

Work Environment NEWS

GULF COAST HEALTH SERVICES STEERING COMMITTEE

FALL 2004



Engaging the Aging Workforce

by Margaret Eaton

According to a recent report by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), there are five top trends that will affect organizations and human resource management within the next year related to our workforce. Three of these trends will require healthcare organizations to adapt or change their current practices related to the “aging workforce.”

The five top trends cited in the SHRM report include:

1. **The aging of the workforce** – Critical to this issue is the need for organizations to develop succession plans to prevent skills and knowledge gaps.
2. **Healthcare benefits** – The aging workforce will contribute to rising health insurance costs and the demand for new healthcare services.
3. **Diversity** – Aging, ethnicity, and gender will transform workplace demographics dramatically. This will require increased tolerance of differences and understanding of others.
4. **Flexible scheduling** – This will require employers to recognize the need for flexibility to meet family needs as the sandwich generation cares for both children and parents.
5. **Training** – Human resource professionals will need to focus on training as the workforce becomes more diverse as well as on skills re-training for the older worker. Management training to prepare effective and ethical leaders will be needed to support succession planning. (SHRM 2002 Workplace Demographics Trends Survey)

These issues are at the forefront of our human resource initiatives as we prepare for the future. The Methodist workforce mirrors the demographics in healthcare. Nearly 30% of the employees at Methodist are over the age of 50. Our average length of service is now approaching 12 years and climbing fast. This is a workforce we want to retain, grow and develop. We recognize the “brain drain” that could occur if we do not actively plan to keep this part of our workforce engaged.

Some of the things we have done include: succession planning, flexible scheduling, changes in our benefit program, and training. Our succession planning is well on its way to becoming more than a plan. For many years, Methodist has had an administrative fellowship. Drawing from the best and the brightest graduate students across the country, Methodist decided this year to extend its administrative fellowship internally as well. This year, we opened the program up internally and were fortunate to have several of our directors apply for this program.

Flexible scheduling has also provided our employees with a way to continue to contribute as their personal and professional lives change.

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Work Environment NEWS

GULF COAST HEALTH SERVICES STEERING COMMITTEE

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Two years ago, we created a Flexible Staffing Team focused on nursing. Today that Team contains a variety of job groups from nursing to security staff. With over 130 employees, Methodist has been able to virtually eliminate temporary agency staff from our hospital resulting in huge cost savings and improved patient satisfaction.

Our benefit programs have also changed to meet the needs of our workforce. Our 50+ employees have found our short-term disability program helpful. The ability to access this program easily and early enables us to retain our aging employees. We are also looking at the option of allowing our older workforce to access funds from their Defined Contribution Retirement Plan to allow partial retirement without impacting income dramatically. Many of our older employees tell us that they would like to retire “slowly” but work because they are either too young to access Medicare or because they just want to continue to make a difference.

While we consider ourselves to be a diverse workforce reflecting the patients we care for, we recognize that demographics do not always translate into tolerance of differences. Methodist values are our culture.

This year we will embark on training focused on our core value of respect. Management and employees will focus their energies on honoring, respecting and encouraging our differences to become a core strength versus just awareness.

We believe that as we continue to focus our efforts in developing our changing workforce we will foster a positive employee environment. We were recently honored by the AARP recognition as a “best place to work for employees over 50.” While we are honored to have received this award, it is more important that our over 50 employees affirm it by remaining engaged.

These employees bring both their experience and life learning to us every day. This is invaluable to our organization. We honor the time and effort that it takes to make that happen. Older employees make excellent mentors for younger, less experienced staff. They are also able to help pass on the spirit of excellent service and pride in the quality of work done. Our goal is to create an environment that honors any age and respects the gifts that all employees bring to Methodist.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Planning is beginning in preparation for the 2005 Go for the Gold! Learning Exchange. We are in need of volunteers to help plan the program. If you would like to participate in planning, please send an email to Donde Batten at dbatten1@houston.rr.com.

Correction

The editors apologize for an error in authorship printed in the July 2004 Work Environment News. The article on Camp DISCOVERY should have been attributed to Kathy Jordan of Texas Children's Hospital.



GOING FOR THE GOLD!

Memorial Hermann Katy Hospital

by Linda Salter

We recently conducted a survey of participants who attended “Go for the Gold” last May, asking about ideas they had discovered there that had been successfully implemented in their own hospitals. This article by Linda Salter of Memorial Hermann Katy Hospital describes her experience.

In attending Go for the Gold, I was particularly impressed by several presentations that addressed physician and staff issues: Professional Relations by Debbie D’Ambrosio of Texas Children’s Hospital; Physician/Employee Conflict Resolution Process by Margaret Eaton of The Methodist Hospital; and Implementation of a Recruitment/Retention Team by Cathy Moniaci of Shriners Hospitals for Children, Houston.

I realized that it would be of great benefit if we implemented some of the ideas about how to deal with interpersonal issues between staff and physicians. As members of a large healthcare system, our nursing staff is held accountable to, and a portion of their annual performance evaluation reflects their compliance with established behavioral standards, which include respect, courtesy, communication, responsiveness, teamwork and professionalism. We realize that there are high stress situations that occur daily within the department with which both nurses and physicians must cope.

We requested that our physicians be held accountable for those very same behavioral expectations, that they work as a team with the nursing staff and provide them with the same courtesy, respect, open

communication, responsiveness to their concerns, and professional behavior that they expect as valued members of our medical staff. Discord is addressed privately between the two individuals. The department director and/or department chairman are always available

for mediation if necessary. This leads us toward the ideal work environment in which the physician and nurse respect the knowledge and skills that each bring to the patient care arena to provide every one of our patients with the highest standard of care.

In the Women’s Services department, we have located decorative posters entitled “Phrases of Praise” within the department on which the nursing staff, physicians, and ancillary employees may write notes of praise to each other on those occasions when they want to thank someone for “going the extra mile” to help make their day better, to improve a patient outcome, or just to let them know what a smile or perhaps words of encouragement meant to them.

After implementing these ideas, we have seen an improvement in the relationships between our staff and physicians. We are constantly striving to develop an environment in which the two groups thrive, thus improving employee and physician satisfaction and retention, and ultimately, customer satisfaction.

We are interested in hearing your stories about ideas that you implemented. Contact Donde Batten at dbatten1@houston.rr.com to describe your experiences!

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Grant UPDATE

The Work Environment Project is off to a great start this fall! As of November 17, 62 hospitals are participating in the survey, up 27.5% from the 45 hospitals which participated in the 2003 survey.

The Work Environment Survey has been revised for 2004. A complete review was conducted of all measures. Participating hospitals identified issues related to the survey method, question clarity, and data availability. National associations' formulas were benchmarked. Based on this information, two measures were eliminated due to lack of data accuracy and value-added information and additional measures of Hospital Acquired Infection were added to improve reporting of data. Recommended practice data collection was changed in an effort to improve reporting of data, with twelve new measures added related to initiatives regarding the five dimensions of an Ideal Work

Environment: professionalism, interpersonal communication and teamwork, staff training and development, environmental factors, and economic considerations. Top performers (whose data falls in the 2003 top quartiles in turnover, vacancy rate, and RN satisfaction) are also being asked to identify three initiatives that are keys to their success. In addition, the new survey includes enhanced directions, flexible data entry, printable surveys, and data check points.

The 2004 survey is available on-line until December 31, 2004.

If you have any questions regarding the on-line survey, please contact the Project Coordinator, Donde Batten at dbatten1@houston.rr.com.

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