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The Journal of Healthcare Contracting is published bi-monthly by **Share Moving Media**
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The Journal of Healthcare Contracting (ISSN 1548-4165) is published bi-monthly by Share Moving Media, 350 Town Center Ave, Ste 201, Suwanee, GA 30024. Copyright 2023 by Share Moving Media All rights reserved.

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Medical Dental Integration

Awareness of the benefits of oral and medical care integration is growing. But implementing it will present some challenges, not only among providers, but patients too.



Researchers and healthcare professionals have studied the connection between oral health and systemic health for some time. The U.S. Surgeon General drew attention to that connection in its 2000 report, “Oral Health in America.” Subsequent reports have only strengthened the case for integrating medical and dental care.

Understanding and accepting the connection represents progress, but doing something about it is another matter. Integrating oral and medical care can mean co-locating dental and medical professionals and equipment; integrating digital dental and medical records; and enlisting professionals who are eager to stretch their understanding of healthcare and work with people they never worked with before. In other words, it’s a lot of work.

Despite the challenges, integrating oral and systemic health at the practice level is occurring throughout the country.

For example, in December 2022, UCSF Health and UCSF Dentistry in San Francisco merged their medical and oral health records into an electronic health record.

Here are some other examples:

- ▶ **Delta Dental of Colorado** administers the Colorado Medical-Dental Integration (CO MDI) project, which

integrates registered dental hygienists into medical care teams. Its clinics have provided more than 60,000 visits for patients who otherwise may not receive care due to insurance status, transportation, geography or socioeconomic status. (Delta Dental Plans Association is a not-for-profit organization which offers dental coverage in 50 states through its network of Delta Dental companies, including Delta Dental of Colorado.)

- ▶ **Zufall Health**, headquartered in Dover, New Jersey, with service locations in seven counties, has provided primary care in the region since 1990 and oral health since 2000. “This allows our dental team to consult on medical patients who may appear with oral issues, and to help them address acute or chronic medical conditions that are affecting medical care,” says Rina Ramirez, M.D., chief medical officer.
- ▶ In December 2022, **Pacific Dental Services**, a nationwide dental support organization (DSO), announced a partnership with MemorialCare, an integrated health system in Southern California, to open at least 25 joint locations in MemorialCare Medical Group health centers throughout Orange and Los Angeles counties over the next five years. The two organizations use the Epic electronic health record system, which is expected to facilitate sharing of medical and dental information. Already, PDS supports four medical practices in the Las Vegas, Nevada, area, and it was the first DSO to partner with an accountable care organization – Commonwealth Primary Care ACO in Arizona.

Five ways oral health can influence overall health

- 1 Respiratory health.** Patients with ventilator-associated pneumonia (VAP) who engaged in regular toothbrushing spent significantly less time on mechanical ventilation than other VAP patients.
- 2 Adverse birth outcomes.** Gum disease among pregnant women is associated with preterm births, low birthweight babies and preeclampsia, a pregnancy complication that can cause organ damage and can be fatal.
- 3 Diabetes.** Diabetes raises the risk of developing gum disease by 86%.
- 4 Stroke.** People with gum disease are three times more likely to have a stroke involving blood vessels in the back of the brain, which controls vision and other bodily functions.
- 5 Blood pressure.** People who delayed dental care during their teens and early adult years are more likely to be diagnosed with high blood pressure.

Source: DentaQuest, whatsnew.dentaquest.com/critical-connections-five-facts-about-oral-healths-influence-on-the-body

Colorado

Delta Dental of Colorado began co-locating dental hygienists in selected Colorado medical practices in 2007 and has expanded the program to more than 20 locations. “We started by co-locating dental hygienists into medical clinics, meaning the hygienists had their dental operatory in the same building and saw medical patients who were referred to them,” says Patricia Braun, M.D., a Denver pediatrician and program evaluator for the Colorado Medical-Dental Integration project. “As the program evolved, the dental hygienists became integrated members of the medical team. They either saw the patient before or after the medical provider or scheduled a future visit if the dental hygienist was busy with another patient.”

Hygienists provide a broad scope of dental hygiene services, including sealants, X-rays, and scaling and root planing in the medical setting, says Dr. Braun. Many practices have seen a reduction in

untreated dental disease in patients with more than one integrated dental hygiene visit. This is a result of preventing dental caries as well as navigating patients with untreated dental decay to dentists.

New Jersey

Zufall Health takes seriously the synergistic relationship between medical and dental teams, says Dr. Ramirez. “Untreated oral disease can be associated with infections, diabetes, weight loss and malnutrition, and can negatively affect individuals’ eating, sleep, work performance and social life,” she says.

Most of Zufall Health’s facilities provide medical and dental care within the same building or adjacent buildings. At its Somerville, New Jersey, site, where a forthcoming construction project will add dental exam rooms, the community center’s mobile dental van is available to patients weekly. “The proximity of

medical and dental care, coupled with an integrated electronic dental/medical record, allow patients to receive medical and dental care at the same location and strengthens interdisciplinary provider collaboration,” she says. The medical and dental teams both use eClinicalWorks software to maintain patient information.

The following programs and initiatives exemplify the cross-functional approach to medical and dental care at Zufall Health:

▶ **Pediatric HPV vaccinations as prevention for oropharyngeal cancer.** Human papillomavirus (HPV) causes six types of cancer and is spread through sexual skin-to-skin contact, Ramirez points out. HPV vaccination can prevent 90% of cancers caused by the virus, and it is most effective for children between ages 9-12 and provides prevention before exposure. To overcome parents’ aversion to HPV vaccination, Zufall Community Dental

Health Coordinators provide education and motivational interviewing that focus on oropharyngeal cancer, the fastest growing HPV-related cancer. The HPV vaccination rate nearly tripled in a project cohort.

- ▶ **Periodontal disease and diabetes management.** Diabetes can increase the amount of glucose in saliva, leading to bacterial growth and plaque accumulation, says Dr. Ramirez. Zufall dentists identify patients with high A1C levels and provide deep cleanings to prevent or treat periodontal disease.

- ▶ **Coordinating dental care for Ryan White (HIV services) patients:** People living with HIV and AIDS often face numerous barriers to accessing affordable preventive and restorative dental services, resulting in higher burdens of oral disease.

- ▶ **Medical and dental services offered in mobile medical van:** Dental care is part of Zufall's Peds in the Park program, which uses a mobile medical van to conduct pediatric assessment and vaccination events throughout low-income

neighborhoods. "It was created to counter the dramatic drop in the number of children receiving their routine childhood immunizations due to the pandemic," says Ramirez.

