

Thought Leader Forum



Summary of Findings

The Role of Health Care Human Resources in
Quality and Patient Safety

Manchester Grand Hyatt San Diego
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AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR HEALTHCARE
HUMAN RESOURCES ADMINISTRATION
OF THE AMERICAN HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION

Founded in 1964, ASHHRA is the leading voice for HR professionals in health care - linking people and organizations to leadership practices, best practices to patient outcomes, and outcomes to business results. Headquartered in Chicago, IL, the society has more than 3,400 members and services the needs of over 50 chapters throughout the United States. For more information about ASHHRA, visit www.ashhra.org.

Vision

By joining together, by raising our skills and by speaking with one voice, we, as ASHHRA members will enhance the well-being of our employees, our health care organizations, and the communities we serve.

- ◆ **Our purpose:** To establish the expertise of health care HR through our ability to learn and share knowledge, build relationships, and exemplify excellence.
- ◆ **Our power:** To influence and impact the future of the health care workforce and those they serve.
- ◆ **Our promise:** To keep in our minds and hearts the passion and commitment we have for our profession.

Mission

ASHHRA leads the way for members to become more effective, valued, and credible leaders in health care human resources administration.

Guiding Principles

Collaboration * Service Excellence
Integrity * Innovation * Passion

Value Proposition

We offer high quality and effective resources, educational programs, and networking opportunities to human resources professionals in the health care industry.

Introduction

The American Society for Healthcare Human Resources (ASHHRA), a personal membership group of the American Hospital Association (AHA), held its first Thought Leader Forum on Thursday, July 24, 2008 in San Diego, prior to the 16th Annual Health Forum and AHA Leadership Summit.

Molly S. Seals, Sr. Vice President of HR & Learning, Catholic Health Partners Northeast Division/Humility of Mary Health Partners, and ASHHRA immediate past president, chaired the proceedings. The discussion was facilitated by Larry Walker, president of The Walker Company Healthcare Consulting.

A select group of thought leaders - AHA-member CEOs as well as health care quality and patient safety experts - participated in the first Forum, a two-hour session titled, "The Role of Health Care HR in Quality and Patient Safety." The CEOs in particular noted that human resources leaders in health care play a pivotal role in creating a culture of quality and patient safety.

"As HR leaders, we can strategically weave the message of quality and patient safety into all human resources deliverables, from recruitment and training to recognition and education," said ASHHRA President Jeanene Martin. "This is a great opportunity for ASHHRA to offer best practices and resources that help members strategically realize the kind of quality and patient safety-centered culture they desire."

The Thought Leader Forum *Summary of Findings* is a strategic overview of the significant role health care human resources professionals can have in creating a culture of quality and patient safety. Related resources from the Thought Leader Forum, such as the Forum *Discussion Transcript* and podcast can be found at www.ASHHRA.org.

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Summary of Findings

Generating ideas to drive change in the health care industry was the focus of the ASHHRA first Thought Leader Forum on The Role of Health Care Human Resources in Quality and Patient Safety.

Expert participants focused on HR's multi-faceted role during an energetic and fast-paced discussion in these areas:

- Identifying challenges in quality and patient safety advancement
- Expanding workforce engagement in improving quality and patient safety
- Engaging HR leaders as partners in quality and patient safety initiatives
- Driving communication that connects with every generation of worker
- Leading workforce development through change
- Building a passion for quality and safety performance at every level in the organization
- Putting HR metrics to work to drive strategic thinking and organizational development.

Also discussed was the transformational role HR will play in the nation's hospitals over the next two decades and beyond.

Identifying Challenges in Quality and Patient Safety Advancement

Panel members were in agreement: hospitals' greatest quality and patient safety challenges result from rapid changes that will remain a constant. Hospitals scramble to meet nationally directed core measures while simultaneously changing work processes (to meet core measure goals) and training employees on ways to successfully meet them.

