
FMCNA Responding to Critical Nursing Shortage

Programs address retention, career paths, recruiting, joint venture

It's no secret that our company is facing a severe shortage of skilled nurses and technicians. "But this situation goes way beyond FMC," says Claire Callahan, FMCNA's vice president for human resources and organizational development. "It's a worldwide problem that's going to be around for the next ten or twenty years. Health care organizations everywhere will have to cope with it." And FMCNA is aggressively coping with it on several fronts.

The nursing shortage didn't just spring up overnight; it has been a growing concern for many years. In 2004, the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations published a 47-page white paper, a call to action entitled *Healthcare at the Crossroads: Strategies for Addressing the Evolving Nursing Crisis*. The document basically revolved around this sobering statement in the introduction: "The impending crisis in nurse staffing has the potential to impact the very health and security of our society if definitive steps are not taken to address its underlying causes."

What's causing the shortage?

What are these underlying causes? First of all, women—who comprise approximately 98 percent of the nurse population—today have far more career options than in the past; many therefore choose not to go into traditional fields such as nursing. And with the average age of nurses today approaching 50, the younger generation will not be able to supply the numbers needed for a basic one-

to-one replacement.

Unfortunately, even a mere one-to-one replacement just won't be anywhere near enough to stem the tide. As the massive baby-boomer generation ages, growing numbers of the elderly will require increasingly sophisticated health care. The Joint Commission report states, "Given this anticipated demand for health care services, it is estimated that by 2020, there will be at least 400,000 fewer nurses available to provide care than will be needed."

Fully aware of this prediction and others equally bleak, FMCNA is responding proactively to address the nursing shortage with programs covering a variety of staffing issues. "We have a number of irons in the fire," Claire comments. "And although they're in the early stages, they do seem to be paying off already."

Helping managers increase retention

We care about our 7,000 nurses, value their service, and want to maintain as high a retention rate as possible. In practical terms, nurse staffing turnover is a costly proposition because of the training needed to bring new hires up to speed. That's why our managers need to be constantly aware of the importance of retaining their nurses and the steps they can take to ensure a good retention rate. Accordingly, all current managers are being made aware of the steps they can take to increase retention, and training programs for new managers now place increased emphasis on this critical aspect of their job.

Helping employees build careers

It's not surprising that higher job satisfaction translates into a better retention rate for our company. Reviewing the responses to our recent Employee Engagement Survey, we found that nurses frequently requested more help in developing their careers. As a result, we've begun a program to develop career ladders for nurses and plan to extend it to PCTs as well.

Streamlining the recruitment process

Over the years, we have had to rely almost exclusively on external staffing agencies to enhance our workforce. Now we have established the Vendor Management Service, which consolidates all of our third-party agencies under a single umbrella. This service will help us maintain a consistent recruiting process and negotiate better rates for the talented, experienced nurses we look for. We've also launched our own internal agency, which will reduce recruiting costs and enable us to train new hires in the FMCNA philosophies, especially those relating to patient care.

Partnering with FMC Asia Pacific

Our efforts to address the nursing shortage even extend halfway around the globe. We recently entered into a joint venture with FMC Asia Pacific, establishing the Fresenius Institute for Dialysis Nurses in the Philippines. The idea is that upon completing their training at the institute, many of the newly minted nurses will want to come to the U.S. for further training and then full-time employment. While they're in this country, they'll also have the opportunity to send money to their

families back home. The first training class began in December and the second in April.

Our partnership with FMC Asia Pacific opens up a spectrum of exciting opportunities. It extends welcome assistance to that organization in growing their business; the new graduates are provided with training and a start to their careers; FMCNA reaps the benefits of an expanded and well-trained workforce. In short, it's clearly a win-win situation for everyone involved in the program.

Claire Callahan is understandably optimistic when she looks at the potential benefits of these new programs. "We're confident that the steps we're taking will eventually pay off in higher retention, greater job satisfaction, and a more efficient recruiting process," she concludes.

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