- ▶ **Pediatric obesity prevention:** During dental visits, pediatric patients are evaluated for BMI, and families receive appropriate nutritional counseling. Additionally, Zufall's Children's Oral Health Program provides fluoride treatments and education in its pediatric fitness program – Ándale – and at asthma clinics.

Putting together the medical/dental team

Medical dental integration works best in offices with shared electronic patient records and physical layouts that facilitate collaboration. But it can't work without medical and dental professionals who embrace the concept and welcome a new way of practicing healthcare.

"We have learned that integrating a new kind of provider into a medical team is challenging and takes time and support, but that with the right people and commitment, it can be successful," says Patricia Braun, M.D., a Denver pediatrician and program evaluator for the Colorado Medical-Dental Integration project. "We have developed a change package, which is a set of key drivers of successful medical-dental integration. These include buy-in from leadership and providers, the right hygienist who is willing to work in a non-traditional setting with a very different team, and time to create efficient workflows. Communication is key.

"The medical team members must buy in to the importance of oral health and add it to their priorities for the visit," she says. "This means identifying patients who would most benefit from seeing the hygienist and completing a warm hand-off to the hygienist. Prioritizing the needs of the patient

is also important. Sometimes their oral health is one of the biggest needs, and at other visits, there are more important health priorities."

Mark Schafer, M.D., CEO, MemorialCare Medical Group in Southern California, says, "While there has been a lot of medical literature over the last 20 years about the mouth/body connection, it is not emphasized in medical school or subsequent training. MemorialCare and Pacific Dental Services physicians and staff will spend some time at the beginning of our partnership to educate each other and become more knowledgeable about each other's area of expertise."

Organizational culture is a key ingredient to integrating medical and dental teams, according to Frances Palm, MPA, president and CEO of Zufall Health, headquartered in Dover, New Jersey. "Medical and dental providers and staff are motivated by the same goal – reducing barriers to healthcare and facilitating improved health outcomes for patients. They recognize the essential nature and connection between oral health and the rest of medical care, and Zufall providers participate in continuing education training that covers both medical and dental topics."



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CDC encouraging medical dental integration

In 2021 the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Division of Oral Health awarded funding to the National Association of Chronic Disease Directors to develop a National Action Framework for medical dental integration. The framework would outline opportunities to integrate medical and dental services in different healthcare and public health settings to support populations with unmet oral health needs and associated chronic diseases.

Following research on oral health and chronic disease plans, NACDD, CDC and KDH Research & Communication (KDHC) identified four pillars that are necessary to support whole-person integrated care, says Barbara Park, RDH, MPH, public health consultant for NACDD:

- ▶ **Awareness.** Increase recognition, knowledge, understanding and perception about equitable, whole-person integrated care and the oral-systemic connection across the lifespan.
- ▶ **Workforce development and operations.** Prepare healthcare professionals and other professionals to

work across disciplines; establish organizational structures to facilitate collaboration; and empower staff to use systems that support whole-person integrated care.

- ▶ **Information exchange.** Share and promote access to meaningful and actionable information.
- ▶ **Payment.** Implement sustainable financing, reimbursement and incentives for systems and patient care that support equity and optimal patient health outcomes.

"We have learned ... that medical dental integration is 'easier' to implement in closed systems of care," says Park. Such systems include Federally Qualified Health Centers; HMOs such as Kaiser Permanente, which include dental services; Veterans Affairs facilities; and safety net clinics that provide coordination of health services – medical, behavioral, dental, etc. – for their clients, many of whom have multiple chronic conditions that put them at high-risk for complications from unmet dental needs.

- ▶ **Cross-disciplinary training and referrals:** Zufall's pediatric medical providers apply fluoride varnish to children who are not actively seeing dentists, perform caries risk assessments, and make directed referrals to dental care. Conversely, the dental team frequently does blood pressure screenings and refers patients unvaccinated for HPV to the medical office for vaccination.

Southern California

Stephen E. Thorne IV founded Pacific Dental Services in 1994 with his first dental practice management contract in Costa Mesa, California. His interest in

'As the program evolved, the dental hygienists became integrated members of the medical team.'

integrating dental and medical care came soon after.

"I wanted to understand more about the connection between oral health and overall health, so in 2015, I put together a team to study the science on what was then called the oral-systemic link," he says. "We ended up defining the Mouth-Body Connection® as the link between oral health and overall systemic health, and the role that harmful bacteria, inflammation, and bone loss in our mouths plays in chronic, systemic disease." In

2018 PDS created a digital book titled "32 Reasons to Learn About the Mouth-Body Connection®" and began providing chairside education on the topic to patients.

"We've redesigned the look and feel of our newest supported practices to provide for an immersive, educational experience as soon as patients enter the door," says Thorne. The phrase "Oral Health Means Better Health" is displayed prominently on the lobby walls, along with supporting collateral and interactive educational opportunities.



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Through its “Smile Generation” brand, PDS-supported dental practices distribute a quarterly digital magazine focused on the connection between oral health and whole-body health. Patients receive oral health and Mouth-Body Connection® education through their MyChart app and monthly emails with information. “In addition, we share news and updates on this topic through our websites and social media channels. One of our most important initial learnings has been that patients quickly get it. Patients accept the Mouth-Body Connection® as obvious. For them, it seems common sense.”

The fact that both Pacific Dental Services and MemorialCare use Epic electronic records was a factor in their partnership. “The interoperability of Epic, along with chart reconciliation, make it easier to close care gaps, enable early intervention and ultimately reduce overall healthcare treatment costs,” says Thorne.

‘It is clear there are many benefits to reimagining healthcare around each patient.’

“This will naturally create opportunities for physicians and dentists to collaborate on medical and dental issues,” says Mark Schafer, M.D., CEO, MemorialCare Medical Group. “For example, a dentist may see in a patient’s record that they are diabetic but have not recently had a check-up. The dentist could touch base with the MemorialCare physician to see what is recommended. This may lead to a blood test that day and a follow-up visit with the doctor, or a same-day visit with a nurse practitioner.”

At press time, PDS was still in the planning phase for its first office in the

‘Patients accept the Mouth-Body Connection® as obvious. For them, it seems common sense.’

MemorialCare partnership. “We are envisioning having a shared reception area/lobby for patients, advertising both medical services and dental services,” says Thorne. “In the clinical areas, there will be a dental clinical space operated by PDS and a medical space operated by MemorialCare.”

