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ASSOCIATION FOR ADVANCING
PHYSICIAN AND PROVIDER RECRUITMENT

AAPPR WHITE PAPER

FROM HEALTHCARE'S FRONT LINES:

Industry Experts Sound Alarm on Concerning Physician Recruitment Trends in Coming Months

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From Health Care's Front Lines: Industry Experts Sound Alarm on Concerning Physician Recruitment Trends in Coming Months

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A recent focus group of the nation's leading physician and provider recruitment experts – conducted by the Association for Advancing Physician and Provider Recruitment (AAPPR) – convened to address common industry challenges and alarming trends organizations are encountering in the latest wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Uncovered were surprising themes of both operational and candidate pipeline challenges spotlighted by weary recruitment leaders and departments met with decreasing funds and limited resources. The group's consensus indicates significant changes are required to help address an already exacerbated and decreasing physician workforce; and, an imperative directive to health care operational leaders to maintain up-to-date recruitment market intelligence to quickly and successfully pivot both short- and long-term workforce strategies.

The impact of the latest pandemic surge, according to the group, will long be felt in future physician recruitment cycles as competing organizations expand efforts to help stabilize an uncertain physician supply and demand market.

Growing Deficits in Care Delivery Talent and the Pressure Testing of Mandatory COVID-19 Vaccine Requirements

According to earlier survey findings of the COVID-19 Impact & Implementation Report, published by AAPPR in the spring of 2021, physician candidate supplies were predicted to have no impact from the pandemic, providing strong confidence and a shortened reprieve for physician recruitment leaders at the onset of community COVID-19 vaccine availability and the earlier stages of the delta variant transmission. Fast forward a few months and as the delta variant's prominence and exponential growth throughout the nation ensued, the focus group unveiled unanticipated increases in recruitment anxiety as the increasing curve of infections and hospitalizations created renewed demands on an already exhausted national health care system and its provider talent recruitment leaders.



'The Great Resignation' – an industry agnostic and cliché phrase born from the growing wave of employment vacancies – showcased the peripheral elements that would soon directly impact physician recruitment. From significant nursing shortages to a mass exodus of employees leaving the health care industry, suddenly physician recruitment success did not directly translate to better odds of overall

success to an organization's expansion of services to the communities they serve. Instead, operational risk meetings, tiered escalation discussions, as well as critical task forces formed to address the looming deficits experienced in clinical care delivery and support.

Adding to a deepening concern around physician candidate pipelines were now the legal implications of organizational choices to mandate the COVID-19 vaccines. The focus group noted a surprising greater number of inquiries in their recruitment discussions, especially among candidates expressing interest in their opportunities. Furthermore, physician candidates displayed a stronger desire to understand the exemption options and the ultimate consequences of choosing whether to abide by the organization-imposed mandate. The focus group conceded their own organization's policy (moreover reported as haphazardly prepared) provided key insight as to how their organization enforces its top-driven directives.

Unhealthy Physician Work/Life Balance and Burnout Creates Limited Care for the Most Vulnerable Rural Communities

Organizations in the focus group exposed even tighter physician supplies, especially in rural areas, among both primary and specialty care. As more physicians opt for early retirement amid increasing burnout and an unhealthy work/life balance, the group remarked those organizations whose desire to continue to see primary care and post-pandemic service lines grow (e.g., pulmonary/critical care, behavioral health, neurology, gastroenterology, cardiology, and more), were now struggling with more physician vacancies than ever before as well as growing time-to-fill metrics. Most concerning were difficulties pushing approvals for replacements or unbudgeted needs whose unplanned physician vacancies have greater implications to financial revenues and strategic growth plans. The additional consequences of the unplanned needs now require successful health care organization leaders to be more vigilant in reviewing and revising their onboarding and retention plans to offset continued unanticipated turnover. This vigilance will require a careful cadence of examining at-risk providers, business continuity, and long-term succession planning.

In the latest physician and provider satisfaction report published by AAPPR, a reported 30% of physicians will retire between the ages of 60 to 65 . With over one in three respondents from the report considering early retirement because of physician burnout, recruitment leaders are auditing their practices' physician age demographics and sounding alarming fears of tenured physicians at their organizations expressing exhaustion and frustration. In validation of early retirement concerns, the national focus group also concurred with an earlier survey report that of over half of physician respondents in the market survey (56.72%) are considering or have considered changing employers. Rural recruitment leaders in the focus group went further to add greater worries over the nation's lack of capacity and financial viability to provide care in smaller populated communities with longer distances to urban care acute/ambulatory settings.



