Ironically, the economic recovery is likely to add new challenges to healthcare recruitment. Employment in healthcare is growing at a fast rate, leading to competition among organizations for qualified candidates. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the healthcare sector created more jobs in January and February 2012 than in any other recorded two month period.¹

As the economy recovers, healthcare organizations may face an accelerating war for talent because as the number of open positions increases so does candidate confidence. As a result, healthcare HR departments will continue to be tasked with improving the candidate experience. David Szary, founder of LEAN Human Capital and The Recruiter Academy, has observed that the number of rejected employment offers at healthcare organizations is on the rise. He noted, “With the economic downturn, people were lulled into a sense of security. We need to re-train recruiters and managers to compete for top talent in healthcare.”

In particular, the economic upturn is likely to exacerbate the existing nursing shortage. Turnover has been a leading contributor to the shortage, with one national study estimating that approximately 1 in 5 newly licensed nurses quits within a year.² Simultaneously, baby boomers are continuing to leave the workforce. As these employees retire, healthcare organizations will be hard-pressed to replace them, and the aging population will require increasing amounts of healthcare over the next 5 to 20 years, further straining the healthcare system. Author Peter Buerhaus of Vanderbilt University Medical Center has suggested that the national nursing shortage could reach 500,000 by 2025, due to increased consumer demand for healthcare and nurse retirements.³
To remain a step ahead, hospitals and healthcare organizations must re-examine their strategies for recruiting employees. An important part of this plan is improving the candidate experience. This white paper will explore five best practices that healthcare organizations can use to enhance the candidate experience through better communication, more effective application and interview processes, and relationship building.

1. Communicate with Candidates Throughout the Process

When candidates do not understand the steps involved in the application process, or where they stand in that process, they become frustrated. If their frustration levels become too high, they may write off a potential employer. As a result, it is important to implement communication checkpoints throughout the hiring process. At each stage, organizations should clarify what information candidates need to provide and what additional steps they need to take. Bradley Savoy, founder of LEAN Human Capital, has found that best-in-class organizations often publicize the timelines for their hiring processes online.

**Applicant tracking software** plays a central role in promoting better candidate communication. When recruiters call candidates, they can immediately reference key information. This makes a strong positive impression on candidates. Judie Goe, Director of Talent Acquisition and Development at Scottsdale Healthcare, noted, “Our applicant tracking system allows us to easily access candidate information and manage the data aspect of the hiring process.” An applicant tracking system also facilitates better communication by allowing candidates to log-in and check their application status; therefore, it’s imperative that recruiters consistently update candidate records.

It is essential to stay in frequent contact with quality applicants throughout the hiring process. This personal touch gives candidates a better experience with the organization and enhances their opinion of the brand. Jason Gallo, Recruiter Strategist at Loma Linda University Medical Center, feels that two-way communication is very important. He said, “The application and interviewing process is like a courting relationship. When we follow up with candidates after an interview, we prefer a high-touch experience where we converse with customers over the phone or meet with them in-person.”

However, recruiters should consider asking candidates how they prefer to communicate. During the interview process, utilize a follow up survey to see if phone, text, email or social media are the preferred means of communication based on what level of job they are applying for and the demographics. Recruiters can analyze the patterns to determine effective communication methods for the future. For example, Scottsdale Healthcare distributes surveys to new hires about their experience with the application process and uses this information to influence changes to their process.

Before someone enters the application process, social media tools like Facebook and LinkedIn can also be useful resources to answer questions about the application process, as well as to educate candidates about the organization’s culture and what it is like to be an employee. Akron Children’s Hospital has used Facebook and Twitter to publish content about unique employee events, like the Halloween parade. Tessa Schmidt, Employment Manager at Akron Children’s Hospital, commented, “Social media gives us the opportunity to be transparent with all applicants. Applicants get a glimpse of what it’s like to work at the organization, not just information about job openings.”

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2. Develop an Application Process that is Efficient, but Thorough

The first exposure candidates have to an organization is usually the job application. Implementing an online applicant tracking system makes the application process easier for job seekers. One benefit of this software is that candidates who are not able to complete an application in one sitting can create a draft of their application incrementally, as time allows, and then submit the final version when they are ready. Another advantage is that the application process is simplified. Tessa Schmidt noted that her organization has successfully used shorter applications for physicians and this same approach is now being used for other types of employment applications. Condensed applications are particularly important for hard-to-fill positions. She said, “One of our goals is to reduce the drop-off rate when candidates start to fill out an application.”