Social determinants

Studies support that oral/systemic health integration can benefit just about anyone. But it may be particularly important to those who live with challenging social determinants of health.

“The benefits of integration are greatest for Zufall Health patients who are most vulnerable or who experience the

highest barriers to care,” says President and CEO Frances Palm, MPA. This includes people who have little to no English language skills (about 66 percent of Zufall patients), low health literacy, low income (88 percent of Zufall patients), limited transportation access, and no health insurance (more than half of Zufall patients).

Zufall Health dental patients receive oral healthcare from dentists, including dental residents; registered dental hygienists, and community dental health coordinators, or CDHCs, who help vulnerable patients overcome barriers

to dental care and navigate the dental care system, she says.

Where’s it headed?

“The concept of having a doctor and dentist together in the same office is new, so we may encounter some questions and it may take time for patients to understand and take advantage of the opportunities,” says Dr. Schafer at MemorialCare Medical Group. “But we believe the added convenience and access to both medical care and dental care will quickly create many supporters of the concept.”

“Health care systems, including hospitals and federally qualified health centers, are thinking of patient-centered care and building healthcare provider teams,” says Tamanna Tiwari, BDS, MDS, MPH, a board member of Delta Dental of Colorado and an author of Delta Dental Institute’s white paper on medical-dental integration models. “However, the sustainability of [medical dental integration] models also depends on bi-directional interprofessional training and practice, including training medical professionals on oral healthcare, and dental providers on overall health.”

Says Thorne, “Given the linkages between oral health and certain systemic diseases, it is clear there are many benefits to reimagining healthcare around each patient, including reducing medical costs and annual hospitalizations. But the biggest benefit of collaboration is the overall improvement of patient health.

Still, he says, “Revolutionizing healthcare is not easy.” ■

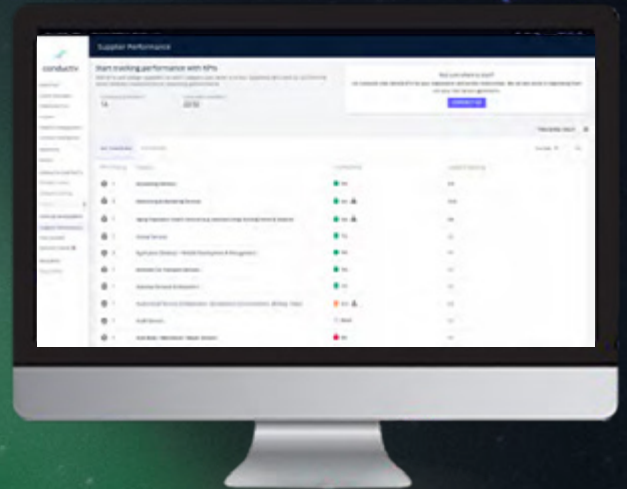


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-Peter Drucker

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The Cost of a Fragmented Lab Supply Chain

Stronger collaboration, smarter distribution is key to supply chain resilience.



While the COVID-19 pandemic, extreme weather events and geo-political activity have exposed vulnerabilities in the global supply chain in recent years, organizations across the healthcare industry have felt the impact of fragmentation—particularly as complexity has grown due to emerging markets, expanding product portfolios and numerous additional structural factors.

Cardinal Health™ Laboratory Products and Services distributes to more than 6,300 hospital labs, hospital-owned clinics and reference laboratories. From its perspective as one of the largest dedicated lab distribution networks in the U.S., Cardinal Health has unique insight into the complexities of the laboratory supply chain and how to proactively address fragmentation.

“With the continuing decentralization of healthcare delivery, the proliferation of new products and services to the market, and evolving regulatory requirements, supply chains are more susceptible to fragmentation and the associated costs,” said Emily Berlin, Vice President Laboratory Marketing & Aero-Med Commercial Sales and Operations.

“Clinical labs have faced labor constraints, supply availability challenges and unpredictable shifts in demand – events that are compounded and made more difficult to address with a patchwork supply chain.”

Fragmented supply chains experience rising costs due to stockouts, delays, quality issues, errors, lack of standardization, inconsistent processes and decreased visibility. For organizations aiming to evolve to a more integrated model, a comprehensive and systematic approach that enables better visibility, faster transfer of information and stronger alignment between clinical, operational and logistical teams is necessary.

The role supply chain plays in laboratory distribution

Not all distribution is created equal. For 70 years, labs have relied on Cardinal Health for supply chain expertise, delivered standardization, savings, an expansive lab product offering and clinical relevance.

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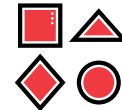
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Aligning supply chain to the care delivery model

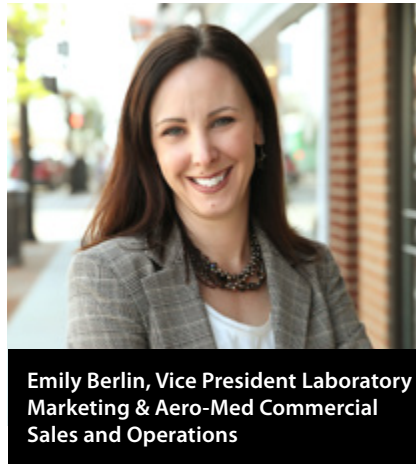
As health systems have expanded into alternative care locations including non-acute settings outside of the hospital, inefficiencies in inventory management, sourcing and supplier coordination have come into heightened view.

“Supply chains will benefit from more efficient procurement, optimized management of upstream and downstream relationships, and increased standardization, particularly as the demand for specialized products has led to new suppliers entering the market,” Berlin added.

“Building strong relationships with suppliers goes a long way to helping our customers operate more efficiently. Through robust relationships and identifying new suppliers to bring through distribution, we can provide customers with more options that address critical lab distribution requirements.”

Labs play an essential role in patient care yet are susceptible to inefficiencies related to product access, delivery schedules and financial value caused by fragmented distribution that does not prioritize the lab’s needs. Prioritizing and elevating the lab is core to Cardinal Health’s distribution strategy. With over 70 years of deep clinical expertise, Cardinal Health lab distribution solutions are tailored to helping labs drive value. In addition to maintaining a breadth of lab products from key suppliers that allows for competitive pricing, Cardinal Health offers a suite of lab-specific services that increase the reliability of laboratory supply. These dedicated solutions include proactive inventory management visibility, cold storage and special handling capabilities, managed seasonal demand, a dedicated

freight management solution, a quality assurance program (QAP) for one-time and standing order support, sequestered lots for critical materials, low-unit-of-measure (LUM) ordering and a reserved respiratory inventory program.