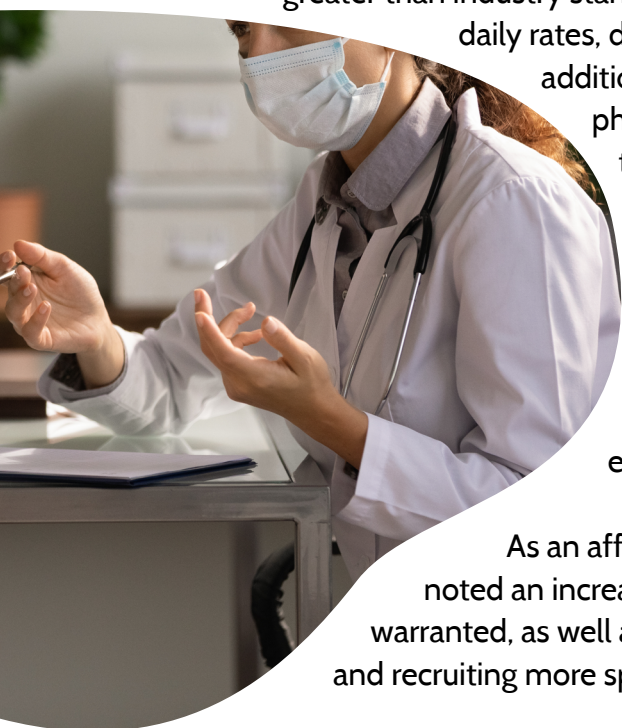
2nd COVID-19 Pandemic (Delta) Wave Reveals Growing Technology Gaps with Aged Physician Populations

In the effort to keep pace with the growth in telemedicine, organizations continue their rapid adoption of technologies to enable providers to deliver care using digital/virtual means and innovative on-line platforms. From greater patient access to enhancing revenue cycles and reimbursable virtual care visits, the group noted how the pandemic has upended some organizations' foray into the future -- besetting even the most non-innovative health care employer to adopt technologies to help deliver a better outcome of the volume to value equation. Echoing greater difficulty by technology adoption and increased population health focus, the group noted the surmounting challenges of technology-inhibited physicians who desire to stay in practice longer but struggle with advancing their technical acumen. In a post-pandemic world of everything that can move to virtual will, the past in-person relationship of physician-to-patient may forever be changed as advancements in biometric equipment and care delivery over a web camera become mainstream. Older physicians who struggle with the technical skills required in a digital physician-to-patient environment find themselves asking if now is a good time to retire.



Demands on Locum Tenens Rise as Shifts to Advanced Practice Providers (APPs) Help Offset Physician Demand

A reported 52% of health care organizations never stopped locum tenens utilization in the initial wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. The focus group reported a greater increase in utilization of locum tenens as employed physician position vacancies increased and timeframes to fill the permanent roles were stretched greater than industry standards in the past. Equally as alarming were leaders reporting higher daily rates, declining quality providers, and longer assignment times requiring additional expense – perhaps a premonition of a future with even less physician supply for direct employment (note lessons learned from the nursing shortage). Some of the focus group's recruitment leaders remarked the formation of non-exclusive partnerships with locum tenens organizations to help take advantage of economies of scale locums volume and preferred rates. In these instances, successful organizations with line of sight to their locum tenens utilization and costs noted the locums agency recruiters were well trained in advance to represent their organization and culture to better evaluate candidates when recruiting for an assignment.



As an affirmation to alternative solutions for provider care, the focus group noted an increase in advanced practice provider (APP) utilization when and where warranted, as well as the significant degree of difficulty now experienced in identifying and recruiting more specialized APPs.

Higher Recruitment Demands and Recruiter Turnover Call for Retention Incentives, Budget Increases, and Quick Process Efficiencies

Not all of the pandemic's impacts were negative, the focus group remarked a rapid evolution and adoption of recruitment process practices to help stem physician recruiter turnover, produce faster candidate interview scheduling, and reduce unnecessary travel and lodging expenses.