These constant changes are hard on front line employees whose job is face-to-face patient care. HR executives are the go-to people not only for the work process re-design, but also for the training, measurement and reporting surrounding these changes. Finding ways to keep front line employees engaged in the commitment to quality and patient safety improvement is key.

Expanding Workforce Engagement in Improving Quality and Patient Safety

How do we create an engaged, committed workforce? How do we help employees understand their role in quality and patient safety initiatives?

Thought leaders agreed that employee engagement surveys can help define needed improvements and even highlight areas where training programs would be helpful. The Agency for Health Research and Quality (AHRQ) "Culture of Safety" Survey is mentioned as a good place to start. The goal is to heighten employee engagement in quality and patient safety initiatives and to increase employees' understanding of their importance and direct link to the success of these initiatives.

By increasing the ranks of highly engaged employees and reducing the number of those who are disengaged, improvement is seen across the board (not just in the areas of quality and patient safety), participants said.

Hospitals use various management techniques to empower their front line employees. From the AONE "Transforming Care at the Bedside" program to use of Lean Manufacturing and Six Sigma strategies, HR executives bring culture change that puts caregivers in the "expert" role. HR executives encourage their boards and senior management teams to empower front line employees to speak up when safety issues arise, to reward the catch of potential safety problems, to unleash staff ideas and creative problem solving in the areas of quality and patient safety. Thus a shift occurs from employee "satisfaction" to employee engagement, making each employee an integral part of the quality team.

This points to the importance of HR executives and managers being a permanent part of the senior management and planning teams, and exemplifies how HR executives directly impact the success of every hospital's quality and patient safety initiatives.

Engaging HR Leaders as Partners in Quality and Patient Safety Initiatives

What is HR's role on the hospital planning team? What does senior management gain by including HR executives as strategic leaders?

Senior management benefits from having HR on its executive team. As everyday hot button issues arise (not only in the areas of quality and patient safety, but also in the areas of cost, regulation, service challenges, etc.), HR is in the loop and can help both senior management and front line employees sort through and address needed improvements. HR helps create strategies based on the organization's core values and mission, then makes certain all education and communication surrounding these strategies is consistent and appropriate to each employee group.

HR is vital when planning quality and patient safety programs and initiatives because it will, ultimately, be responsible for identifying thought leaders in the organization who can lead

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change, build new programming with these thought leaders' expertise and ideas, then educate these thought leaders in the scope of the new initiative, asking them to, in turn, educate those with whom they work. HR is expected to help employees make the connection between initiatives and the work they do each day.

The forum participants stressed that HR is the ideal venue for anything involving a hospital's culture change, including the HR leadership, in driving understanding and internalization of the hospital culture.

HR's presence on the senior management team is vital in times of extreme change. HR is able to bring employee concerns and questions to the table in an immediate manner. It can both assure consistent communication and encourage collaboration between all work groups to achieve the goals of any new initiative.

Every process change involving quality and patient safety will involve some sort of training; HR executives know how to engage people at every level of the organization, and this engagement is key to the success of any new initiative.

HR leaders are often asked to be the "voice of reason" within the organization, being able to "speak truth" to senior management and ask the hard questions when there is disparity between what senior management wants and what employees believe to be reasonable, or the right way to pursue initiatives.

HR's role, then, can sometimes be that of a mediator. Ideas that flow from the senior management team must be implemented all the way through to the front line. Sometimes, good ideas may not be implementable at the front line level, or may be too cumbersome to successfully implement, and staff/management mediation may become necessary. By having a seat at the executive table, HR is more able to communicate to employees the purpose for the ideas and changes, and directly report back to senior management the difficulties or successes in implementation.

Communicating with different age groups within the organization can be a challenge. HR executives are experts in communicating with all age groups in ways appropriate to and accepted by each group.

Driving Communication that Connects with Every Generation of Worker

How can HR best drive communication about quality and patient safety throughout the organization? How do we address generational differences in communication?

The thought leaders discussed their organizations' newest communication modes, and HR's role in helping target each age group with the appropriate communication method.