Emily Berlin, Vice President Laboratory Marketing & Aero-Med Commercial Sales and Operations

Improving coordination between clinical and supply chain teams

Costly inefficiencies tend to occur due to duplication of effort arising from lack of coordination. Clinical and supply chain teams can improve coordination by establishing clear lines of communication and meeting regularly to share data, such as testing volumes and inventory levels, to boost visibility and ensure quality control. Creating lasting efficiencies across multiple locations and systems requires solutions that provide transparency to help identify and solve issues that arise. Automation can help increase efficiency by reducing the risk of errors and disruptions.

Berlin stated that, “customers rely on both our clinical and operational expertise to help optimize lab operations, particularly as distribution channels have evolved. We are steadfast in keeping our finger on the pulse of industry developments and new technologies and are

continuously expanding the solutions we provide. By partnering solutions like automated lab capital equipment and custom specimen collection kitting with dedicated diagnostic specialist and kitting advisors, we help customers streamline, which drives workflow efficiencies and savings.”

Helping clinical labs evolve

Transforming opportunities for improvement into core strengths is key to a resilient and flexible supply chain that is positioned to navigate future challenges. By partnering with an experienced laboratory distributor, organizations can facilitate collaboration, streamline the ordering and delivery processes and make the unpredictable more predictable through access to real-time data and insights.

“We are continuously investing in our distribution network to accelerate service and remove complexities across the supply chain for our customers,” Berlin said. “Capabilities like our specialized handling and cold chain network mitigate risk and help assure product integrity so that customers receive products when they need them, at the quality they expect.”

Cardinal Health has launched a multi-year warehousing and modernization plan that focuses on infrastructure and technology investments. Their newest facility, located in Central Ohio, is equipped with Locus robotics and an innovation lab designed to test new technologies and streamline fulfillment processes.

“We have evolved to help our customers evolve,” said Berlin. “Health systems and laboratories rely on us to help them be more agile, reduce risk, and improve the efficiency of healthcare delivery to ensure their patients receive the critical care they need.” ■

The Journal of **Healthcare** C O N T R A C T I N G

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HIRC Awards Transparency Partner Badges

Healthcare Industry Resilience Collaborative awards first-ever transparency badges to 8 healthcare suppliers.

COURTESY OF THE HEALTHCARE INDUSTRY
RESILIENCE COLLABORATIVE

The Healthcare Industry Resilience Collaborative (HIRC), a non-profit

consortium of healthcare supply chain leaders focused on increasing transparency and resiliency, recently recognized the first awardees of the new HIRC Transparency Partner Badge. This distinction is designed to validate the companies' continuous efforts and commitment to supply chain transparency and resiliency.

The inaugural badge awardees are:

- ▶ B. Braun
- ▶ Cook Medical
- ▶ Medtronic
- ▶ Sandoz
- ▶ Cardinal Health
- ▶ Innovative Health
- ▶ Philips
- ▶ Stryker

HIRC AWARDS TRANSPARENCY PARTNER BADGES

The awardees gave two primary reasons for pursuing the badge: to increase trust with providers, and to increase supply chain reliability to improve patient outcomes.

“HIRC Transparency Badge is an outstanding step forward for the healthcare industry to define what good looks like in supply chain transparency and resiliency,” said Tom Harvieux, chair of HIRC, and chief supply chain officer at BJC HealthCare. “We invite all suppliers to join HIRC and pursue the transparency badge,” Harvieux said.

provider members regarding the following transparency measures:

- ▶ Mapping insights of final assembly and beyond for all locations that provide critical and essential products sold into the U.S. market
- ▶ A Business Continuity Maturity (BCM) assessment

“Providers can only reward transparent and resilient suppliers if we can tangibly identify who they

- ▶ **99%** of providers and suppliers agree that in order to create a more resilient healthcare supply chain, we must increase transparency.
- ▶ **100%** of providers and 92% of suppliers agree that transparency, including visibility to geography and business continuity planning, is important to supply chain resiliency.
- ▶ **77%** of providers are more likely to do business with a supplier who has the Transparency Badge, all else being equal.



Bill Selles



Katie Dean



Tom Harvieux

HIRC is an organization of hospitals and suppliers – led by AdventHealth, BJC HealthCare, Corewell Health, Cleveland Clinic, Mayo Clinic, Stanford Health Care, and others – that has come together to promote resilience and transparency in the healthcare supply chain.

“The healthcare supply chain has lacked definitive information telling buyers when they can trust a supplier to be transparent—until now,” said Bill Selles, SVP Supply Chain at Corewell Health.

To qualify for the transparency badge, awardees must grant full visibility to all

are, and we need more providers to use the evidence-based badges to support purchasing decisions,” says Katie Dean, Business Operations and Transformation Leader at Stanford Health Care.

According to HIRC, the transparency badge is an important step toward greater transparency in healthcare, and transparency is a critical foundation to healthcare supply chain resiliency. This reality was reinforced by a recent survey of HIRC’s provider and supplier members. According to the findings:

- ▶ **88%** of suppliers agree that having the Transparency Badge will have a positive and meaningful impact on their customer’s perception of them.

When asked to select the 3 most important components to transparency, communications candor, risk awareness, criticality alignment, bi-directional data sharing, and upstream visibility rose to the top:

- ▶ Candor on potential supply chain disruptions (**73%**)
- ▶ Awareness to external risks to the upstream supply chain (**50%**)

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- ▶ Alignment on what are the critical products needing protection **(49%)**
- ▶ Bi-directional sharing to make demand v. capacity more accessible **(49%)**
- ▶ Visibility into my upstream supply chain **(48%)**

- ▶ Sharing of risk assessments to characterize preparedness **(29%)**

According to HIRC, the transparency badge process is simple to follow, standardized, and designed to empower

trusted relationships. HIRC notes that the badge itself is only a step—but one that it believes is an important milestone in enabling a collaborative approach to solving for supply chain resiliency. ■

Addendum: Industry Reactions

Commentary from the Healthcare Community Regarding the HIRC Transparency Partner Badge Awards

“This is an outstanding step forward in coming together as an industry to define what good looks like in supply chain transparency and resiliency.”

– Tom Harvieux, Chair of HIRC, and Chief Supply Chain Officer | BJC HealthCare

“Such an important development in building out the foundation of resiliency in healthcare. Suppliers who take on this responsibility are creating the trust needed for a safer supply environment.”

