

HEALTHCARE TRENDS IN FOCUS

Emerging Staffing Challenges

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For a few years prior to COVID-19, the healthcare industry appeared somewhat settled with very few emerging issues. In two short years, that has changed as organizations have adapted to the impact of COVID-19 and a “new normal”. In addition to the pandemic challenges, healthcare organizations are facing other workers’ compensation issues with strains/sprains (primarily from patient/resident handling activities) and slips, trips and falls continuing to drive non-COVID-19 frequency and severity.

While some healthcare organizations have always experienced high turnover, recent events have amplified these challenges industrywide causing a significant staffing crisis. Since COVID-19, we have seen healthcare employees:

- choose early retirement over working in settings with presumed higher risk
- leave the field due to pre-existing conditions or concern over the pandemic
- be lured away for increased financial incentives in other industries

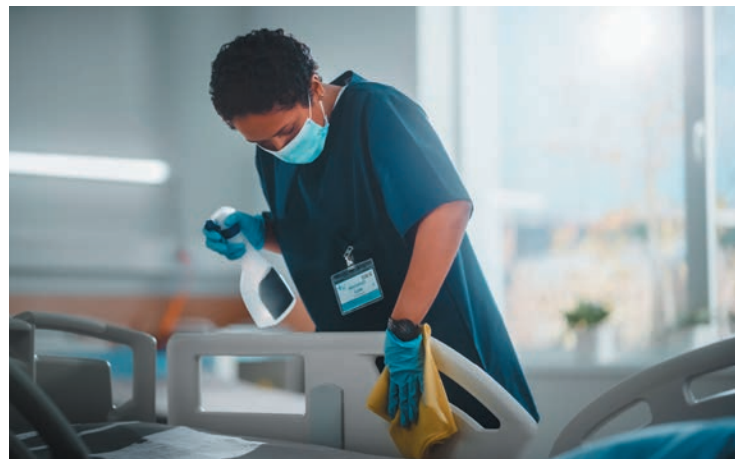
Industrywide, employee headcounts in healthcare have decreased. Yet some healthcare organizations are still reporting a similar number of workers’ compensation claims, primarily because of pandemic-related claims. During 2020 and 2021, many organizations have experienced a decrease in claims for common healthcare industry loss drivers like strains/sprains and slips/falls.

Issues to Consider Include:

- how the claim frequency rates related to strains/sprains, slips/falls, etc. compare to pre-pandemic trends (once payrolls are audited and accurate comparisons can be made)
- if potentially longer workdays, increased overtime, and general fatigue from the staffing crisis in healthcare impact claim frequency and severity

Shift in Healthcare Agency Staffing

Another emerging trend is the shift in how the agency staffing industry operates. Historically, organizations like hospitals would pay a premium for agency healthcare staff. Due to the labor shortages, staffing agencies have increased the rates they charge clients, leading to higher earnings for agency employees. A staff



PMA identified **increased injury** potential for recently hired healthcare employees. Nearly **30%** of workers’ compensation claims that occur in the first year of employment happen within the **first 10 weeks of employment**.

PMA State of the Healthcare Services Industry 2022, data valued as of December 2021.

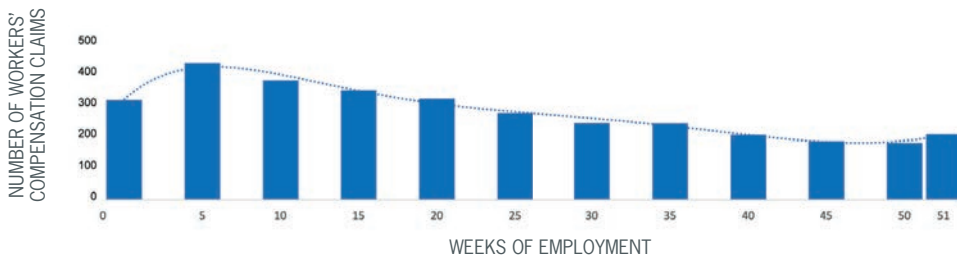
member employed directly by an organization can get lured away by an agency and possibly return to the same organization through the agency—for a much higher rate of pay.

Staffing organizations’ business models are also changing based on increased demand. While agencies previously focused on filling day-to-day labor needs, they are now focused on contract-nursing assignments that usually last around 12 weeks. The contract-nursing option offers organizations more stability and continuity of patient care, however, it comes with a hefty price tag. As contracts end, we have seen bidding wars occur between healthcare organizations and staffing agencies, which drive up the cost of agency staff.

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FIRST-YEAR INJURIES IN HEALTHCARE



Source: PMA State of the Healthcare Services Industry 2022

While agency staffing was originally intended to fill scheduling gaps, the fact that agency staff are now longer-term employees is a concerning trend for healthcare leadership. The wage disparity between staff nurses and contract nurses can breed resentment amongst the two groups. This trend magnifies another concerning issue in the healthcare industry—nurses leaving their employers for a variety of reasons such as better work environment.

