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Innovative Online Recruitment Technology from the American Hospital Association Empowers Lakeland Regional Medical Center to Attract Highly Skilled Health Care Talent to Meet Growing Patient Demand

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Today's current challenging economic conditions, which have reduced compensation and insurance coverage for many, combined with health care reform measures, which provide greater access to care, are driving consumers across the United States to hospital emergency rooms and health care clinics at record rates.

The situation at Central Florida's Lakeland Regional Medical Center mirrors the rest of the nation. Growing numbers of people are heading to hospitals and health care facilities for clinical care, surgeries, medical procedures, lab tests and therapy which is fueling the need for skilled health care talent – both clinical and non-clinical – to meet this demand for services.

Located mid-way between Tampa and Orlando, Lakeland Regional is a private, non-profit facility that has served Polk County, Florida's largest county, and the surrounding community for more than 80 years. The facility operates the busiest Emergency Room in the state, and is a Level II Trauma Center that is equipped with state-of-the-art technology, life saving equipment and a dedicated chest pain management team. The facility is fully accredited by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations, is licensed for 851 beds and has some of the most comprehensive and sophisticated care available to the community.

The facility was the first in the region to offer open heart procedures, including less-invasive robotic surgery. Its Heart Center is the largest and most comprehensive in the county and its 'Heart Team' is composed of some of the Southeast's most talented cardiovascular surgeons, electro physiologists and cardiologists who perform more than 9,000 procedures per year.

Additionally, Lakeland Regional's Cancer Program is now the fifth largest and most respected, known not only for its renowned staff of oncologists and surgeons, but also for its understanding and treatment of female reproductive cancers.

Top Talent Required for Critical Care

The responsibility for recruiting and acquiring the majority of Lakeland Regional's talent is spearheaded by the facility's Human Resources (HR) Department, which fills more than 1,300 positions annually. The department handles talent acquisition and management facility wide, with the exception of physicians, who are recruited by an internal physician recruiter.

As a hospital organization, Lakeland Regional fills a wide range of positions – from nurses, radiologists and lab techs, to information technology, marketing, administrative secretaries, food service, environmental, financial, claims and patient access (registration) workers. Each time the facility expands or offers new services to serve its growing patient base, the need for the right talent also rises.

According to Jeffery Payne, vice president, human resources for Lakeland Regional, who has also served as president of the American Society for Healthcare Human Resources Administration (ASHHRA), “Due to the economic environment in the last 18-24 months – where many people are losing jobs or are experiencing wage reductions – our hospital facility is serving more and more patients who don't have access to personal physicians. And, as more people are seeking access to care due to health legislation that covers more of the population, we expect this growth to continue.”

Adding to the challenge of more patients seeking care, is a shortage of workers for many types of health care positions due to the general aging of the working population and the need for training for highly specific skills. For example, the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) Center for Workforce Studies recently updated their projections of physician supply and demand to account for the impact of 30 million new patients under health care reform. According to their June 2010 report, the nation is currently short almost 14,000 physicians, and by 2025, that gap may reach 130,600 physicians¹.

He continued, “With many practice panels full and others scrambling to recruit physicians (especially in primary care), imagine what things might be like 15 years from now, with a tenfold increase in the shortage of physicians. Unless something is done, the report indicates that such a supply/demand imbalance within the American health care system may be catastrophic.”

In addition to physicians, other caregivers are already in short supply. A study by Dr. Peter Buerhaus and colleagues at Vanderbilt University recently projected a shortage of 260,000 registered nurses by 2025². Adding to the dilemma, our nation's academic medical programs have neither the capacity nor faculty members for training the care professionals required to meet the projected future demand.

These trends are driving the need for our nation to increase the supply of the physicians as well as other types of health care workers – all providing a great opportunity for those currently in the health care workforce, and as for those interested in entering the field.

Rising Demand Fuels Fusing of Internet-Based Technology into Traditional Recruitment

The rising need to identify and recruit top talent fueled Lakeland Regional's HR team to explore using the Internet and Web-based recruiting tools to help identify talent, not only from the geographic community, but also from all around the nation and even around the globe.

Historically, Lakeland Regional used several sources for finding talent. In addition to the physician recruiter, the HR Department had a staff of 4 full-time recruiters as well as a part-time resource. This team utilized traditional advertising in key magazines and newspapers, along with advertising and job postings on popular online sites such as Monster.com; CareerBuilder.com; Indeed.com and Simplyhired.com.

Through its association with ASHHRA, Lakeland Regional's HR team learned of an innovative online recruitment resource specifically designed for the health care field, in development by the American Hospital Association and its subsidiary, AHA Solutions: the National Healthcare Career Network (NHCN). Lakeland Regional quickly became a Charter Member of AHACareerCenter.org to support the initiative and access the talent pools aggregated through the NHCN.

Participating NHCN associations and professional societies represent multiple disciplines including Academic Research; Dentistry; Executives; Food Preparation/Environmental Services; Mental Health/Social Services; Advanced and General Nursing; Operations, Pharmacy, and Physicians and Surgeons.

