Chapter 81
Expanding the Boundaries of Healthcare Human Resources Planning

Christopher L. Pate
St. Philip's College, USA

Nancy A. Leahy
St. Philip's College, USA

Leonard Leos
St. Philip's College, USA

ABSTRACT

Human resources are central to healthcare services, yet leveraging these resources to meet strategic operations and operational outcomes can present challenges to leaders and human resources professionals because of the complex and dynamic nature of healthcare delivery. Although the traditional roles of human resources management are necessary in supporting an organization in meeting its goals, economic, strategic, and cultural considerations are becoming increasingly important to human resources management and workforce planning in healthcare settings. This chapter presents several features of these different lenses to assist human resources managers in developing a holistic view of human resources planning in health care.

INTRODUCTION

"Healthcare is transitioning from a stable, comfortable, and complacent past to a confusing present and unpredictable future" (Begun & Heatwole, 1999, p. 342).

Although this statement was made ten years ago it is reflective of the healthcare industry of the 21st century. Today, change is not occurring in small incremental steps, but in quantum leaps. The delivery of health care, reimbursement, technology, quality measurements, malpractice claims and awards have led to dramatic and fundamental changes within the healthcare industry over the past two decades. Coupled with the shortage of

healthcare professionals, an aging population, a large workforce on the brink of retirement, the rise in consumerism, and an increase in the uninsured in some countries due to rising unemployment, these changes underscore the importance that human resources professionals must place on development of their strategic capabilities. These changes also underscore the importance of the difficulties faced by organizations as they strive to achieve optimum performance in healthcare human resources planning (HHRP).

The World Health Organization (2006) reports that there are over 59 million healthcare workers worldwide, yet this supply of workers remains insufficient to address the healthcare needs of the global population. With nearly 4 million more healthcare workers required to meet the demand for health services (World Health Organization, 2007), the global economy is experiencing the effect of a shortage. Although the gap between the supply and demand of healthcare workers is most pressing in the world's underdeveloped and most challenged nations - those lacking a robust infrastructure, a stable financial system, or impoverished by war - industrialized nations also face substantial challenges in meeting the healthcare needs of their populations because of existing or pending imbalances and shortages in the healthcare workforce. For example, it is predicted that the United States will be short of nearly 200,000 physicians over the next decade (Helwick, 2007; Phillips, Dodoo, & Green, 2005) and will lack up to 260,000 registered nurses by 2025 (Buerhaus, as cited in American Association of Colleges in Nursing, 2009). Canada has reported a pending shortage of 78,000 nurses by 2011 (Biddiscombe, 2009) and 6,000 physicians by 2010 (Kondro, 2007). Pacific and Asian nations, such as New Zealand, Australia, and others in the region are also reporting substantial shortages (Henderson & Tulloch, 2008).

As organizations, hospitals, communities, states, and nations search for solutions to address workforce shortages and other workforce-related outcomes, these entities must consider the linkages between healthcare human resources planning (HHRP), human resources management (HRM), and other fields of study that support the development of practical and workable solutions. Certain fields of study, such as strategic management and economics, have direct relevance to HHRP because they provide direction for planning and methodologies to inform the decision-making process. The concepts and ideas found within these disciplines can provide HR professionals with a set of tools and methods to successfully integrate and extend the traditional tools of HRM in healthcare settings.

Extending HRM in healthcare settings also requires an awareness of the unique role that culture plays in determining the healthcare needs of a particular population. Cultural considerations drive the type and quantities of care demanded by a population, which in turn influences the types and quantities of healthcare providers needed to support a particular population. To the extent that the quality of the interaction between the patient and provider depends upon cultural aspects of both parties, cultural aspects of the healthcare encounter are key considerations in developing HR strategies for the healthcare workplace: HHRP must recognize that the effectiveness of any healthcare encounter will be influenced by the cultural beliefs, perceptions, and values of both patient and provider. Cultural considerations present unique challenges to the HR professional, particularly in determining how best to create a workforce that aligns and recognizes the ways in which culture influences healthcare outcomes.

Determining the correct quantities and types of healthcare workers needed to provide effective healthcare services for a particular population will require HR professionals to look beyond the traditional functions associated with human resources management. Healthcare human resources planners who explicitly incorporate basic economic relationships, organizational strategies, and cultural considerations have the potential to

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