The current economic recovery is going to have an ironic effect on healthcare recruiting: It will be increasingly difficult to find, attract, and hire the best candidates for the right jobs. The healthcare sector in the U.S. created more jobs in January and February 2012 than in any other recorded two-month period.1 As a result, continuing and long-term care organizations will likely face an accelerating war for talent.

In addition, baby boomers are continuing to retire, kicking off a massive population shift from “workforce” to “care recipient.” Over the next five to 20 years, continuing care organizations will be hard-pressed to replace boomers in the workforce and at the same time provide them with care — further straining the healthcare system. Consider this trend: In 2010, the nation’s 90-and-older population reached 1.9 million; over the next four decades, this segment of the population is projected to more than quadruple.2

Besides the economic trends, author Peter Buerhaus from Vanderbilt University Medical Center suggests that as a consequence of the parallel trends of greater consumer demand for healthcare and increased nursing retirements, the national nursing shortage could reach 500,000 by 2025.3

As the number of open positions increases, so does candidate confidence. To attract top candidates, HR departments will be tasked with improving the candidate experience.
Overview of Contributors

Heritage Community of Kalamazoo
- A long-term care community in Kalamazoo, Michigan, that offers a continuum of care extending from senior apartment living to full-time skilled nursing care
- Number of residents: Approximately 375
- Number of employees: 460

Schervier Nursing Care Center
- A skilled nursing facility and member of the Bon Secours New York Health System, whose mission is to bring compassion to healthcare and to provide “good help to those in need.”
- Number of patients: 2,990 hospice patients and 800 palliative home care patients
- Number of employees: 1,900

Hospice of the Valley
- Provider of compassionate end-of-life care for families throughout central Arizona, including greater Phoenix
- Number of patients: 3,750

Vigil Health Solutions
- Vigil Health Solutions provides emergency call and nurse call solutions for the full continuum of care. The company offers comprehensive solutions to the expanding aged-care market.
- In addition to his work at Vigil Health Solutions, Steve Moran is also the publisher of Senior Housing Forum, a blog dedicated to the senior housing industry.

Planetree
- An international, not-for-profit organization that partners with healthcare organizations across the continuum of care to personalize, humanize, and demystify the healthcare experience by putting the needs of individuals first.
- Planetree guides organizations through a structured process that enables and inspires caregivers to transform the healthcare experience they provide. Its model of patient/resident-centered care has been implemented in a range of hospitals, continuing care facilities, outpatient clinics, and consumer health libraries across North America, Canada, Brazil, and the Netherlands.

David Szary, founder of LEAN Human Capital and The Recruiter Academy, noted that one indicator of this trend is the increase in the number of employment offers that candidates are rejecting from healthcare organizations. “With the economic downturn, people were lulled into a sense of security,” Szary said. “We need to re-train recruiters and managers to compete for top talent in healthcare.”

Efficient hiring practices include positive candidate experiences, from the first touch to the accepted offer. To remain a step ahead, continuing care organizations must re-examine their strategies for recruiting employees. A crucial tactic in this strategy is to improve the candidate experience with “high-touch” and “high-tech” methods. This white paper explores five best practices that continuing care organizations can use to enhance the candidate experience by improving communication, making the processes for applying and interviewing more effective, and building relationships with candidates from the outset.

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 they get too frustrated, they may dismiss a potential employer. To avoid this, it’s 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. Szary 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. An applicant tracking system also facilitates better communication by allowing candidates to log in and review their application status; therefore, it’s imperative that recruiters consistently update candidate records.

It’s also essential to stay in frequent contact with quality applicants throughout the entire hiring process. A personal touch gives candidates a better experience with the organization and enhances their opinion of the employer brand.

Myra Johnson, Vice President of Human Resources at Heritage Community of Kalamazoo, a long-term care community, noted that customer service standards are important to their organization. While this applies to the service employees provide to residents, it also extends to the interactions Human Resources has with its candidates. Recruiters should consider asking candidates how they prefer to be contacted. During the interview process, consider a follow-up survey to see if phone, text, email or social media are the preferred means of communication relative to the level of job that candidates are applying for and relative to candidate demographics. Recruiters should also analyze patterns in candidate data to determine effective communication methods for the future.
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 applicant tracking software is that candidates who are unable to complete an application in one sitting can complete their application as time allows, saving it as a draft and submitting the final version when they're ready. Another advantage is that the application process is simplified. At Schervier Nursing Care Center, online applications have transformed the candidate experience.