As open physician requisitions across the nation continue to surge, the focus group observed increases in burnout and turnover of existing physician recruiters at their organizations. Moreover, the struggle to retain top producers and recruitment operators who continue aligning requisition loads to industry-recognized physician recruiter bandwidth became more prevalent. What once was reported at the onset of COVID-19 as one in four organizations larger than 1,000 employees eliminating recruitment staff at the beginning of 2020 has now turned into a competitive race to recruit a unique and often considered niche expertise. Organizations report adding sourcing/physician candidate marketing investments toward their 2022 physician recruitment budgets amid continued struggles in hiring top talent. Some organizations and third-party search firms, report adding experienced and demonstrated physician recruiter headcount to help quickly ramp needed recruitment efforts at their competing organizations. As a result, physician and provider recruiters across the country are being lured, especially those with gender and ethnic diversity, for their consultative/advisory role to a healthcare organization's strategic leaders -- particularly with new remote work capabilities, together with, on average, more than two out of three recruitment leaders and recruiters becoming bonus eligible for incentive pay for the achievement of recruitment goals within a defined timeframe. Across the nation there are now more physician recruiter openings than the focus group could recall from years' past.

As health care organizations were tasked to do more with less, pandemic-induced technologies such as virtual interviewing and candidate self-scheduling became mainstream to help offset the lack of recruitment resources and costs. The migration to a virtual platform for evaluating candidates not only showcased a more streamlined approach for first-round interviews, but also paved a permanent path for helping reduce an organization's overall recruitment expense (i.e., cost-per-hire). The group also remarked how their organization now views this as part of their standard recruitment work to schedule a provider candidate faster, while saving the organization and the candidate time and money – all the while still providing a great candidate experience. The group of experts concurred that many candidates have come to embrace the ability to video interview first to help quickly evaluate further consideration of their candidacy. In contrast, organizations touted the ability to evaluate how a physician behaves in a digital environment to help better understand a candidate's technical prowess and comfort level. Faster and more automated software, such as those used for digital signatures, allowed speedy facilitation of the offer and employment agreement process without the distractions of chasing down signed documents. More so, some organizations have reported working on on-demand virtual practice and community tours to help elevate and showcase their organization's employment value proposition (EVP) earlier on in the recruitment process.



Nimble Organizations Who Maintain Pulse on Market Dynamics Will Prevail

The group of experts concluded the continued effectiveness of collaboration with one another across the nation as a unique advantage in helping better forecast physician recruitment trends and performance of multivariant solution testing.

The recent release of the annual comprehensive benchmark report for in-house physician and provider recruitment noted a continued rise in the physician shortage along with up-to-date key industry performance indicators such as searches per recruiter, provider turnover, time-to-fill per specialty, the most in-demand specialties, use of locum tenens and search firms, preferred provider incentives, compensation, and more. Of interesting note was the group's comment that full cycle recruitment continues to evolve with more organizations adding supporting roles (e.g., travel coordinators, sourcers, event planners, etc.) to help augment their recruitment team's expertise, stay focused on core competencies, and maintain high job satisfaction levels.

Equally as important as the benchmarking data is the continued monitoring and interpretation of the physician recruitment landscape. With routine advisory councils and committees, the focus group celebrated a deep network of colleagues within the Association for Advancing Physician and Provider Recruitment and the importance of certification in this unique space. Leaders expressed use of the network as soundboards to challenges/solutions and lends a competitive advantage to keeping health care operation leaders well-informed of additional insights and trends within the industry. The collaboration of innovative approaches and minds helps to instill high-functioning and high recruitment performance standards to help drive timely hiring, achievement of medical staff development plans, retention of exceptional talent and lessen the overall burnout of recruitment.



About AAPPR

The Association for Advancing Physician and Provider Recruitment (AAPPR) is a nationally recognized leader in health care provider recruitment, onboarding, and retention. For more than 30 years, AAPPR has empowered physician and advanced practice provider recruitment leaders to transform care delivery in their communities by providing best-in-class practices, up-to-date industry knowledge, and evolving innovative approaches for hiring, onboarding, and retaining exceptional clinical talent.



To learn more or to become an organizational member of AAPPR, please visit aappr.org/join-now.

Gratitude

A special thanks to AAPPR Board member, Allan Cacanindin, CPRP, CDR from Physician, Advanced Practice, and Executive Talent Acquisition at SSM Health for his thought leadership, design, and facilitation. Added thanks for our focus group contributors willing to share their thought leadership, insights, and experiences.

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- Lynne Peterson, Bluestone Physician Services - Senior Director & Ambassador, Provider Recruitment & Retention
- Donna Shelby, Citizens Memorial Healthcare - Director of Physician Recruitment
- Scott Simmons, Cleveland Clinic Health System - Senior Director, Professional Staff Affairs
- Ginger Canaday-Thompson, Holzer Health System - Physician Recruiter
- Sarah Krueger, MidMichigan Health - Senior Physician Recruiter
- Joni Adamson, MO Primary Care Association - Director of Recruitment & Workforce Development
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