To minimize any potential barriers for applicants, some progressive healthcare organizations have implemented “nurse job hotlines.” When candidates call the hotline, they are connected immediately with a nurse recruiter’s mobile phone. The recruiter can then engage the caller in a brief screening process, establish rapport with the individual, and then initiate the “traditional” application process. After applicants pass the initial screening processes, many top healthcare organizations use behavioral interviewing as a way for candidates to shine. This technique gives applicants a unique opportunity to discuss their experience in-depth with managers and peers. It also gives candidates the chance to learn about the team and the organization’s values. Miranda Maynard, Employment Supervisor at EMH Healthcare, said, “When candidates discuss their experience in a behavioral interview, it reinforces for them that they have valuable knowledge and skills.”

Although many candidates are comfortable with behavioral interviewing, it can be helpful for healthcare organizations to explain why they are using this approach and why it is valuable for applicants. As David Szary explained, behavioral interviewing is all about having a professional dialogue. The questions are intended to determine what is important to candidates and to ensure that they will be successful and happy, if hired. When applicants understand the rationale behind behavioral interviewing, they view the process favorably.

3. Promote Hiring Manager and Candidate Accountability

As hiring managers interview candidates, the organization must hold them accountable for being responsive and communicating clearly. Bradley Savoy noted that for every potentially negative experience a candidate has, a ripple effect will pervade the market and harm the organization’s brand reputation. EMH Healthcare sets expectations with hiring managers that they must give candidates a great experience. Miranda Maynard observed, “Our applicants may have been customers in the past or will be customers in the future. How they are treated during the hiring process can affect our brand.”

Akron Children’s Hospital has worked with LEAN Human Capital to implement a Service Level Agreement (SLA) which defines response time expectations for both the recruiting team and hiring managers. Hiring managers are held accountable for reviewing and responding to applicants in a specified period of time. This enhances the candidate experience, but also gives the organization a competitive advantage. Tessa Schmidt

Tips for Making Candidate Emails More Mobile Friendly:

1. Use Rich Text Format and Arial Font. Rich text format or RTF is the most widely accepted email format for mobile devices. Using RTF in conjunction with Arial font means that candidates will receive messages that look clean and crisp on their smart phones.

2. Make Sure the Title and First 40 Characters Are Compelling. Screens on mobile devices are small. As a result, the only thing people see when they open an email is the title and the opening sentence. Healthcare recruiters have just 80 to 120 characters to convince candidates to open their message and learn more.

3. Keep Messages to 100 Words or Less. Mobile friendly emails are crisp, compelling, and to the point. Rather than overloading messages with unnecessary text, incorporate links which will drive candidates to more information about open positions.

4. Test Emails to Ensure They Are Effective. Before sending messages to candidates, test them out by sending them to friends, colleagues, and even yourself. Ask whether the emails are engaging and compelling, as well as how they appear on smart phones.
Publicizing the accomplishments and profiles of outstanding healthcare employees is a great way to attract candidates with similar aspirations. EMH Healthcare, Loma Linda University Medical Center, Akron Children’s Hospital, and Scottsdale Healthcare have all launched campaigns that tell the stories of their top performers and include employee testimonials.

Loma Linda University Medical Center’s recent online and print advertising campaign highlights specific employees said, “One reason we implemented a Service Level Agreement is because we don’t want to lose applicants to competitors who respond more quickly.”

There are a variety of ways that employers can promote candidate accountability through the application and interview process:

**Behavioral assessments**
When applicants are required to complete a behavioral assessment, it allows them to demonstrate accountability for following directions and complying with deadlines. Behavioral assessments allow recruiters and hiring managers to hone in on critical areas during the interview, making the process more efficient for both parties; this also demonstrates that the organization is focused and knowledgeable.

**Online reference checks**
Some organizations use reference checking software which gives candidates the responsibility for contacting references and following up to ensure that feedback has been sent to employers. This approach empowers candidates and enables them to show potential employers that they take ownership of their assignments. Reference assessment software speeds up the hiring process and shows that the organization is progressive and takes their hiring process seriously, leaving job candidates with a favorable impression.

**The interview process**
Behavioral interviewing requires candidates to prepare in advance and put their best foot forward. During interviews, employers hold candidates accountable for what they documented in their applications and the information they discuss in meetings with managers and peers. Another technique that promotes accountability during the interview process is asking candidates for work samples and evaluating how they respond.

**Measure your sourcing ROI**
HealthcareSource reviewed the sourcing process at four hospitals and found that with over four thousand applications, only 7% were sent to the hiring manager, about 2% were interviewed and only ½ of that 1% were hired. The same study showed that 82% of their sourcing data was incorrect. By utilizing job board analytics to determine media spend, recruiters will be able to source higher quality candidates thereby improving the interview experience for hiring managers and applicants.

### 4. Involve Top Performers in Attracting and Evaluating Candidates

Publicizing the accomplishments and profiles of outstanding healthcare employees is a great way to attract candidates with similar aspirations. EMH Healthcare, Loma Linda University Medical Center, Akron Children’s Hospital, and Scottsdale Healthcare have all launched campaigns that tell the stories of their top performers and include employee testimonials.

