specific work environments.

While the Triple Aim is the new method for measuring performance, we know that health care organizations across the country are working to improve their performance and quantify their improvements on a range of business impact areas. We are supporting these organizations with research, analysis, and peer-learning opportunities to document best practices and support the implementation of effective training programs across the industry.

By studying organizations making outstanding investments in their frontline workforce, we have developed a *Business Guide to Investing in the Frontline Workforce*, which explains how investments in frontline workers can affect key business areas and presents industry-vetted practices and policies for organizations implementing investment programs. Additionally, it explains how providers can measure the impact of their investments by aligning training programs with key business needs. The *Business Guide* instructs health care leaders on how to improve their investments programs by making learning and advancement more accessible, creating an organizational infrastructure for workforce development, engaging leaders and managers in investment efforts, leveraging public and private resources to expand current investments or pilot new programs, and collecting and analyzing data to demonstrate the impact of investments and plan for the future.

Under the Triple Aim and beyond, health care organizations will be required to meet new standards while maintaining quality and reducing cost. A skilled and competent frontline workforce will be essential to meeting these goals, and health care organizations across the country should develop programs to invest in, develop and retain these essential employees.

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Sources:

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