Effective Workforce Transformation

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Increasing Care Demand and Growing Workforce Shortage

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Healthcare staff shortages are a growing global issue. At the same time, ageing populations and an increasing burden of chronic diseases are driving up demand for healthcare. The gap between rising demand and a shortage of healthcare workers is looming. HealthManagement.org spoke to Sourabh Pagaria, Executive Vice President & Managing Director of the Southern European business of Siemens Healthineers, on challenges healthcare workers face today and strategies to address the issue of workforce shortages.

What are the key challenges healthcare workers face today?

Coping with unfamiliar equipment, insufficient training, excessive work hours due to workforce shortages, and unrelenting work volume can all contribute to stress in healthcare workers, leading to low employee satisfaction, severe burnout, and further exacerbating the problem with additional turnover. Spreading the workforce too thin inevitably increases multitasking, which psychology research has shown to be a significant source of errors. The more complex the tasks involved, the more time and error consequences there will be. This type of stress leads to staff burnout and attrition, which puts additional strain on the remaining staff. This vicious circle exacerbates productivity losses and staff retention issues.

We must also remember COVID-19 experience's long-lasting stress. The sick, dying, and contagious were supported by healthcare professionals, especially those working on the frontline. Additionally, new and unexpected roles were imposed on healthcare workers. In order to boost capacity for COVID-19 patients and secure the safety of other patients, they quickly had to adapt workflows within hospitals and other facilities. They were required to hold the hands of infected patients in place of family members who were not permitted to enter the ICU. They also had to deal with their own individual difficulties, such as a lack of supplies and concern over potentially infecting their relatives at home.

Workforce shortage is a significant issue in healthcare. How do you think this problem can be overcome?

Nurse and radiographer shortages are a growing global issue. At the same time, ageing populations and an increasing burden of chronic diseases are driving up demand for healthcare. As a result, a gap between rising demand and a shortage of healthcare workers is looming. Moreover, during the pandemic, we saw numerous examples of a massive gap between workforce supply and demand. Using a remote workforce outside of the hospital can assist in overcoming this issue. Remote solutions can connect healthcare workers with various tasks and help achieve the right balance. Specialists in low-demand areas, for example, could provide virtual consultations and assist colleagues in higher-demand areas. This method can also improve efficiency and productivity.

Which workforce productivity tools can help healthcare workers?

Two powerful trends will shape the future of healthcare: increasing care demand and growing workforce shortage. By 2030, the worldwide population of people over 65 will double (He et al. 2016). At the same time as demand continues to grow, hospitals are struggling with understaffing. The result is a wide and growing gap between supply and demand, increasing by 14% every year (NHS 2017). The most effective strategy to meet this challenge is to increase workforce productivity within the healthcare sector. How can we do that? In our view, it can be done using three levers: Eliminating waste, reducing necessary activities without value, and ensuring individual growth. Additionally, supplementing the workforce can help to close the workforce gap. Let's go a little bit deeper into these three levers:

1. **Eliminate waste:** Worldwide, between [30% and 50% of healthcare activities](#) can be classified as "wasteful". This includes the unnecessary duplication of tests, overly complicated bureaucratic procedures, and overtreatment, among many examples. To eliminate waste, it is necessary to identify errors and eliminate them, analyse operations and stop unnecessary activities and simplify and streamline to master complexity. One solution can be the use of digital tools to enter the field of intelligent imaging. MyExam Companion, for instance, turns data into built–in expertise to guide users through procedures and helps to

generate consistent results.

2. **Reduce necessary activities without value:** Healthcare has a 36% automation potential (Chui and Manyika 2016). Automation and robotics can significantly reduce the time required by humans to perform many necessary tasks. Furthermore, proven task-shifting strategies, such as outsourcing non-core activities, can reduce expert staff workload. To reduce non-value activities, work must be automated, non-core activities delegated, and multidisciplinary collaboration encouraged. Our eHealth solutions help build healthcare networks and provide seamless access to patient data, allowing health facilities, payers, and patients to collaborate.