– Tom Lubotsky, VP of Supply Chain | Allina Health

“Such a major milestone in our industry! It’s important to see suppliers actively demonstrate their commitment to resiliency.”

– Regine Villain, SVP of Supply Chain & Chief Supply Chain Officer | Ochsner Health

“This is a monumental step towards reinforcing the partnership between the supplier and provider community in support of patient care.”

– Sree Duggineni, Executive Director of Supply Chain | City of Hope

“Congratulations to this inaugural cohort of HIRC Transparency Partner Badge recipients!”

– Molly Zmuda, VP of Spend Management Services & Delivery | Vizient, Inc.

Commentary from Supplier Awardees of the HIRC Transparency Partner Badge

B. Braun

“B. Braun has chosen to meet the HIRC Transparency Badge requirements as part of our supply chain transparency journey. HIRC and the SRS tool are an important component of our facility, warehouse and vendor transparency initiative which will allow our company and our customers to quickly assess and understand any potential impacts from disruptions across the globe. At B. Braun, providers are our purpose, and a secure supply chain ensures that they have the products they need to focus on what matters most – the patients they serve.”

– Jeremy H. How, Corporate Vice President Sales Operations | B. Braun

Cardinal Health

“Transparency is core to our manufacturer and customer engagement models. Cardinal Health chooses to meet the HIRC Transparency Badge requirements because it aligns to the collaborative relationships we have with providers in order to anticipate supply chain challenges and proactively provide solutions before there is an issue.”

– Robert Rajalingam, President, U.S. Medical Products and Distribution | Cardinal Health

“Cardinal Health has a core team that focuses on resiliency and transparency within our operating model and is committed to maturing based on customer and industry needs. We leverage data, collaborative discussions, and industry position to enhance our capabilities and exceed expectations.”

– Pete Bennett, SVP, Global Logistics | Cardinal Health

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Cook Medical

"The Transparency Badge is a great way to show our commitment to being a strong business partner. I'm pleased to say that Cook is recognized as a leader in this space, and this badge is another way to reinforce our obligation to the customers and patients we serve.

One thing we lack in our industry are standards. Health systems, suppliers, and distributors often follow their own rules with little consistency. HIRC has a real opportunity to create some of these standards with their growing membership. We need someone to take ownership and bring all stakeholders to the table to shape the future, and I believe that HIRC can do this and do it well."

– Ross Harvey, Vice President, Global Supply Chain | Cook Medical

Innovative Health

"At Innovative Health, we believe it is our obligation to give providers as much transparency into our supply capabilities as possible, in order to ensure that they never run out of supplies to treat their patients. We believe that supplier transparency and resilience will become absolutely critical in providers' vendor selection in the coming months, and as a technology leader, we need to promote and support this."

– Rick Ferreira, CEO | Innovative Health

Medtronic

"We are honored to be an inaugural recipient of the HIRC Transparency Partner Badge. This recognition is a direct reflection of the Medtronic Mission to alleviate pain, restore health, and extend life. Congratulations to all suppliers that have stepped forward to meet the HIRC challenge. We are creating a more resilient healthcare supply chain, together."

– Joe Robinson, Vice President, Enterprise Risk & Continuity | Medtronic

Philips

"The pandemic put the healthcare supply chain front and center for everyone and reminded us of the importance of transparency if we are to help health systems achieve their patient care goals in these challenging situations. The HIRC Transparency Badge is proof of our commitment to working with like-minded organizations like HIRC to develop standards and a secure collaboration platform that help us to deliver on our goal of improving lives."

– Jeff DiLullo, Market Leader North America | Philips

Sandoz

"Sandoz is proud to endorse and comply with HIRC's Transparency Badging program as we believe providing transparency and visibility into our supply chain is a core fundamental to establishing trust with our patients and providers. By complying with HIRC's transparency program, we believe the strength of our supply chain will be measured against a strong baseline that is understood by our customers and aligns with our mission to provide access to patients and be the most trusted supply chain in the industry."

– Kevin Cook, VP Supply Chain North America | Sandoz

Stryker

"Stryker has made significant investments and improvements to our supply chain planning and resiliency initiatives. We are passionate about being a constant for our customers and their patients. The HIRC Transparency Badge allows us to highlight the work we have done and the investments we have made while also improving communication and trust with our hospitals. I believe the spirit of transparency will open the dialogue between Stryker and our customers to better understand their needs and how we can best show up beside them."

– Kevin Steed, Vice-President/General Manager, Enterprise Account Management | Stryker

"Stryker continues to make investments and shift our approach with the goal of being an industry leader for product quality and availability. Our commitment is to focus on continued improvement while always keeping the patient in mind."

– Dale C. Pease, Vice-President, Division Operations, Medical, Global Quality and Operations | Stryker

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The Need for Automation in the Lab

Laboratories need to seek opportunities for stability and improvement across the continuum of care. While staffing levels have decreased, projections show that the demand for lab services and testing will increase by 13% between 2016 and 2026.

Labor continues to be one of the highest expenses in healthcare. Short-term costs have risen 37% between 2019 and 2022. There is currently not enough staff to cover throughput, which paints a grim picture for patient care since 70% of medical decisions depend on laboratory results.

Automation is an incredible resource that labs can utilize to increase productivity and the agility of any tests that need to be run. With automation, providers can reduce human error by simplifying and streamlining the workflow of the lab by using specimen tracking software, which will improve patient care. Implementing automation within your lab could allow your organization to move full-time technicians to higher value areas.

For the clinical side, Fisher Healthcare has several solutions that can improve laboratory processes. Products like barcoded Thermo Scientific Matrix screw top tubes can easily track specimens, while other solutions can load several protocols at the same time to improve efficiency.

From a non-clinical standpoint, eCommerce platforms can help with tracking orders, as well as viewing complementary and alternative products. Automated reports for backorders,



shipping notifications, savings opportunities, and standardization recommendations for improved operations save administrative time.

COFI Model Approach

Fisher Healthcare provides a consultative, COFI model approach that ensures a comprehensive view of the laboratory business from multiple perspectives:

- › **Clinical:** Improving turnaround time, quality and reliability of results are at the forefront for many laboratories. These metrics directly contribute to patient outcomes. Fisher Healthcare carries in-house expertise to review all areas of the lab; tapping into

an extensive network of industry knowledge to provide critical insight on workflow optimization or innovative technologies.

