

Bridging Generational Gaps: The Key to Retaining Young Healthcare Workers



Hospital CEOs face significant challenges in maintaining a sustainable workforce, especially if they fail to address the generational differences among healthcare workers. Understanding and acting on the specific needs of younger employees is essential for attracting and retaining staff in today's healthcare environment. Hospital CEOs aiming to reduce workforce turnover must prioritise resolving issues related to racism and discrimination, particularly affecting younger generations. Implementing effective reporting protocols can create a safer and more supportive environment, showing staff that their concerns are taken seriously. Furthermore, equity-centered hiring and retention practices are crucial for building a diverse and inclusive workplace, ultimately leading to higher job satisfaction and lower turnover.

The Importance of an Inclusive Environment

Creating an equitable and inclusive workplace is a key strategy for retaining younger healthcare workers. A recent survey by the Commonwealth Fund, in collaboration with the African American Research Collective, highlights the importance of tackling racism and discrimination to reduce stress and burnout among workers aged 18 to 29. The survey, which included responses from 3,000 young clinicians—such as doctors, nurses, dentists, and medical assistants—conducted in early 2023, revealed stark generational differences. A significant 67% of younger workers identified racism or discrimination based on race or ethnicity against patients as a major problem, compared to 52% of all workers. Furthermore, 64% of younger clinicians reported witnessing such discrimination, compared to 47% of workers overall.

These experiences contribute significantly to stress levels among younger employees, with 30% reporting high stress due to racism or discrimination, compared to 16% of the overall workforce.

Addressing Emotional Challenges

Workforce shortages are already placing considerable pressure on clinicians to meet professional demands. Hospital CEOs must recognise the importance of addressing the emotional challenges that come with this pressure, alongside the mental and physical needs.

This issue was a focal point at the recent HealthLeaders CEO Exchange, where hospital leaders discussed strategies to improve workforce experience by emphasising relationships and culture. The goal is to ensure a supportive environment that keeps staff happy and engaged.

Creating a Safe Reporting Environment

To address racism and discrimination effectively, the Commonwealth Fund suggests establishing a safe and comfortable environment for reporting such instances. Nearly half of the younger workers surveyed (48%) expressed concern about retaliation or negative consequences if they reported discrimination. Implementing robust reporting protocols would not only alleviate these fears but also demonstrate a commitment to addressing and eradicating discrimination.

Equity-Centered Hiring and Retention Practices

Decision-makers are also encouraged to adopt equity-centered hiring and retention practices to foster diversity and inclusion in the workplace. Ensuring that all employees feel valued and included can significantly reduce turnover rates.

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