

Top 10 Workforce Trends for 2010

by Bonnie Barndt-Maglio, Ph.D., RN and ChrysMarie Suby, MS, ANP, RN of Labor Management Institute

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Healthcare reform and continuing economic challenges will impact the healthcare workforce in 2010. Demand will continue to rise, particularly for primary care providers, and the supply will be found in the unexpected source of mature workers postponing retirement. The work environment will need to become more healthful – with younger workers focused on self care and older workers requiring a workplace that accommodates their physical needs (e.g., shorter shifts, less consecutive days scheduled together, equipment for moving heavier patients). These and other workforce trends, drawn from the combined experience of The Camden Group and Labor Management Institute are detailed below.

1. Demand for front line care providers, such as registered nurses, nurse practitioners, and primary care physicians, will continue to rise due to the expected outcome of healthcare reform, which will give millions of previously uninsured Americans access to healthcare and shift the focus of care from an episodic and critical care basis to care across the continuum. The current supply of nurses will not meet the demand and gaps in service that will be prevalent.
2. Nursing and other healthcare professionals will remain in the workforce longer due to the economic downturn over the past two years. Retention of skills, knowledge, and experience will benefit patients, but will also necessitate accommodations such as scheduling shorter work shifts, increasing part-time staff, and increasing the need for assistive equipment and devices.
3. Nursing will continue to attract “late entrants” into the profession. However, this potential workforce will be hampered by the inadequate numbers of nursing instructors, which has been intensified by the current economic state.
4. Expect an increase in the demand for healthy work environments – one that includes scheduling balance, shorter shifts or other flexible scheduling options, adequate time off between work shifts, involvement of the workforce in decision-making, and better balance of efficiency, quality, and productivity.
5. As the attention to quality and cost increases, evidence-based staffing methods will continue to be refined. Under these methods, staff mix and numbers will be determined by such outcomes as length-of-stay, patient satisfaction, safety, and infection rates.
6. Collaboration among healthcare professionals will increase in order to achieve the outcomes and efficiencies necessary to improve throughput, reduce length-of-stay, and decrease hospital readmission. Physicians, pharmacists, nurses, case managers, administrators, and others will need to develop plans to progress patients along the continuum of care and quickly address those patients with more complex medical needs.

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7. Electronic health records will initially increase demands on the healthcare workforce as development and implementation occurs. Developing the work processes that will make the best use of the new technology will require careful monitoring to anticipate and minimize the decline in productivity that often occurs during the first two years of implementation as charting time increases among all healthcare workers across the continuum.
8. The continued emphasis on reducing length-of-stay will drive a demand to increase the hospitalist workforce in order to provide timely intervention and discharges.
9. Greater integration of providers will serve to consolidate and standardized practice approaches to achieve lower cost and higher quality outcomes. Through this process, healthcare workers will be required to continually rethink care methods to develop new and innovative approaches.
10. Increased monitoring, reporting, and surveillance of cost and quality will provide the healthcare workforce with an ongoing “report card”– and inspire improved practice. However, information technology and decision support services will need to produce data on a real time basis in order to potentiate meaningful change.

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