Three ways to implement patient-centered workforce management

Salaries, wages, and benefits account for 55% of all operating expenses in hospitals, reports **Becker's Hospital Review**. While labor accounts for your biggest expense; it's also your most valuable asset. To strike a balance between lowering your costs and optimizing outcomes, you may have turned to expensive analytics and other systems to provide needed insights to compete in today's changing environment. Did you still come up short? It's time to transform workforce management from a short-term guessing game to a long-term, patient-centered strategy.

Here are three ways to implement patient-centered workforce management to optimize labor, efficiencies, and outcomes.

1

Move from tactics to strategy

Healthcare's frontline managers are tasked with making labor decisions that ensure the right caregivers are assigned to the right patients, while also being held accountable for cost controls. But what's lacking behind those decisions is true business intelligence and a deep and meaningful view into the root causes of labor cost drivers.

Healthcare senior managers often list off their workforce management strategy as a series of tactical interventions, such as overtime variance justifications, collecting time punches, paying employees, scheduling and staffing, and reporting. According to **a study by the Massachusetts Hospital Association** called "Changing the Conversation: Accelerating Workforce Transformation in Healthcare," however, to be viable and sustainable in the changing healthcare market, this tactical approach has to change. The study states that leaders and workers need to shift from rigid, task orientation to a flexible approach that focuses on the patient experience. That means you need talent management and human capital management strategies to identify and deploy caregivers based on their skills and experience.

2

Focus on compliance

Compliance—or lack of it—is one of the most significant factors in gathering and understanding workforce data. Organizations assume adherence exists for standard procedures, such as punch-in/punch-out by managers or scheduling coordinators. These coordinators may also assume their software is acting as their compliance watchdog. Yet, costly lack of compliance occurs under a few scenarios. First, it is common to find a department manager who states that he or she doesn't have overtime in his or her department, yet that manager is deleting overtime from the time card and converting it to regular pay. Or, the time and attendance system is not calculating time based on the policy because during initial implementation of the time system, department pay practices were not corrected and the system was configured based on previous practices. Another common point of noncompliance occurs when new policies are implemented but the time system isn't updated accordingly.

Suddenly, an organization finds itself being fined for a wage-and-hour or safety violation, and urgent attention is focused on gaps. A patient centered system, on the other hand, helps avoid these financial risks by integrating time and attendance, scheduling and care workloads, and compliance reports into the workforce management system.

3

Scrap traditional reports

Healthcare providers have long relied on backward-looking reports to make some of their most important staffing decisions and projections, including identifying who is working, if there are open shifts, work availability, and cost implications of staffing decisions. Aside from needing more forward-looking data, the information is often buried in disparate systems. The **Massachusetts Hospital Association study** showed that the healthcare workers surveyed had important ideas for improving healthcare delivery based on the elimination of fixed, layered, fragmented approaches to their work. Instead, they said, the complexity of their mission and engagement requires frequent decision points with people and teams working together. You can get this information from a single point of intelligence. An effective and solid patient-centered workforce management strategy is built on the same principals, and includes a solid foundation of transactional compliance and management tools.

Learn more about patient-centered workforce management ›

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