



Recruitment Marketing's Role in Delivering Quality Patient Care

BY DAVE WILKINS



Recruiting high-quality candidates for hard-to-fill positions is one of the primary business challenges health care organizations face today. The health care workforce shortage is widespread and growing, forcing changes in hospital operations and patient care, and requiring a significant shift in the way organizations source, recruit and retain talent.

The U.S. has been dealing with a clinician shortage for decades; however, an aging population means the problem is about to get much worse. Current estimates put the nurse vacancy rate at most hospitals at over 8 percent, with

one in seven hospitals reporting more than 20 percent of their RN positions as vacant.¹ According to a recent study by the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), projections show a physician shortfall in the U.S. ranging between 61,700 and 94,700², with a more significant shortage among some sub specialties.

Increasing demand for health care services from our growing and aging population, together with the dramatic growth in the number of people insured under the Affordable Care Act, is putting tremendous pressure on health care organizations. Add to that increased competition for clinicians

from the more than 11,800 urgent care and retail facilities drawing from the same talent pool and you have even more challenges for health care talent acquisition teams.

While vacancy numbers are certainly of serious concern, time-to-fill data paints an equally alarming picture. The length of time it takes for an organization to fill a job can be a key determinant of its ability to expand, and we are now seeing difficult-to-fill positions, such as RNs, with an average time to fill of 143 days.³ That, of course, comes at a significant cost to the organization. According to a 2013 Lean Human Capital survey, the total

cost of vacancy for 240 RN positions at just one hospital, with an average time to fill of 136 days resulted in an expense hit of \$6,887,040. When you're dealing with numbers that large, if you can reduce time to fill by even small percentage points, the bottom line hit can be significant.

Extended timelines to fill key roles is also impacting patient care. According to a study by the American Nurses Association, higher RN non-overtime staffing decreases the odds of readmission of medical and surgical patients by nearly half and reduces post-discharge emergency department visits.⁴ Increased RN staffing was associated with 28 percent decreased odds of a patient experiencing cardiac arrest in the ICU, 30 percent decreased odds of a patient acquiring pneumonia during hospitalization, 51 percent decreased odds of unplanned extubation and 60 percent decreased odds of respiratory failure. Furthermore, increases in RN staffing have been shown to reduce length of stay by 2.4 to 3.1 percent.⁵

To address the staffing gaps, organizations are employing more contractors, increasing staff overtime, closing beds and shuttering expansion plans. This is having a tremendous impact — from patient care, which is any hospital's core mission, to expenses and revenue, which support the health of the organization itself.

As we know, the solution rarely is as simple as placing an ad and receiving a flood of highly qualified applicants. According to Lean Human Capital, health care talent acquisition professionals are seeing an average of 11 applications per hire for direct care RNs. Candidate flow is simply too tight. If you're only seeing 11 applications, you're likely not able to hire staff of the highest caliber. Instead, you're picking from a small set of applicants rather than finding the best candidates from a larger pool of talent.

That's one reason why median first-year turnover hovers around 14 percent, providing a real indicator of quality of hire. When you are having to lower

your hiring standards to fill vacancies, patient care is impacted. Revenue is impacted. With turnover at 14 percent and hospitals paying an average of \$25,000 per back fill in overtime and blended agency costs, the revenue impact clearly becomes a significant problem over the course of a year.⁶

Bottom line, if you're not able to increase your lead flow, your pool of qualified applicants shrinks, and you are subsequently less likely to hire the most qualified employees. The goal is not just more leads, but also better leads.

Rethink your recruitment strategy; increase your pipeline

While most organizations understand the crucial role that recruitment plays in the overall talent acquisition process, the vast majority do not have dedicated sourcing programs to attract more candidates, build a pipeline and increase brand loyalty among potential applicants. This is where recruitment marketing comes into play. Defined as *the strategies an organization uses to find, attract, engage and nurture talent before they apply for a job*, recruitment marketing is often referred to as the pre-applicant phase of talent acquisition.

The average time to incubate a candidate lead in health care is 25 hours.⁷ Recruitment marketing is focused on not only increasing the number of qualified candidates, but also reducing the time involved in finding qualified candidates and getting them in for an interview.

Key elements of recruitment marketing include:

- Candidate attraction – optimizing job listings, increasing search engine optimization, developing branded career solutions
- Candidate sourcing beyond advertising jobs – organizing relationships with passive and active candidates, identifying underperforming sources, organizing candidates in to targeted talent pools
- Candidate relationship management – maintaining and nurturing relationships with your candidates,

building a pipeline, increasing your 'brand' loyalty

- Candidate experience and applicant conversion – employing best practices to ensure an optimal experience for qualified target candidates
- Analytics to monitor and ensure program success – tracking campaigns; monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of your sourcing spend and overall recruitment efforts.

Some of these initiatives have existed in various forms in applicant tracking systems (ATS), but in recent years we are seeing more of these functions move out onto their own and function on par with ATS. As more health care executives begin to understand how recruitment marketing initiatives can shorten time to fill key roles, decrease turnover, improve patient outcomes and increase revenue, this trend will only accelerate.

There's an art and a science to finding, attracting, engaging and closing a candidate. Recruitment marketing helps demystify the process and build talent pools by increasing the effectiveness of sourcing strategies and attracting more of the right talent via targeted sourcing techniques. Mostly importantly, increasing the candidate pipeline and reducing time to fill crucial roles, will improve patient outcomes.

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Sources:

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