Increased Injury Potential for New Employees

While healthcare organizations look to hire staff, an accompanying concern is the injury

rate for employees within their first two years of employment. Historically the new employee injury rate in healthcare has been high. With the influx of new hires, it is very possible we could see further increases. The healthcare industry experiences an increase in employee injuries in the first 8-10 weeks of employment before beginning to level off and then eventually decreasing as tenure increases.

Retaining Employees for the Long Run

It is now more important than ever for healthcare organizations to retain employees. In addition to wage increases, other strategies to keep staff on board include:

- offering flexible scheduling
- providing opportunities for growth and advancement
- developing an employee recognition program
- enhancing the organization's culture and building a sense of community in the workplace

These options may take time, focus and energy to implement, but they are solutions that can assist you in keeping top talent. Seek employee input in enhancing your new employee onboarding; after all, no one knows your greatest strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities better than those closest to your organization—your employees! 🌟

New Employee Success, Safety and Satisfaction

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Healthcare organizations face unique challenges related to employee safety. One of the most effective strategies employers can take to enhance their safety culture and improve employee satisfaction and retention is to focus on safety from their very first interactions with employees.

Hiring Practices: Start by examining your hiring practices, ensuring that safety plays a role in selecting the right candidate.

- Ask the candidate position-specific, safety-focused questions
- Involve peers and supervisors in the interview process
- Provide a facility tour, including the candidate's future work area
- Consider a job-specific functional fitness evaluation
- Include aptitude or personality testing for leadership roles
- Conduct compliance and hiring practices such as drug screenings, reference/background checks, and a review of human resources policies

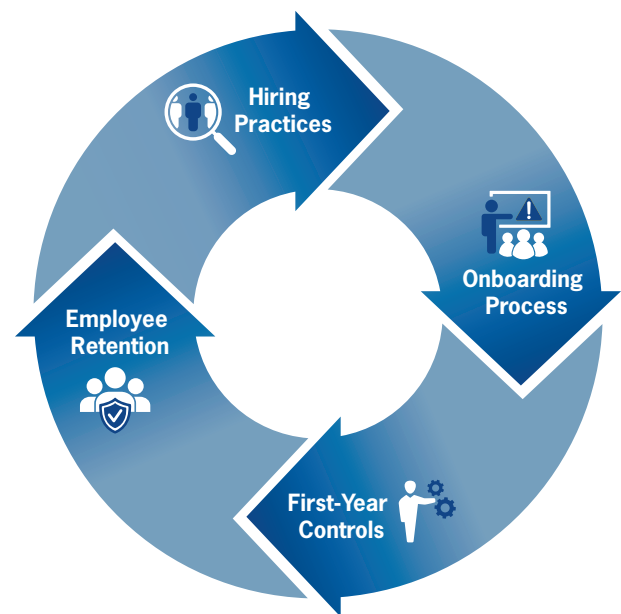
Orientation and Compliance: Orientation offers the opportunity for employees to learn about your organization and its values and people. Careful planning is important, as this “first impression” can play a significant role in determining how employees feel about your organization and commitment to them.

A “general orientation” typically covers key areas of regulatory compliance and includes a benefits sign-up and an employee handbook review, including key policies. This is a perfect time to review your mission, vision, values, and commitment to safety.

A “facility/safety orientation” takes a deeper dive into an organization's safety programs, and should include a review of policies, injury-reporting procedures and the return-to-work process. As part of facility/safety training, review key safety practices for general exposures like workplace violence, infection prevention, emergency management and OSHA regulations. In addition, promote your Safety Committee's role in keeping employees safe. This will help to reassure new hires of your commitment to preventing injuries.

Role-Specific Onboarding: This involves creating and establishing relationships that can help simplify the new hire transition. The goal is to communicate organizational and role expectations, make the employee comfortable in their new environment, and promote safe work practices. Consider incorporating the following into your onboarding:

Preventing Year-One Injuries



- Peer Shadowing Program – an informal way to learn what it is like to perform a particular role. Establish expectations for open communication between the parties regarding what is taught and what is learned – and to whom they should ask questions or voice concerns.
- Report of injury expectations at the department level
- Required personal protective equipment (PPE) procedures specific to the department/unit (e.g., gloves, gowns, masks, eye and hearing protection, including proper donning/doffing and hand hygiene)
- Daily inter-shift communication practices and expectations:
 - Electronic Medical Records (EMR)
 - Safety Huddles
 - Hand-Offs
 - Daily Safety Briefings

Healthcare Hazards and Controls: Healthcare workers face many serious safety and health hazards in varied work settings from hospitals to group homes and varied jobs, including frontline

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workers involved in patient and resident handling and support positions. Identifying key hazards and controls during onboarding for the worker's specific position is key to their success in maintaining overall personal safety and providing a positive and safe patient experience and outcome. Consider including the following areas as part of your onboarding:

- Slip, trip and fall prevention
- Ergonomic risk factors
- Workplace violence
- Job-specific safe patient handling

Employee Retention—Easing the Transition to a New Role: Reducing first-year injuries can have a positive impact on retention. By prioritizing safety—driven by senior leadership—you can set the stage for success from day one. Employers are encouraged to:

- Provide ongoing coaching and establish onboarding review meetings

- Demonstrate a commitment to safety through communication and action
- Communicate progress on important safety practices through team meetings, sharing success stories
- Cover key safety metrics, including employment claim statistics
- Celebrate success!