Ideas discussed by the thought leaders included podcasts, blogs from the CEO that encourage employees to ask questions and provide ideas, short issue-oriented newsletters, video casts,

employee feedback mechanisms, e-mail newsgroups, and making regular, focused rounds to each department. Because HR feels the "pulse" of the employees, it has a unique opportunity to be the driver of innovative communication methods.

The participants agreed that it is important for employees to have several types of communication from which to choose, and that HR is the natural catalyst for these communications. HR is able to adapt the needed message to the appropriate work, or age group, and to determine the success of the communication in achieving the desired objectives.

Leading Workforce Development through Change

What does HR bring to the table in times of dramatic change?

The thought leaders agreed that HR's significant role is that of a training and communication hub. Its role of assuring engagement at all levels of the organization is also key. Important are its ability to strategize, to get to the broader questions so that needs at each level of the organization are heard and addressed, and to encourage understanding across all operational areas so that every group is pulling toward the same goal.

Especially in the areas of quality and patient safety, HR is uniquely poised to be in touch with and responsive to every level of the organization at all times.

Building a Passion for Quality and Safety Performance at Every Level in the Organization

How do we engage people in the areas of quality and patient safety? How do we get them to feel personally involved in the organization's quality and patient safety goals?

The thought leaders shared several "best practices," including initiation of a Patient Safety Council made up of employees at all levels of the organization; the empowerment of each employee to speak up when they see potential problems or think of creative solutions; and the rewarding and recognition of those employees who help the organization achieve its quality and patient safety goals.

Thought leaders stressed that HR plays a major role in creating a "blameless culture" so that the workforce can report errors without fear of reprimand. HR is vital to the CEO's access to data and information, and stimulus of the organizational will to nurture and emphasize a "no blame" culture.

Recounting stories of actual patients, events and near misses, the participants said, best accomplishes the teaching and internalization of the importance of quality and patient safety. If an organization is quite small, and describing on-site cases could compromise patient anonymity, another hospital's experiences could be recounted.

Hospital governing boards are becoming more engaged with quality issues and performance, and the HR executive is key to providing the board with pertinent information, as well as the “stories” that make quality and patient safety personal, passionate, engaging, and actionable.

Putting HR Metrics to Work to Drive Strategic Thinking and Organizational Development

What tools can help us define and measure the organization’s commitment to quality and patient safety?

The use of organization-wide and departmental “balanced scorecards” was emphasized as especially important in the areas of quality and patient safety. HR is key to the development and successful use of these performance measurement tools. They are key also in the communication about how well departments and services are performing in relation to the organization’s goals.

Engaging employees in the thought processes behind quality and patient safety also helps encourage strategic thinking throughout the organization. Organization-wide tools and events highlight ideas for achieving (and commitment to maintaining) quality and patient safety. Highlighted were:

- Patient Safety Week events, where peers could display departmental innovations and learn from one another
- Recognition programs such as “Great Catch!,” designed to tell the story of everyday employees seeing on-the-job problems and correcting them before a catastrophic event occurs
- Quality Month, where employees display and present their ideas to peers and management, and where innovative employees are followed throughout the year by senior managers who continually seek their ideas and input for ways to help achieve the organization’s goals.

Some organizations require new hires to sign “compacts” indicating their support and intent to become engaged in the organization’s quality and patient safety initiatives. In addition, some organizations require each employee to sign compact revisions as they are unveiled. Compacts are seen as a tool that can move the organization toward greater personal commitment to quality and patient safety goals.

HR’s ability to produce detailed employment reports can help senior management identify potential problems in the areas of quality and patient safety. Connecting the dots between double or even triple shifts and patient safety errors can allow a hospital to set new boundaries on work hours. HR can set the stage by providing information, avenues for dialogue, and means for employee education and idea sharing.

HR keeps track of employee safety, and can help an organization create a culture of total safety, not just patient safety. HR should work with senior management to determine lapses in safety and conduct root cause analyses when appropriate. The results can lead to new training and education modules.