According to Anthony Burke, president of AHA Solutions, "Understanding that critical staffing issues can threaten hospitals' performance and quality of patient care, the American Hospital Association co-founded the NHCN in 2008. Since its launch, the NHCN now aligns more than 230 health care trade associations and professional societies on a common technology platform, connecting more than two million talented association members with potential health care employers."

Burke reports that demand for the online recruiting solutions from AHA and NHCN is strong and continues to grow. "In the fall of 2010, NHCN health care job postings have risen to nearly 5,000 per month, the number of job seekers has grown to 9,000 per month, and online resume postings now total more than 65 thousand," he adds.

Two Year Track Record of Successful Recruiting

Lakeland Regional has been utilizing AHACareerCenter.org since 2008 and the HR Department has been pleased with the online recruiting tool on many fronts. For example, because the facility is in need of many highly specialized professionals in 'niche' areas, the fact that the AHACareerCenter.org site draws from key associations within NHCN is a huge plus.

AHACareerCenter.org Vice President, Amy Goble, adds, “By utilizing AHACareerCenter.org, health care facilities such as Lakeland Regional can access potential candidates from trusted health care associations within the NHCN.” Other affiliate members include the Association of periOperative Registered Nurses (AORN), American College of Cardiology (ACC), American Academy of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation (AAPM&R) to name a few. These organizations’ members are in high demand specialties and have the certifications, skills and expertise needed to fill critical positions for health care employers. In addition to AHA, trade associations, like American Health Care Association, represent other health care segments like long term care and assisted living.

Seamless Technology Integration with Existing Talent Management Systems

According to Mr. Payne, Lakeland Regional was able to seamlessly fuse the use of AHACareerCenter.org with its existing recruiting processes. “Because AHACareerCenter.org is Internet-based and easy to use, our HR staff could quickly take advantage of its features to identify candidates.”

He added, “As a Charter Member of AHACareerCenter.org, Lakeland Regional had access to unlimited job postings and the innovative technology enabled seamless ‘transfer’ of applicants between the AHA system and our own internal applicant management systems. That way, our HR team was able to spend less time on laborious tasks such as ‘processing’ candidates which saved times and allows our team to focus on more critical recruiting tasks. AHA also offered a ‘Career Center Concierge’ to ease the transition, help our team navigate the new system including the set up of job postings, reporting and management.”

Payne explains that because of the health care-specific focus of AHACareerCenter.org, it is not just your average online job board – it’s much more. “Due to their ‘impersonal’ nature and broad focus, using the popular online job boards was becoming near-taboo for our HR team. AHACareerCenter.org’s capabilities allow our team to ‘cut to the chase’ and identify specialized health care candidates in clinical fields such as nurses, aids, radiologists and respiratory therapists, and non-clinical positions such as technology, marketing and finance.”

The applicant pool for health care is also changing according to Payne. As job opportunities continue to open, we are seeing trends such as former clinical health care workers moving into new non-clinical roles and interest from displaced candidates from other fields. “With AHACareerCenter.org, we can open the door to a much more specialized group of applicants. Today, we routinely recruit from other states and have even had interviews from candidates in other countries. And thanks to new Internet recruiting technologies and communication innovations such as Skype, the interviewing and selection process is more personal.”

For health care facilities such as Lakeland Regional, the need to attract and retain leading talent will continue to grow to ensure the highest standards of care possible are provided, concludes Mr. Burke. “The opportunity within the health care industry is tremendous and technology innovations are paving the way.”

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About AHA

The American Hospital Association (AHA) is a not-for-profit association of health care provider organizations and individuals that are committed to the health improvement of their communities. The AHA is the national advocate for its members, which includes more than 5000 hospitals, health care systems, networks, and other providers of care, and 38,000 individuals. Founded in 1898, the AHA provides education for health care leaders and is a source of information on health care issues and trends. For more information, visit the AHA Web site at www.aha.org.

About the National Healthcare Career Network and AHACareerCenter.org

Recognizing that critical staffing issues threaten hospitals' performance and quality of care, the American Hospital Association co-founded the National Healthcare Career Network (NHCN) with Boxwood and ASAE (American Society of Association Executives). By aligning more than 220 trade associations and professional societies on a common platform, NHCN provides health care organizations with access to a high quality talent pool of more than two million members, as well as vast data sources and career development-related tools housed in the affiliate associations. As part of the NHCN initiative, AHA Solutions manages AHACareerCenter.org, the lead online site matching health care employers with the highest qualified candidates. For more information, call 800-242-4677, email CareerCenter@aha.org, or visit www.ahacareercenter.org.

Sources:

¹ MD News.com "How to Deal with the Physician Shortage", Available online at: http://www.mdnews.com/news/2010_09/physician-shortage

² *Workforce 2015, Strategy Trumps Shortage*. Jan. 2010, American Hospital Association.