Plan and implement onboarding wisely to help new hires acclimate to the organizational values, culture, and potential hazards. Having a robust orientation that emphasizes an effective workplace safety experience is important to minimizing first-year employee injuries. Recognizing the importance of establishing clear strategies focused on role-specific onboarding, learning reinforcement, and regular check-ins may help healthcare systems ensure the success, safety, satisfaction, and ultimate retention of employees. 🎯

Strategies to Recruit Talent and Promote Employee Wellness

Monica Manske, Senior Strategic Consultant, Risk Control, PMA Companies

The healthcare employment practices landscape continues to change. Through PMA’s risk assessment process and client relationships, we have learned the creative and unique ways clients are addressing recruiting, employee wellness and workplace violence challenges.

Creative Recruitment Strategies: The “Great Resignation” impacts all industries. The market demands a competitive salary structure and incentives beyond financial inducements. Our clients are strategically enhancing recruiting strategies and offering alternatives to attract the right candidates, including:

- A la carte pay structure options (higher pay with no benefits, overtime incentives, etc.)
- Hybrid and flexible work-hour models including twelve-, eight- and four-hour shifts
- Employer-sponsored training specialization, certifications and advancement opportunities

- Facility tours and job shadowing to see “a day in the life”
- Creation of panel interview program
- Weekly panel review of key leadership open positions to ensure candidate fit
- Creation of career pathways for CNAs, LPNs, RNs, etc.
- Leader education institute
- Competitive tuition reimbursement
- Identifying new pipelines for potential candidates
- Partnership with schools
- Recruiting from outside of the normal market for temporary key positions and offering boarding and nutrition stipend
- Engaging marketing professionals to create recruitment campaigns
- Creating a knowledge resource with industry professionals to better understand the modern workforce
- Utilization of PT, OT assistants to support nursing home unit staffing



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Keeping Employees Engaged, Safe & Happy: Once the right candidates are selected, an effective onboarding experience is a powerful strategy to impact employee retention and safety.

Additional strategies we've observed include:

- Overtime hours paid under an incentive plan
- Employee bonuses with additional time off
- Leader/employee weekly meetings for the first 90 days of employment
- Career coaches and planning with immediate plan implementation
- Education program designed for travel nurses and new graduates to ensure consistent workplace practices
- New employee community events and activities
- Evaluating blogs and community posts to stay current for competitive advantage
- Total well-being programs
- Senior leadership visibility—rounding on units and directly interacting with staff to identify needs
- Employee surveys and recognition
- Recognizing employees with birthday, anniversary and thank you cards
- Swag or raffles
- Town Hall meetings
- Mentoring programs

Strategies to Combat Employee Fatigue and Improve

Wellness: Many factors can impact the emotional, psychological, and social well-being of healthcare workers. During the pandemic, employees faced new challenges, including heightened attention on wearing PPE, the complexity of delivering patient care, and the stress of managing daily activities outside the workplace

(e.g., virtual school, elderly parent care). These challenges call for a heightened focus on employee mental health. Strategies to combat fatigue and improve wellness include:

- Quiet rooms with low lighting, providing the caregiver an opportunity to decompress
- Life coaches or counselors
- Additional time off and increased scheduling flexibility
- Wellness and resiliency programs with monthly support messages and virtual access
- Rewards including bonuses, gift cards, or additional time off
- Employee Health Services staff acting as a sounding board
- Good Samaritan Fund to assist employees
- Flexibility with day care issues
- No-cost concierge services
- Sharing wellness articles
- Monthly wellness newsletters
- Onsite farmers market to support healthy food options
- Employee Assistance Program programs

Workplace Violence Prevention Programs & Training: Higher employee vacancy rates may impact areas such as workplace violence. In some healthcare settings, we have noted an increase in claim frequency resulting from workplace violence. To address this issue, clients are enhancing wellness initiatives and are reviewing their workplace violence prevention programs and educational platforms to ensure they are meeting their current environmental needs.

PMA clients continue to show creativity and resilience in the everchanging healthcare landscape with a laser focus on safety while providing high-quality patient/resident care. 🌐

If you have any questions or would like additional information, please contact your local PMA Risk Control Consultant or reach out to us at heretohelp@pmagroup.com.

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