Loma Linda University Medical Center’s recent online and print advertising campaign highlights specific employees and how they add value to the organization. Employees appreciate being recognized for their outstanding work and it is easy for Loma Linda to keep the content fresh, as new top performers are continually identified by supervisors. Scottsdale Healthcare has posted videos to its career micro-website which feature employees talking about what it is like to work at the organization. When information comes directly from employees, candidates feel that it has a great deal of credibility.
Peer interviewing is another approach for involving top performers in the candidate experience. This interviewing technique gives applicants access to people who are performing the day-to-day tasks involved in a job. As Jason Gallo said, “With peer interviewing, candidates can really put a face with the job and its responsibilities.” In addition, peers are often better qualified to answer candidate questions about job details than HR or the hiring manager.

Scottsdale Healthcare has found this to be the case and conducts panel interviews for many of their positions. Candidates report that peer interviews make them feel like they have already made a connection with the staff. Also when employees are engaged in the interviewing process, they are more likely to help new hires to be successful once they are on the job.

5. Build Long-term Relationships with Candidates

Many healthcare HR professionals stay in touch with high potential candidates by phone or email, even if they do not meet immediate hiring needs. Miranda Maynard commented, “With high potential candidates, we want to give positive, constructive feedback and keep them engaged. It’s a way of investing in people for the future.”

Examples of candidate relationship building activities include:

Mentoring promising candidates
Many healthcare recruiters offer practical feedback to candidates. Counseling applicants about their interview style or how to enhance their skill set is typically appreciated. As Jason Gallo noted, taking this extra step differentiates organizations and is something that applicants often remember years later.

Building talent communities for hard-to-fill positions
Capturing candidate information in applicant tracking systems enables recruiters to create communities of individuals who can be targeted when hard-to-fill job openings arise. To maintain contact with these candidates, HR professionals may reach out periodically with a personalized email.

Publicizing the work environment and the role the organization plays in the community
Social media can be a good way to disseminate this type of information. Judie Goe said, “The more we keep candidates engaged, the better. It’s good for our reputation in the community, and applicants are more likely to come back and look for opportunities to become employees.”
In today’s tightening labor market, healthcare HR professionals must engage candidates with an applicant experience that is high-touch. This means stimulating candidates’ interest in employment opportunities, keeping them informed during every step of the application and hiring process, and building long-lasting relationships with high potential applicants who do not meet immediate hiring needs. Successful healthcare recruiters have found that providing candidates with this high-touch, personalized experience is only possible when organizations also utilize technology. Tools like applicant tracking software, behavioral assessments, online reference checks, and social media save time for healthcare HR professionals, enabling them to reach out to candidates in more meaningful and personal ways. As David Szary said, “When healthcare organizations devote time and resources to candidate care, good things happen.”

To keep pace with the interviewing, hiring, and talent management changes in the healthcare HR field, subscribe to the HealthcareSource blog, Healthcare Talent Management, and join the conversation on Facebook and Twitter.

Organizational Information

**Akron Children’s Hospital**
- Number of facilities: 2 pediatric hospitals, 17 pediatrician offices, and approximately 70 pediatric specialty locations across northeast Ohio
- 1500 applications per month
- 200 open positions per month

**EMH Healthcare**
- Number of facilities: 3 campuses in Elyria, Amherst and Avon, Ohio
- 1500 applications per month
- 50 to 60 open positions per month

**Loma Linda University Medical Center**
- Number of facilities: Loma Linda University Medical Center, Loma Linda University Behavioral Medicine Center, Loma Linda University East Campus, Loma Linda University Heart & Surgical Hospital, Loma Linda University
- 7500 applications per month
- 400 to 500 open positions per month, cyclical with the school year

**Scottsdale Healthcare**
- Number of facilities: 2 full-service hospitals, 1 community medical-surgical hospital
- 2700 applications per month
- 150 open full and part-time positions per month; 100 on-call positions
About HealthcareSource
With more than 2,000 healthcare clients, HealthcareSource is the leading provider of talent management software for the healthcare industry. The HealthcareSource Quality Talent SuiteSM helps healthcare organizations acquire, develop and retain the best workforce possible in order to improve the patient and resident experience. The company’s cloud-based talent management solutions include applicant tracking, behavioral assessments, reference checking, employee performance, compensation, competency and learning management, and eLearning courseware. A private company focused exclusively on the healthcare industry, HealthcareSource consistently earns high marks for client satisfaction and retention. KLAS Research recently named HealthcareSource a category leader for Talent Management for the third consecutive year, in addition to recognition from Modern Healthcare’s “Healthcare’s Hottest,” Inc. 500|5000, and Deloitte Technology Fast 500. To learn more about the benefits of automated talent management visit: www.healthcaresource.com

Contact HealthcareSource to learn more about our solutions
For more information, contact us at: 1.800.869.5200 or solutions@healthcaresource.com