



## Diagnosing Clinical Talent

Ken Lahti, Ph.D. - Director of Product Strategy & Development, PreVisor

***Effective health care is all about the patients. To ensure the best care possible, talent leaders can leverage talent management processes to identify and develop skills and maintain employee engagement in a clinical setting.***

There is a lot going on in health care right now. Medicine is transforming, with innumerable innovations and an ever-deepening understanding of human health and biology. Care delivery systems are evolving to reach more people, including remote and undertreated populations. Also, practices are improving based on management and behavioral sciences, along with new technologies. Amid all the action - and all the opinions - there is one thing everyone agrees on: At the end of the day, it's all about patients. Quality care for people who seek it is the goal, and talent leaders can help. However, it is not HR's role to change the financials of our health care system, at least not directly. The contribution of talent management professionals who specialize in staffing, developing or managing the people assets of organizations is to improve care through the employees who deliver it. In short, better-equipped people equal better care. Through effective talent management, we can help identify who is most likely to be successful in particular health care roles, and we can help employees maximize their success from day one and throughout their careers.

### Spending the Dollars

Although we cannot fix everything about the health care system, effective talent management programs can help to create more productive health care organizations. These organizations will make better decisions based on valid information about their people - who to hire, who to promote, who needs what training to increase performance - will spend their HR dollars more wisely, and will generate a significant return on investment from improved performance, retention and employee engagement processes.

In health care, the quality of patient care directly impacts an organization's bottom line. Today, patients have easy access to more information than ever before about their health care options, including online reviews of quality of care. These reviews ensure we can all make more informed choices as health care consumers, based not only on our own experiences, but on a provider's reputation and quality ratings.

Perhaps with this in mind, the federal government instituted a program of incentives tied to formal patient satisfaction surveys. The

HCAHPS (Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems) is a nationally standardized survey that enables valid comparisons of patients' perceptions of care across hospitals. The government even publishes the survey results for the public, comparing thousands of health care organizations in a searchable database ([www.hospitalcompare.hhs.gov](http://www.hospitalcompare.hhs.gov)). With this easy flow of readily available information, it's not surprising that patients are voting with their wallets.

### People, Patients and Personality

Employees of health care organizations are key drivers of the patient care experience. Recent health care experiences and how someone is treated by staff - from the physicians and nurses to the technicians and medical billers - play as big a role in the overall experience as the exam or the treatment. This criticality of front-line health care employees in the patient care equation means there is a huge opportunity for talent management practices to act as levers - important tools with which to improve patient care.

What does good care look like? Likely, we all have our own definitions. However, they probably touch on similar themes: patients are treated with dignity, respect and empathy; they receive accurate information and instructions; their concerns are listened to and their questions answered; and, of course, they are given the right treatment and care for their situation. In fact, if we look at the federal government's HCAHPS survey, which was created to serve as the national standard and benchmarking tool for patient care, we find these and related themes addressed. HCAHPS uses some two dozen core questions to measure:

- How well nurses and doctors communicate with patients.
- How responsive hospital staff are to patients' needs.
- How well hospital staff help patients manage pain.
- How well the staff communicates with patients about medicine.
- Whether key information was provided at discharge.

The survey also addresses the cleanliness and quietness of patients' rooms, as well as provides an overall rating of the hospital and whether patients would recommend the hospital to family and friends.

Communication, responsiveness, pain management and room cleanliness are just the tip of the proverbial ice-berg. There are many other factors that impact quality patient care than whether the care provider has the necessary skills and experience. In other words, the health care provider's technical expertise is important and necessary,

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but it's just one element of patient care satisfaction. Knowledge, skills and the professional judgment a care provider has developed through training and clinical experience clearly impact quality of care.

Further, there is another consideration — how effectively employees relate to people, genuinely listen to them and show that they are respected and their needs matter. This aspect of patient care is not just about expertise; it is about a patient care provider's personality or character. Call it bedside manner or plain old customer service, but soft skills matter to patients.

## Talent Management and the Health Care Opportunity

Because patients' health care experiences are driven primarily by the employees with whom they interact, we have an opportunity as talent leaders to improve patient care through more effective talent management that encompasses three things: efficient processes, science-based people measurement and a winning game plan.

1. Talent administration: Effective use of communication technologies and automation can dramatically improve the efficiency of talent management processes. For example, the use of online recruiting tools can help talent managers reach a wider yet more targeted audience and can accelerate the application and evaluation process.
2. Talent measurement: Scientific assessment tools can be used to measure the competencies and skills of candidates and employees alike to produce objective, credible and meaningful decision-support information. For example, the use of employment tests, structured behavioral interviews, simulations and multi-source performance measures such as 360s all can produce valid and objective competency information regarding people's readiness and potential for success in particular roles or in particular organizations. Valid assessment tools can be used not only in hiring and promotion decisions, but also to inform and guide employee development by highlighting key competencies that are strengths or opportunity areas, or by periodically assessing current skills, knowledge of policies and practices or even professional standards.
3. Talent strategy: For long-term success and organizational survival, talent management processes should be aligned and integrated with the overall business strategy. The challenges an organization faces based on its services, market position, competitors and customers all create specific demands regarding people resources. To respond to those demands, we need to be able to combine workforce analytics and a deep understanding of the organization's business strategy and operational climate to project the talent implications of anticipated business changes. An effective talent strategy informed by workforce analytics can drive changes in recruiting practices and inform talent redeployment programs related to organizational changes and growth.