- › **Operational:** Fisher Healthcare has one of the most comprehensive portfolios in the marketplace. That enables laboratories to gain access to new products and complementary products when supply challenges occur. Identifying ordering efficiencies is also a way that laboratories can gain operational efficiencies.
- › **Financial:** Laboratories are looking for opportunities for both cost containment and revenue generation. Workflow improvements, standardization options, and contract maximization are ways laboratories can save money.
- › **Innovation:** Laboratories need automation solutions to keep pace with demands and better satisfaction and outcomes for patients. As the market leader, Fisher Healthcare has strong relationships with its supplier partners which enables conversations to take place to influence the development and manufacture of products laboratories need to combat challenges in today's ever-changing healthcare marketplace.

For more information on Fisher Healthcare's portfolio of lab products and services, visit fishersci.com. ■



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Increasing American Manufacturing in the Wake of COVID-19

Supply chain leaders discuss the merits of investing in U.S.-based manufacturing for providers.



In the constant search for ways to cut costs across the board, one of the biggest points of debate for IDNs and providers is the decision between domestic or international manufacturing for their supplies. The pandemic illuminated the need for increased manufacturing in the United States as the demand for PPE and other materials skyrocketed. Companies without any onshore manufacturing were much more likely to struggle with sourcing materials for their clients, but the labor and raw material costs make domestic manufacturing harder to maintain for others. Essentially, it comes down to the needs and goals of the company.

The Journal of Healthcare Contracting publisher John Pritchard recently sat down with several supply chain leaders to discuss the merits of investing in U.S.-based manufacturing for providers:

- ▶ **Rene Gurdian**, Assistant Vice President of Supply Chain Finance and Strategy at Ochsner Health
- ▶ **George Godfrey**, Chief Supply Chain Officer at Baptist Health South Florida
- ▶ **Bob Boswell**, President and CEO at LeeSar & Cooperative Service of Florida
- ▶ **John Wood**, CEO of Encompass

Changing sourcing strategies after COVID

Because of the pressures that COVID created for the healthcare supply chain, many organizations had to look for new sourcing strategies to improve supply chain assurance across the board. The biggest thing we learned from COVID is the lack of transparency and visibility around distribution and manufacturing, which led to the discovery of counterfeit products that did not meet the compliance standards required for their use in a healthcare setting. “We didn’t know where they were coming from. We didn’t know what types of challenges we were coming up against overseas,” Gurdian said.

At Ochsner, their Supply Chain leadership group has invested in several resiliency tools to better understand the bill of materials outside of the United States. This information provides their supply chain an improved transparent landscape that provides insight into the raw materials Ochsner is purchasing, which provides an opportunity to align long-term contingency plans on potential upcoming disruptions. Gurdian said, “At Ochsner, our overarching goal is to try to educate our team members, whether it’s a par technician or a contract analyst, that while [these individuals] are not at the bedside directly, we are five to six degrees separated and we can potentially impact patient experience as well in tandem with the clinical experience.”

Patient care is of course the top priority, and that starts in places like supply closets. With the labor challenges facing healthcare within the nursing community, Gurdian used the example of hard-working nurses that need to spend time taking care of their patients, but that time is limited when they cannot locate the right products in the right place due to disheveled supply closets. “At Ochsner, we pride ourselves on the format of PAR closets (supply closets) and products being in a place that nurses can quickly locate the product and return to the bedside to be with their patients.”

Godfrey’s team at Baptist Health is among the many that have struggled with item substitutions in the last few years. These companies that struggled with item substitutions faced prices that increased as high as 200% for out-of-contract transactions. When organizations like Baptist Health are tied up in a contract that cannot procure the items they need, they have to source the items on an off-contract basis.



“Historically, supply chains don’t have the reporting capabilities to understand the complexities in item substitutions,” Godfrey said. “We go through contract renewals; we have a process in place. We understand increases and decreases, but when it comes to item substitution and you are in the hand-to-hand combat of getting supplies for the patients, the tools and analysis are not robust.”

The application of technology can be tricky when it comes to the human element of your organization. Automating your processes and applications after COVID might seem like an obvious

choice to make, but it shouldn’t be at the expense of your team.

Godfrey said, “We look at technology not to replace people, but more to enable our people to do an outstanding job at what they are called to do. Whether it’s using technology for workload management or deploying supplies into one of the 1,100 supply cabinets we manage across 12 hospitals, we try to be innovative at everything we do. Additionally, if we are trying to drive success in certain areas, we are trying to measure success as we go along.”

Other organizations decided to improve their predictive analytics to improve

their sourcing processes. At LeeSar, Boswell said through predictive analytics, they were able to leverage material resource planning capacity. He said, “We started leveraging more technology and freeing up our sourcing specialists and buyers to focus more on back orders. We also generate a daily pulse report that is a byproduct of our IT system. With this pulse report, we know the status of all inventory locations, current backorder and auto-sub status, raw and adjusted fill rates.”

Changing manufacturing processes after COVID

Sourcing strategies are among many things that have changed in the wake of COVID-19. If American manufacturing is going to be a viable option for providers going forward, there are things that need to change to make it more available for providers.

One of the biggest challenges facing domestic manufacturing is finding the people to fill these jobs. Labor costs and operational costs are higher for domestic manufacturing, but these costs can be offset with improved quality standards and smaller shipping windows.

For Encompass, John Wood and his team are considering shifting their manufacturing processes to nearshore instead of onshore.

“We have manufacturing in the U.S., but we have a big focus on moving to nearshore,” Wood said. “The mission for Encompass is really focused on the fact that we believe every patient, resident, caregiver, and family member needs to feel safe and comfortable in the healthcare environment. Safety is the biggest part of that, and the way we can assist people is by creating innovative products that are reliably delivered and cost effective.”

Nearshore sourcing allows for improved shipping windows from offshore sourcing. Wood said that a facility in China would have to guess what customers need three months in advance, but a nearshore facility in Mexico could drastically reduce that window.

From Wood’s perspective, COVID has forced his team to be better at what they do. “The big problem through COVID was the difference in lag time in the cost system. On the manufacturing side, we were getting price increases six months before.”

Wood believes whatever challenges that providers face in supply chain are due to “something in the chain that shouldn’t be there,” not because the healthcare industry is erratic. He said, “It’s complicated, right? You’ve got distributors, manufacturers, providers, GPOs. It’s become quite a complex system. I would say we do a better job with our direct IDNs because we have salespeople who go out and help us implement programs.”