No matter which tools are utilized, HR’s main contribution is in continually reinforcing to senior management and the board of trustees that the organization’s greatest asset for success lies in its people.

Future Role for HR Executives

- It was agreed that in the coming decades HR would continue to have responsibility for assessment of the organization’s employees, for performance management, and for employee recognition and reward programs.
- Consistent communication to and with all levels of the organization will, more and more, become a function of HR.
- Retention is and will be an ongoing focus. It was stressed that employees stay with an organization if they are engaged both with management and with their peers. HR’s role is to help develop the tight linkages that encourage retention.
- Addressing the issue of utilizing the hospital’s workforce to its best advantage will be key. Some hospitals focus on workforce shortages. The proper focus should be on correcting inefficiencies and transforming the work environment to allow employees to do their jobs most effectively. HR is the main player in this effort.
- HR’s role in encouraging more collaboration between departmental work groups and professional groups (i.e. nurses and physicians) is, and will be, ongoing.
- The panel expressed the opinion that in the future, power will shift more toward employees, due to predicted continual workforce shortages. Collaboration with employees will be vital; HR is uniquely positioned and skilled to build these collaborations.

Conclusion

Today’s HR leaders are catalysts in creating a culture of engagement. They develop programs, services and education to support new competencies. They are senior management’s greatest resource for building value in health care, and assuring that employees have the communication resources and tools they need to deliver superior quality and patient safety.

In the future, they will be increasingly looked to as “transformation agents” in the continual quest for quality and patient safety improvement.

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Thought Leader Action Ideas

for Maximizing the Role of Health Care Human Resources in Improving Health Care Quality and Patient Safety

Engagement and Recognition

- Stimulate and nurture a “culture of engagement” that connects all employees to their critical role in improving quality and patient safety.
- Lead initiatives that tap the wealth of employee ideas for ways to improve quality and patient safety.
- Shift organizational emphasis from a focus on employee satisfaction to a commitment to employee engagement.
- Ensure that every employee has a sense of ownership in and commitment to the hospital’s most critical quality and safety priorities.
- Facilitate the development of quality and safety champions at every level in the organization.
- Develop innovative reward and recognition programs that highlight individual and collective efforts to improve quality and patient safety.

Communication

- Work with senior leadership to develop communication strategies that ensure consistency in quality and patient safety messaging throughout the organization.
- Create processes for collecting and sharing quality and patient safety stories across the organization, creating new learning and approaches to quality and patient safety improvement.

Work Transformation and Skills Development

- Set the organizational agenda for improving employee competency and commitment, with a direct connection to achieving quality and patient safety objectives.
- Lead efforts to streamline internal processes that improve quality and patient safety.
- Direct and lead organization-wide employee training connected to quality and patient safety initiatives and expectations.

- Lead the development of new employee orientation programs that focus on each individual’s role and accountabilities in improving quality and patient safety.

Culture, Motivation and Commitment

- Provide leadership to ensure that workers of every generation embrace the organization’s commitment to quality and patient safety.
- Drive the expectation of individual responsibility and empowerment in quality and patient safety.
- Nurture a “no blame” culture that encourages and expects all employees to speak up forcefully when quality and patient safety is at risk.
- Provide leadership in developing avenues for employees and departments to “showcase” their innovative ideas and initiatives for improving quality and patient safety.

Strategic Leadership

- Be a catalyst for developing innovative new ways to maximize workforce performance.
- Ensure that human resources leaders are actively involved as leaders in quality and patient safety councils and committees.
- Be the organization’s leading advocate for improvements in quality and patient safety processes that affect employees in their work.
- Be forceful and courageous in standing up for the organizational changes necessary to ensure improvements in quality and patient safety.
- Be the conscience of the organization, the voice of reason, and an advocate for employees in their efforts to improve quality and patient safety.
- Ensure that meaningful human resources metrics are included in the organization’s performance measurement reporting.



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