3. **Ensuring individual growth:** Nurse and physician shortages are looming trends in healthcare, despite the fact that they are the heart and soul of the system. Increasing workforce productivity will require enabling them to do their jobs more effectively and efficiently. Advanced technologies provide powerful new tools, and digitisation will assist in making expertise available where and when required. By encouraging lifelong learning, augmenting the capabilities of human workers, and making expertise available where and when needed, the workforce can be enabled to focus on what adds the most value to patients. In this case, our PEP Connect solutions and syngo Virtual Cockpit can provide online access to learning activities and make expert knowledge available across sites in real-time.

Do you think remote training is a feasible strategy to improve the skills/qualifications of healthcare workers?
During COVID-19, remote work in the healthcare sector emerged as one of the most effective ways to reduce coronavirus infection rates, gain access to necessary medical expertise, maximise resources, streamline patient treatment, and allow employees to continue working even when quarantined and forced to stay at home. We've all participated in what TIME magazine dubbed "the world's largest work-from-home experiment". During the pandemic, workforce training was more important than ever, and because of the situation, training sessions were also conducted virtually/remotely. Virtually managed education platforms are important tools for healthcare administrators to streamline staff education while providing performance insights and optimising clinical operations. As Siemens Healthineers, we provide a variety of virtual training solutions that are supported by immersive technologies such as simulators, AR, and VR, as well as webinars that help to increase on-the-job competencies with personalised hands-on experiences and a learner-centric approach to train and practice fully individual and independently in a safe environment. Furthermore, virtual training can increase efficiency by leveraging innovative technology for continuous equipment education and skill development while improving staff satisfaction with innovative learning tools accessible anytime and anywhere without disrupting clinical operations. Finally, it boosts performance at a lower cost by leveraging innovative technology for continuous equipment education and skill development. Another tool for improving skills and qualifications is the use of our PEP platform, which has various subscription options and, for example, allows customers to add their own learning content to their group.

Many healthcare workers feel their work is hindered because of unnecessary administrative tasks. Do you agree? If yes, how do you think this can be addressed?
It is a fact that there is an increasing demand for administrative tasks to be performed by healthcare workers. According to a Medical Economics (January 2021) article referring to the United States, if doctors had to chart their feelings about practicing medicine, many would list "paperwork" as their main complaint. In countless surveys and studies, physicians consistently rank the time and effort required to fill out forms and other administrative tasks near or at the top of their list of

What healthcare providers are asking for ...		...what MedTech partners can offer:	
Attract, retain and develop workforce	**Personalized learning experience** Instant access to digitalized education and information at the individual's fingertips	**Share and connect with experts** Information and updates on cutting edge trends from online network	**Empower the learner** Creation of individual profile, education plans, and transcripts to record trainings
Standardize quality of care	**Drive staff competency** Instant access to formal education, supported by social learning	**Enhance workforce performance** Education experience for the institution with learning plans for assignment and management	**Customized workforce management** Customizable education plans combining education for employees designed by Siemens Healthineers and/or your institution
Reduce risk and act compliantly	**Monitor progress** Dashboard and reporting tools for instant viewing of education status	**Streamline Audit Preparations** Integrated management and administration tools	**Manage entire teams of departments** Creation of tailored education plans with group assignments and tracking functionalities with a single solution

Source: Siemens Healthineers

grievances. "This isn't why I went into medicine" is a common refrain heard throughout the profession. Furthermore, time and focus are diverted from more clinically important activities of physicians and their staff, such as providing actual care to

to ensure that only people who absolutely need to be there are allowed through the door; physically separating potentially infectious patients in triage locations; and setting up dedicated spaces, equipment, and personnel for infectious

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patients and improving quality, and may prevent patients from receiving timely and appropriate care or treatment. Paperwork and administrative demands have also been linked to an alarming increase in physician burnout rates, particularly among primary care physicians. Technology and digital solutions can be of assistance in this situation. I'm referring to digital intake and check-in tools. For example, allowing patients to check in digitally helps to streamline the intake process and registration and allows providers to process completed patient forms more quickly. It also provides a more comprehensive and accurate evaluation of patients' medical histories and medications or expanding the use of telehealth, leveraging the experience gained during the pandemic when remote patient care helped reduce administrative tasks and enabled patients living in rural communities or at high risk of COVID-19 complications to more easily and cost-effectively access healthcare. Finally, improving patient engagement, particularly among those with chronic disease as a more engaged patient is more likely to adhere to treatment plans, track their health, and question their clinicians.