The future of American manufacturing

Are we prepared for another pandemic? Another supply chain gridlock? What happens if another significant disruption upsets the balance again? The answer is complicated, but introducing more American manufacturing could be the key to avoiding some of the challenges that came from the coronavirus pandemic.

Gurdian said, “I think what we’ve learned is that there was a lack of transparency and education between the sales side of the suppliers to the supply chain side of the suppliers. I can sell products all day, but that doesn’t mean that I know how it’s made or where it comes from. What I’ve requested from any of the vendors that we

talk to is to make sure that their team feels empowered to get some cross education with their peers in their organization within their organization’s supply chain department to really understand the products they are selling. It’s great to get a sale, but it’s not good if the product doesn’t show up.”

There’s of course a bit of give and take when it comes to engaging in domestic manufacturing. Onshoring manufacturing for healthcare companies will require higher labor and operational expenses, but it will also ensure the quality of the material and decrease shipping rates. Being able to visit the facilities for quality checks is a huge bonus for buyers, and it would have been a major advantage for healthcare organizations that were struggling with counterfeit products during the height of the pandemic. Ocean freight prices are astronomical, and it takes much longer for supplies to get in from an offshore source.

Another thing to consider for those looking to make a switch is the performance of their suppliers. Have you had difficulties in getting the supplies you needed? The quality of your supplier is a huge component to the success of your organization. “What we look at is supplier performance,” Godfrey said. “We are trying to move business away from the suppliers that do not manage their business very well.”

“At the end of the day, the most important thing is that patient care is not being compromised. Our first priority is to secure the supplies regardless of the source. In doing this there is a natural migration to the better performing and more consistent suppliers. Noble intentions are to support more domestic manufacturing and suppliers; the reality is that currently there are cost factors and limited supply in that space,” Boswell said. ■

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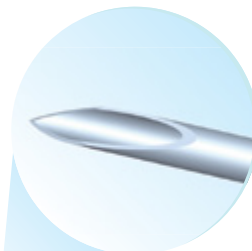


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IDN Solutions to the Nursing Shortage

Staff shortages throughout the medical profession have left health organizations scrambling for hiring and retention solutions.

Nurses are increasingly citing burnout, emotional and physical stress, and pandemic-related challenges in the workplace. These stressors have led many nurses to leave the profession for different jobs or careers.

So, how have individual health organizations addressed nursing shortages?

AdventHealth

In January 2023, Orlando, Florida-based AdventHealth allocated a grant provided by the State of Florida's Linking Industry to Nursing Education (LINE) Fund to support nursing students at AdventHealth University. The funding purchased new healthcare simulation equipment to ensure students feel confident and prepared to begin their careers.

"Increasing nursing student access to simulation education will help future nurses develop greater competence, confidence and critical thinking skills," said Julie Vincent, chief nursing executive at the AdventHealth Central Florida Division. "Simulations allow students to practice in a safe environment, learn from their mistakes, and receive immediate feedback from professors and supervisors."

The State of Florida predicts the shortfall of nurses to continue within the next decade. The grant funding aims to meet a critical need of the state through nuanced educational opportunities for students in the healthcare field and more nurses entering the career pipeline.

Kaiser Permanente

The solution to the nursing shortage won't be solved by "hiring alone," according to Anthony A. Barrueta, senior vice president, government relations, Kaiser Permanente. "To address the "40-70% burnout rate for healthcare workers and the 3.2 million healthcare workers needed to meet current and future demand, America must diversify its health workforce."

Kaiser Permanente provides clinical education opportunities that reduce financial barriers for students in healthcare, Barrueta wrote in a blog post. Kaiser offers financial assistance to students and current employees in the form of tuition waivers, scholarships, and career transition programs. These programs support underrepresented students and employees while diversifying the healthcare workforce. "For patients, having doctors and other clinicians who, through lived experience or learned cultural competence, share or understand their background is critical. For workers, a staff that appropriately reflects the community with which they identify can help address feelings of isolation, misunderstanding, and burnout."

Mercy

Missouri-based Mercy has relied in part on international nurses to address staff shortage issues in its healthcare system.

The IDN announced in March 2023 that 120 international nurses were working at Mercy South. Another 20 international nurses were working at Mercy Hospital Fort Smith in Arkansas, and the first international nurses had begun working at Mercy's other acute care hospitals across multiple states. They are internationally educated and have the licensing and permits to work in the U.S., according to Mercy. The international nursing program began at Mercy South in St. Louis in 2019 to address multi-decade nurse shortages. The program "greatly assisted" the hospital system during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic because there were adequate staff-to-patient ratios during peak virus transmission, according to a release.

New international nurses receive 12 weeks of orientation, educational opportunities, and admission to a fellowship program that supports the needs of each individual nurse.

Oklahoma ranks at the bottom of nurses per 100,000 patients; in the state there are about 700 nurses per 100,000 patients, which is about 450 less than the national average, according to the National Council of State Boards of Nursing and News 9 of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

SSM Health

Many hospitals and universities have begun to partner to provide collaborative, hands-on education programs for students. Oklahoma City University and SSM Health St. Anthony's have partnered to address healthcare staff shortages in Oklahoma. OCU students gain work experience at SSM Health St. Anthony's

while they are completing their nursing degree. In exchange for their work hours, students receive financial aid and scholarships to assist in funding their education.

Oklahoma ranks at the bottom of nurses per 100,000 patients; in the state there are about 700 nurses per 100,000 patients, which is about 450 less than the national average, according to the National Council of State Boards of Nursing and News 9 of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

The program connects students with a nursing mentor at the hospital to guide them through early career challenges. The goal of the program is to retain qualified nursing candidates within the state.

Franciscan Health

In Indianapolis, Franciscan Health and Ivy Tech School of Nursing are confronting the difficult transition from school to work life through an internship program. The transition from school

to the hospital, without support, often leads nurses to burnout or to seek other careers shortly after graduation.

The partnership program educates students in a hospital setting, so they are prepared and confident once they begin their career in nursing. Franciscan Health hopes to ease the transition to the workforce through partnerships with area schools.

Of the nurses who go through this program, a large percentage, “90-95%,” stay in Indiana, said Angie Koller, Dean of the School of Nursing, Ivy Tech in an interview with Fox 59 News.

Students in the program work in paid internship positions for 8 to 12 hours per week in the hospital. Students shadow one-on-one with a Franciscan Health nurse to learn and experience the many aspects of the career before graduation.

