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Ease the burden – and expense – of nurse recruitment and retention

Concierge services offer innovative benefit

By Todd Wheeler, president, Hospital Concierge of America

For the healthcare industry, recruiting and retaining the very best nurses is a top priority. Failure to do so, especially in a highly competitive marketplace, can be catastrophic. Hospital administrators are increasingly aware of this fact and are now beginning to implement creative ways to recruit and retain the best nursing staff. One of the emerging trends in the industry is concierge services. By providing an assistant who takes care of personal chores, such as dry cleaning, shopping, oil changes, and shipping, postage and mailing; hospitals are able to attract and retain the very best nurses in the industry. This extra effort on the part of the hospital provides a tremendous competitive edge, especially during nursing shortages. By showing you care about your people, loyalty is increased tremendously.

In addition to retention, concierge services can also save hospitals the time, effort and expense of recruiting and training new personnel, often amounting to hundreds of thousands of dollars each year. Furthermore, it's estimated that the average employee spends more than an hour each day taking care of personal business while on the clock.

Expensive for the hospital? Not really. Reducing vacancy rates and therefore the number of traveling nurses can pay for the cost of the program many times over. In addition, by eliminating lost personal time, another result is happier employees who want to stay on the job. Happier employees = better patient care and lower turnover = reduced costs. In fact, according to Fortune Magazine, of the 100 "Best Places to Work" in the U.S., one-third of the businesses that made the list provide concierge services to their employees. This trend hasn't been overlooked by the healthcare industry, where more and more hospitals are looking for ways to implement these innovative services.

The value of incorporating a concierge program as an employee benefit is immense, but before making the decision to hire an outside provider, there are a few important factors to consider:

Bottom line proof

If a hospital is in the process of interviewing potential providers, they should ask the concierge about the time and money they have helped to save their clients and the end users. How have their services helped to recruit and retain valuable employees? How do they manage and track their requests? Do they provide customized usage reports? How

do they quantify the money and time that the service has saved? How do they staff?
What is their staffing philosophy?

Industry specific

Make sure the concierge service you're considering understands the competitive nature and specific needs of the healthcare industry. They must be aware of the high priority hospital places on its nursing staff. By 2020, it's predicted that there will be shortage of 800,000 nurses in the U.S. alone. Do they customize the program based on your unique needs and requirements or do they take a cookie cutter approach. Does the concierge company take the time to understand your goals and objectives to produce the results that you desire? Do they offer consulting services? If a concierge company isn't educated and clear about what will set your hospital apart, the service probably won't meet your expectations.

Range of services

Some concierge companies only provide a limited range of services. Others will arrange almost anything, including hotels, limousines, professional service referrals, house cleaning, Gallup and JCAHO support, and even help in planning a wedding. So if you're looking for a full-service, never-say-no vendor who can meet almost any need, be sure to clarify that up front. Flexibility is key. Even if they haven't completed a specific request before, they should have the relationships and the resources to get it done.

On-site office

Most hospitals and healthcare facilities are large enough that they require an on-site concierge office. This is a location within the facility where employees can go to make their requests and leave with a smile knowing that their trusted assistant is taking care of them. If a concierge service is able to establish an on-site presence, ask about the quality of their offices. A concierge office should be a welcome port in the storm. The way the office looks, feels, sounds and even smells should be warm and welcoming to your people? You'll want the concierge to portray the best image possible for your organization, and if their office space is cluttered and unprofessional, it can often do more harm than good.

Web-based request systems

While most concierge companies provide email as a means of making requests, others have developed web-based request management systems. These systems allow hundreds of requests to be processed each month, and provide for the management, tracking and reporting of each and every project that comes into the concierge office.

References

A good concierge provider should have plenty of outstanding references. Be sure to check with the organizations they already represent – both management and end users. Also, ask if their subcontractors are bonded and insured, and find out what kind of background checks they do on vendors and their own employees.

Exclusivity

Depending on the competitive nature of your facility, you may want your concierge to be exclusive to your organization. This exclusivity can provide a significant advantage over your competition and it's a powerful strategic differentiator when it comes to employee recruitment and retention. Bear in mind that there's typically a premium associated with exclusivity but, depending on your situation, the cost may be well worth the extra expense.

Consulting services

Some concierge companies provide consulting services to help you plan a program that best suits your individual needs. Even if they don't implement the concierge program themselves, they can walk you through the process and provide behind the scenes support. In order for concierge services to truly be perceived as a valuable employee benefit, you have to do it right – the first time. Choosing the wrong program or provider can be costly and counter-productive.

Personal attention

A concierge company should become part of your hospital's team. It is critical that they develop a personal understanding of your specific challenges; recruitment, retention vacancy levels, work/life balance. A vendor that simply goes through the motions -- without working hard to find the very best solutions, won't be a good fit.

Bottom line: In today's challenging healthcare industry, finding new ways get and keep good people critical. A properly implemented concierge program makes the difference in helping your hospital recruit and retain the very best.

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