“Before, candidates worried about taking time before work to come in and fill out application forms,” said Julianne Castellina, HR Coordinator at Schervier. “Now they can do it at midnight, if that fits their schedule, and they can complete the information at their own pace.”

Many of the best continuing care organizations use behavioral assessments during the initial application stage to learn more about each candidate's competencies, such as their work ethic and compassion. Once candidates have passed the initial screening process, these organizations use behavioral interviewing strategies to give applicants a unique opportunity to discuss their work experience in depth with managers and peers. The process also gives candidates the chance to learn about the team they might work with and the organization's values.

“We have a structured hiring process, and customer service plays a central role,” said Johnson. “The first step is filling out an online application and completing a behavioral assessment that evaluates the candidate's customer-service skills. Next, candidates complete a screening interview with an HR manager. Customer service and compassion are embedded into every phase of the hiring process. Some people have a nurturing spirit, and that's who we're looking for.”

Some candidates may be uncomfortable with behavioral interviewing. To put these candidates at ease, it can be helpful for continuing care organizations to explain the value of behavioral interviewing for both the organization and the applicant. As Szary explained, behavioral interviewing is all about having a professional dialogue. The questions are intended to determine what is important to the candidates and to ensure that if hired, they will be successful and happy. When applicants understand the rationale behind behavioral interviewing, they view the process favorably.

“We try to set people up to succeed in interviews,” said Libby Westby, Recruiter at Hospice of the Valley. “Through our questions, we can see who has a natural customer-service orientation. If a candidate has a consistently positive attitude and heart, we can teach them.”

### Background on Effective Hiring Techniques

- **Behavioral assessment software**
  - This solution provides candidates with a brief online assessment that focuses on important competencies, like work ethic, customer focus, and compassion. Assessment results identify which candidates would be most compatible with the organization and job.

- **Behavioral interviewing**
  - In behavioral interviews, candidates are asked to provide examples of past job-related situations and how they reacted. This type of interview is a more accurate predictor of an applicant's potential for success than traditional interviews.

- **Applicant tracking systems**
  - Applicant tracking systems allow candidates to complete job applications online. The human resources staff can quickly identify the best applicants and then automatically route the information to hiring managers for review.
Think Like a Marketer

Continuing care recruiters are marketers. They are responsible for selling their organizations to potential candidates. In a very real sense, candidates are customers just as much as residents and patients. Using marketing strategies can help enhance the candidate experience and attract high-quality applicants. When sourcing, replace the term “candidate” with “customers” to get in the right mind frame. For example:

- **Make it easy for potential applicants to become customers**
  A good first step is implementing an online application process that’s simple to use. Online applications should be easy for potential customers to find on your organization’s website and be easy to complete.

- **Target your customers and qualify them**
  For recruiters, the ideal customer is someone who is ready to fill out an application and start a new job. Posting job ads is one way to bring in potential customers. However, many other customers who are a great fit won’t see those ads. Try creating content that will draw them to your career website. One example is a video about working at your organization. If a customer has taken the time to watch a video and then apply, they are likely to be very interested. It’s easy to promote this content for free through social media tools like LinkedIn and others.

- **Promote yourself**
  Putting a face on the recruitment organization is important. Generation Y workers have a different sense of privacy and expect to see a face in the recruitment department before they even apply. One simple way to do this is to put professional social media accounts on business cards and email signatures. Be sure to include the organization’s Facebook page, too.

- **Write an HR blog for your community**
  Creating a blog for customers is a great way to enhance the healthcare organization’s brand. Give career advice, tell inspiring stories about employees, and work with the marketing or PR team to promote it. Create calls to action in each blog post. For example, post a link to a specific job position. Free platforms like WordPress exist for creating blogs. It’s also a good idea to learn the basics of search engine optimization, or SEO, to use the best keywords.

### 3. Use the Interview Process to Promote Candidate Accountability

During the interviewing stages of the hiring process, the organization must hold hiring managers accountable for being responsive and communicating clearly with candidates. As Szary noted, for every potentially negative experience a candidate has, a ripple effect will pervade the market and harm the organization’s reputation.