Avera Health

The Health Resources and Services Administration allocated \$2.5 million in funding to Avera Health in November 2022 in support of solutions for the healthcare industry staff shortages in South Dakota.

Cleveland Clinic hopes to change the narrative of the nursing shortage to a more positive, meaningful one, encouraging nurses to continue to pursue a very fulfilling, human-care focused career path.

“We are looking to novel ways to better support the professionals we have through technology, to maximize innovative solutions for caregivers to spend more time doing what led them to this profession—helping others, and reduce time spent doing administrative and regulatory tasks like documentation,” said Rachael Sherard, senior vice president for rural health at Avera Health, in a press release.

Avera Health has introduced two programs through HRSA funding. The first program supports a three-year Rural Public Health Workforce Training Network Program to prepare rural nurses

and ensure they are cross trained in skills including telehealth, documentation, health information technology, and virtual nursing. The second program is a Nurse Education, Practice, Quality and Retention Program (NEPQR) and a Registered Nurse Training Program (RNTP) that prepares BSNs and RNs for careers in rural hospitals.

South Dakota is a state particularly in need of nurse retention. These programs work with area hospitals such as Avera St. Luke’s Hospital in Aberdeen, South Dakota and Avera St. Mary’s Hospital in Pierre, South Dakota to provide education in cultural awareness, health equity, and literacy. The primary purpose of the programs is education and retention of nurses in the rural healthcare workforce, according to Avera Health.

Cleveland Clinic

Cleveland Clinic’s Dr. Lisa Baszynski, associate chief nursing officer, said in a podcast recently that reframing the nursing shortage narrative is the first step to addressing its challenges. The pandemic brought to light many decades-long issues within nursing, but also emphasized the care, resilience, and selflessness of individuals in the nursing profession.

Cleveland Clinic hopes to change the narrative of the nursing shortage to a more positive, meaningful one, encouraging nurses to continue to pursue a very fulfilling, human-care focused career path.

Cleveland Clinic has numerous education programs, such as the ASPIRE Nurse Scholars Program, that exposes young students to nursing as early as high school. The Cleveland Clinic also has extensive connections with universities and collaborative partnerships with deans, faculty and students to ensure a nursing pipeline into its healthcare positions.

For current employees, there are many professional development programs and opportunities for advancement throughout a career at Cleveland Clinic. Nurses in these programs are empowered to remain in the healthcare workforce.

El Camino Health

El Camino Health Hospitals in Mountain View and Los Gatos, California support individual nurse’s goals and careers through professional development and career transition programs. These programs allow for progression within a nursing career and help to retain nurses who are looking to advance in the profession.

The transition programs offered since 2020 include positions in the mother-baby unit, the critical care unit, cardiac/stroke telemetry, emergency department, labor and delivery, and operation room programs.

Providence

Providence expanded its caregiver education program in February 2022 across its Western U.S. hospital system to foster individual clinician growth and development in relation to the nursing shortage.

The expanded education program at Providence Health, in partnership with Guild, a professional development platform, will “enable nearly 100,000 healthcare workers and caregivers to

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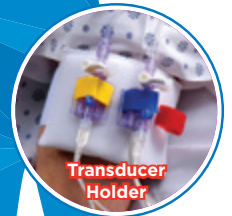
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obtain professional skills and experience,” according to Providence in a press release. These skills will further develop healthcare workers’ careers and build and retain the medical workforce for the future.

“At Providence, we believe the growth and development of our valued caregivers are key to our success,” said Darci Hall, Providence’s vice president of talent effectiveness and development. “Many have used our existing education offerings to excel in their careers with Providence. We’re excited our partnership with Guild will help us expand access to affordable education and enhance the experience to increase our caregivers’ success.”

The program’s goal is to increase nurse workplace satisfaction, empower healthcare professionals, and improve healthcare staff’s workplace preparedness. Healthcare organizations can prepare nurses for a variety of healthcare setting scenarios through the Nurse Residency educational program.

On their first day of employment, eligible full-time and part-time employees of Providence will have access to healthcare education courses, undergraduate and graduate degrees, professional certificates, and English language learning courses. These educational offerings from Providence are key to investing in the growth and development of its current workforce.

UPMC

In December 2021, UPMC Health introduced an in-house travel staffing agency to retain nurses in its workforce. The goal of the staffing agency is to rely less on

outside staff such as travel nurses; instead empowering UPMC employees to go where they are most needed across New York, Maryland, and Pennsylvania.

The program will be a retention tool for current staff and create a pipeline to bring new and qualified talent into the hospital system.

According to UPMC in a press release, “The advantages of this innovative program include competitive wages and excellent benefits that are unmatched by outside travel agencies, such as tuition assistance. The program also offers vast career growth opportunities and diverse clinical experience working and living

temporarily in communities across UPMC’s footprint. UPMC Travel Staffing will rotate nurses and surgical technologists to different facilities for six-week assignments.”

CommonSpirit Health collaborates on nurse residency program

Dignity Health Global Education (DHGE) introduced a Nurse Residency program in April of 2023 in partnership with CommonSpirit Health (CSH) across 21 U.S. states. Nurses are a critical part of health systems, and the goal of the educational program is to address

the high national rate of nurse turnover. The program aims to retain nurses in the healthcare workforce through empowerment and education.

In 2022, there was a 17% RN vacancy rate, with turnover for first year nurses at more than 31%, costing the U.S. an average of \$52,250 in the year alone, according to a release and the 2022 NSI National Healthcare Retention Report.

The DHGE retention initiative is an online, industry-relevant education program in partnership with CSH that enhances healthcare operational efficiency through higher education. The 12-month Nurse Residency program provides coursework and industry training tailored to each health organization’s specific needs.

The program will “increase RN retention by targeting 20% or higher, saving millions in hiring and retention costs for U.S. healthcare systems,” according to a release. The program’s goal is to increase nurse workplace satisfaction, empower healthcare professionals, and improve healthcare staff’s workplace preparedness. Healthcare organizations can prepare nurses for a variety of healthcare setting scenarios through the Nurse Residency educational program.

“The healthcare industry at-large is profoundly aware of the current critical state of the nursing workforce,” said Kurt Hayes, chief product officer, DHGE. “We all need to do whatever we can to help alleviate the severe shortages. DHGE is proud to offer this innovative Nurse Residency program which aims to make a significant impact in nurse retention while simultaneously lowering hiring and retention costs for system partners, saving hospitals millions of dollars, which will ultimately result in better patient outcomes.” ■

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