Healthcare workers have borne the brunt of the COVID-19 pandemic. Do you think the workforce was given adequate support and protection?

The COVID-19 pandemic has served as a stark reminder to the world that the safety of healthcare workers must be prioritised by governments, health systems, and executives. Frontline caregivers were frequently exposed to SARS-CoV-2 due to the nature of their work. In many locations, particularly early on, this risk was exacerbated by a lack of personal protective equipment (PPE). According to the World Health Organization, healthcare workers accounted for approximately 14% of global COVID-19 infections. Healthcare workers, especially those on the frontline were caring for the sick, dying, and contagious. Healthcare workers were also thrust into new and challenging roles. They had to quickly modify workflows within hospitals and other facilities in order to increase capacity for COVID-19 patients while also ensuring the safety of others. They were forced to stand in for family members who were not permitted to visit the ICU, holding the hands of infected patients. At the same time, they had to deal with personal issues, such as a lack of supplies and the fear of spreading the virus to their families. Some safety measures were implemented, and we have all seen them: restricting access to healthcare facilities

patients, reducing the need to move them and ensuring that as few people as possible come into contact with them. Not to mention the remote training, which increased during the pandemic, allowing healthcare professionals to continuously train themselves while also being protected. But, at the end of the day, we can't protect patients unless we protect the people in charge of their care, and protecting healthcare workers means protecting both their mental and physical health.

Burnout is a major problem in healthcare. How do you think this can be addressed?

It is obvious that healthcare systems will never be the same after COVID-19. Healthcare workers have faced unprecedented challenges at a high personal cost. In addition to overwhelmingly stressful and sometimes traumatic work environments, many people experienced loneliness and isolation at home as they were forced to distance themselves from loved ones whom they feared they might infect. The healthcare systems and the way they previously operated were disrupted. Traumatic events, such as being faced with a pandemic or being diagnosed with a life-changing disease, can activate the body's sympathetic nervous system (SNS), causing stress hormones to be released and physical reactions such as a racing heart, impaired immune function, and high blood pressure. A better understanding of how stress and trauma affect healthcare professionals is critical for protecting them at a time when they are most needed. Taking precautions to protect their health and well-being helps them navigate this crisis safely and ensures that patients receive the care they require. Siemens Healthineers recommends the following three resilience-building strategies for healthcare providers:

1. **Promote mental and physical self-care** - It is okay for healthcare professionals to not feel okay. They must also believe that their organisation cares about their well-being. Healthcare leaders must ensure that all employees have the skills necessary to be mentally and physically healthy and resilient. Mind-body techniques like mindful breathing, active meditation, movement, biofeedback, and guided imagery are included in the programme to teach self-awareness, self-care, and self-expression.

2. **Incorporate stress and trauma relief into the workplace** - Healthcare systems that incorporate and support proven and scientifically-based mind-body medicine programmes in small group formats will have better

long-term outcomes. Effective trauma relief and resilience building are critical for the well-being of employees and the organisation as a whole.

3. **Develop a true culture of caring and well-being** - Healthcare leaders can help their employees manage their stress by implementing institution-wide self-care programmes based on facilitated small groups. Organisations can collaborate to create a culture that values everyone's well-being and promotes feeling "cared for" as an organisational principle.

What strategies can be adopted to assure healthcare workers that Artificial Intelligence is a source of support rather than a threat?

Currently, the demand for diagnostic services exceeds the supply of experts in the workforce. Creating solutions to manage this ever-increasing workload is critical for the healthcare industry. Furthermore, as the workload increases, diagnostics and treatment become more complex. Diagnosticians and physicians require new tools that can process large amounts of medical data quickly and accurately, allowing them to make more objective treatment decisions based on quantitative data tailored to the needs of the individual patient. When analyses are too difficult, time-consuming, or inefficient to perform alone, artificial intelligence (AI) can help clinical professionals stay focused on their patients and better use their expertise. Artificial intelligence-enabled tools detect meaningful relationships in raw data, extract relevant insights, and apply those lessons to new patient cases. AI is an indispensable tool in all fields of healthcare, including drug development, patient care, and operational decisions, because it assists physicians in making more informed clinical decisions.

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