At the same time, the application and interview process gives employers several paths for promoting candidate accountability. These include:

- **Behavioral assessments**
  When applicants are required to complete a behavioral assessment, it allows them to demonstrate accountability for following directions and complying with deadlines. Top candidates have an opportunity to show that they have the right competencies and behaviors for the job, as well as being a good cultural fit with the organization. Behavioral assessments allow recruiters and hiring managers to focus on critical areas during the interview, making the process more efficient on both sides. It also demonstrates that the organization is focused and knowledgeable.

- **Online reference checks**
  Some organizations use reference assessment software, which makes candidates responsible for contacting their references and following up with them, to ensure that feedback has been sent to the potential employer. This approach empowers candidates and enables them to show potential employers that they take ownership of their assignments. Reference assessment software also speeds up the hiring process and shows that the organization is progressive and takes the hiring process seriously. Candidates — and their former employers — are left with favorable impressions of the organization.

- **The interview process**
  Behavioral interviewing requires candidates to prepare for the interview and helps them to put their best foot forward. It also presents an opportunity for candidates to learn more about the mission and values of the hiring organization.

“In continuing care, we need to focus interviews on the organization’s mission and values,” said Jim Kinsey, Consultation Services Specialist at Planetree. “How a candidate responds to questions about values is important.” Cultural fit is a big part of the decision-making process for candidates, so it’s a disservice to them if the hiring team hasn’t looked at that part of the equation. Behavioral interviewing gets to cultural issues, and usually candidates — and hiring managers — know quickly whether the fit is right or not.

During these interviews, employers ask candidates about specific experiences that are documented in their applications or that have been discussed with other members of their organization. Candidates must be knowledgeable about their strengths and weaknesses and what motivates them. They leave feeling that they had a good interview and that it was a productive use of their time.
4. Involve Top Performers, Residents, and Patients in Evaluating Candidates

Peer interviewing is a great approach for involving top performers in the candidate experience. This interviewing technique introduces applicants to people who perform the day-to-day tasks associated with a job. Candidates say that peer interviews make them feel as if they have already made a connection with the staff. On the other side of the equation, when employees are engaged in the interviewing process, they are more likely to help new hires be successful on the job.

Another creative approach that some continuing care organizations use is engaging residents and patients in the hiring process. “In continuing care, it’s important to ask residents to interview and select the people who will work in their home,” Kinsey noted. “This process shows candidates that the organization is a unique place for both employees and residents.”

Steve Moran, Account Manager at Vigil Health Solutions and author of the Senior Housing Forum blog, added that hiring candidates who are resident- and patient-centered translates into a happier staff. “Happy employees can change the culture of a continuing care organization,” Moran said.

5. Build Relationships with Candidates Through Social Media

Social media is a great way to reach candidates and break down the communication barrier, especially with the younger generation. Tools like LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter can be useful resources to answer questions about the application process. They are also good ways to educate candidates about the organization’s culture and what it’s like to be an employee. Progressive organizations, such as MedStar Health, use social media as a way to build better relationships with potential candidates before they even apply.

In addition, social media:

- Can be especially valuable for finding passive candidates; sites like LinkedIn let recruiters target their searches to find the right people for specific roles.

Before diving into social media in a professional setting, it’s a good idea to train employees in “social media etiquette” so they know what’s appropriate to post on the organization’s profile, as well as their own. Consider creating a social media policy to help guide online initiatives.
Conclusion: Enhance the Candidate Experience by Balancing High-touch and High-tech

In today’s tightening labor market, healthcare HR professionals must engage candidates with an applicant experience that is both high-touch and high-tech. “High-touch” means stimulating candidate interest in employment opportunities, keeping candidates informed at each step of the application and hiring process, and — for high-potential applicants who do not meet immediate hiring needs — laying the groundwork for building long-lasting relationships.

Successful healthcare recruiters have found that this kind of high-touch, personalized candidate experience is only possible with the right technology. Recruitment and hiring tools, such as applicant tracking software, behavioral assessments, online reference checks, and social media, save time for healthcare HR professionals and allow them to reach out to candidates in more meaningful and personal ways. In the words of recruiting expert David Szary, “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.

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How do you evaluate employees for leadership positions?

If your continuing care organization ever promoted or hired the wrong team leader, you’ll relate to this cartoon!
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