When talent leaders combine efficient technology-driven talent processes such as recruiting, staffing and performance management

with valid decision-support systems such as pre-employment assessment, promotional assessments, structured performance evaluations and a strategy that ties these processes directly to their organizations' goals and objectives, they are doing talent management right. And if we do talent management right in health care organizations, we can improve the lives and care experiences of millions of patients using our most important asset: our people.


### In Practice: Hiring for Great Patient Care

How might one describe the ideal health care provider? That person would probably be an expert in his or her field. In addition to that expertise, whether it's nursing, phlebotomy, brain scans or claims and billing, patients likely want this ideal provider to be someone who:

- Seems genuinely motivated to help see them through whatever it is they're currently experiencing.
- Listens carefully and is considerate and empathic toward their situation.
- Stays calm under pressure and adapts as the situation demands.
- Communicates effectively, providing timely information and instructions regarding medication and treatment or recommendations and policies.
- Pays close, careful attention to details. It is estimated that more than 1.5 million preventable medical errors happen each year.

Each of these characteristics describes the care provider's personality. There are eight distinct personality factors that can be clearly linked to patient care: communication, helpfulness, motivation, composure, responsibility, accuracy, assertiveness and adaptability. All of these competencies, along with other job-related knowledge, skills and abilities, can be measured through Internet-based assessment tools that integrate seamlessly into hiring practices. Candidates who score higher on job-related competencies are more likely to be successful on the job and can be prioritized in the recruiting process.

Talent management also can help health care providers that want to improve care while controlling costs. Using technology to create process efficiency and assessments to get the right people in the right positions at the right time, thereby reducing turnover costs, are just a couple of ways this might play out.

We can improve patient care through more effective talent management by bringing the right people into our organizations to work with patients and by helping those people grow and stay knowledgeable and engaged. 

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## At Children's Healthcare of Atlanta, It's All About People

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Achieving national recognition is not by accident or luck. Sarah Evans, Ph.D., assessment and organizational development consultant for not-for-profit Children's Healthcare of Atlanta, said it requires that an organization focus on its own workforce and the impact employees have on the patients and families they serve.

"The efforts put into talent management - strategic planning, measurement and development - are connected and purposefully driven," Evans explained. "The results of our human capital initiatives are shown in survey results, low staff turnover and, in some cases, accolades."

Children's was named one of Fortune's Top 100 Best Companies to Work For in 2009, and it was ranked No. 8 in Top 10 Companies in Atlanta this year by the Atlanta Business Journal. The organization also made the Top 10 list five years running for Leading Pediatric Hospitals in the nation according to U.S. News and World Report.

These kudos did not come easily, however. The organization is one of the fastest growing pediatric health care institutions in the nation, having experienced significant expansion during the past decade, with even more growth projected for the next 10 years. Maintaining excellence isn't easy.

Human resources, working with the executive team, recognized that to continue delivering on its promise of excellent care, one of the first priorities was to identify employees who were ready to step into leadership roles today. HR also determined they needed to add more individuals to the pipe-line. These individuals should not only guide the business, they should be able to lead and develop people who will continue to deliver the high-quality care Children's promises.

The first step in the leadership assessment and identification

project was to align an existing leadership competency model to the current business strategy and organizational needs. The competency model was refined using a rigorous process that included interviewing current leaders to find out which competencies were effective and any areas where gaps existed.

The next phase was a review of internal assessment processes against the new leadership competencies, to ensure measurement of leader performance was consistent with the expectations at Children's. The work was completed within a conservative budget and showed Evans' team that it needed to select assessments that delivered the most value quickly.

"We used a multifaceted approach to gather data, including a new 360-degree feedback tool linked to our leadership competencies. We also captured performance information and leveraged self-report tools to measure facets such as personality. The value of this approach was that we integrated the information to provide feedback to the leaders who were assessed as well as their managers," Evans explained. "The comprehensive, objective data helped to set the stage for a powerful development opportunity between the leader and boss. The goal was for this data to drive a more open, honest dialogue and result in a rigorous development plan and outcome for each leader."

Children's leadership competencies are also being used for talent and succession planning. As a result of this HR initiative, the team at Children's Healthcare of Atlanta expects to identify a pool of ready leaders, minimize the time to fill internal positions and fill important succession plan gaps.

"Our culture is strong and specifically geared to deliver excellence in care to patients and their families — we have a very familial work environment. It's preferable for our leaders to come from internal hires, and to stay here. Strong leaders who value people as much as operational excellence [are] core to our success," said Children's Chief Learning Officer Larry Mohl.

Talent management can indeed impact quality of care. **TH**