



Increasing Employee Satisfaction Through Child Care Programs

By Fran Durekas

The healthcare industry is known for being a highly competitive, highly educated and innovative field that employs large numbers of women professionals. In fact, some have called healthcare a woman's economy due to the high numbers of female employees and consumers in the sector. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 78.7 percent of the positions in healthcare and social assistance are held by women.

With women comprising such a large percentage of the 16 million and growing U.S. healthcare workforce, how do organizations create a flexible and innovative working environment that attracts and retains these in-demand healthcare professionals while addressing their often complex work-life needs?

One solution that has proven to be effective for many leading organizations, from health insurance providers to hospitals and research universities, is to provide employees assistance with child care options. Whether financial assistance, on- or near-site child care or backup care programs, organizations providing such family care solutions find that they boost employee satisfaction, retention and productivity, and are a powerful recruitment tool as well.

Unique work-life needs of women professionals

Depending on the type of work, healthcare can be a stressful, 24-hour field. And with millions of women working in this field, the demands of family, pregnancy, breastfeeding, and child care can be a lot to juggle. While workers in other sectors may have more leeway to change schedules if their child is sick or their child care falls through, it's not so simple for employees in the healthcare field, particularly if they are caring for patients or scheduled to work a particular shift.

Providing flexible schedules can be a challenge for organizations with high turnover rates or staffing shortages, but studies show that flexibility is an important element of both attracting and retaining employees. Many healthcare organizations are addressing flexibility with paid-time-off programs as well as flexible schedules that allow workers, such as nurses, to compress their work week with longer shifts that give them additional time during the week to deal with family needs.

In addition to wanting – and needing – flexibility, the predominantly female healthcare workforce values work-life benefits that address child care needs. On-site child care, sick-child care, and backup care are key programs that can meet the needs of healthcare employees, particularly shift workers or single parents, while providing peace of mind and supporting employee engagement.

As part of an effort to develop a culture that promotes work/life balance, Chilton Hospital in New Jersey created a new — and key — employee benefit for its approximately 1,450 employees: on-site child care.

At Chilton, hospital-based doctors, nurses and other staff are often called to provide care in all situations, including snowstorms and the flooding brought on by Hurricane Irene. When inclement weather or natural disasters strike, Chilton's on-site child care facility extends its hours and keeps the lines of communication open with parents. "The center always does a great job keeping parents informed before and during these events. This makes it so much easier for our staff to concentrate on caring for their patients," says Julie McGovern, Vice President, Administration & Human Resources, Chilton Hospital.



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More than three-quarters (75%) of kindergarten and first grade teachers surveyed in a 2010 Knowledge Universe survey, "Early Childhood Education: A Benchmark for Long-Term Success," agreed that children who attend early learning programs not only have a distinct advantage throughout their academic careers, but are more likely to graduate from high school than those who did not.

These findings are consistent with a recent report from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, which revealed that children who receive high quality early childhood education perform better academically and cognitively at age 15.

An industry where education is highly valued

Not only does the healthcare field employ a large percentage of female workers, it also boasts higher levels of education and wages, especially when compared to other sectors, like retail or manufacturing. In addition to M.D.'s, the field employs professionals with bachelor's and associate degrees as well as other special certifications, making it one of the most credentialed industries in the country.

Not surprisingly, people working in healthcare professions tend to value education, which makes on-site and near-site child care programs that offer high-quality early childhood education particularly attractive to working parents. Research shows that young children who are exposed to early learning environments during their formative years of development (birth to five years) greatly benefit academically, socially, emotionally and physically for the rest of their lives.

One organization that provides its employees an educationally rich child care program for their children is Oregon Health & Science University (OHSU) in Portland, Oregon. OHSU has built a reputation as a world-class teaching hospital and research center, in part, by realizing the importance of attracting and retaining the best and the brightest. When OHSU asked its professors, scientists, staff, and students about what benefits matter most, they discovered that quality, near-

site child care ranked high on the list. As a teaching hospital, they knew they wanted to offer an education-based program, so they looked for a partner organization who could not only bring experience in early childhood education, but who could create a center that looked and felt like a part of OHSU.

The Healthy Starts Children's Center at OHSU not only complements the teaching and research university's culture of learning with a high-quality early childhood curriculum, the center is also certified as an Eco-Healthy child care facility, which aligns with OHSU's focus on sustainability and healthy eating.

Boosting employee productivity and satisfaction with high-quality child care solutions

The University of Rochester Medical Center (URMC) in Rochester, New York, is known for delivering health care that's as innovative as it is compassionate. But in order to better the lives of patients, families, and communities, URMC knows it must pay attention to the health and well-being of employees, too. "We're committed to identifying ways to support the work/life balance desired by our faculty and staff," says Doris Robinson, Senior Human Resources Representative for URMC.



Offering an on-site child development center was a key part of UPMC's strategy to enhance its workplace. "Child care is viewed as a critical service to strengthen recruitment and retention for residents, faculty, and staff," adds Robinson.

Like other healthcare organizations, Horizon Healthcare Services, Inc. has an employee population that is 80% female. As a result, Horizon supports its 5,200 workers with an innovative benefits program. This includes an on-site child care facility at Horizon's Newark headquarters as well as offering backup child care at its seven regional locations for times when usual care arrangements are disrupted. "We try to do what we can to lessen the burden for working mothers," states Alison Banks-Moore, Horizon's Chief Diversity Officer, EO/AA, Work /Life Initiatives. "The care benefits are a huge help for those who utilize them."

The ROI on the Horizon program is tangible — including increased productivity from fewer missed work days, longer tenured employees, and leveraging the programs to attract top talent.

Chilton Hospital also reports that its child care benefit has helped with recruitment and retention. "It's very difficult to hire doctors right now," says McGovern. "But I've been able to hire some great talent who valued our child care benefit." What's more, McGovern believes the staff who have children in the center stay with the hospital longer, because they are committed to the teachers and staff.

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How to determine if a child care benefit is right for your organization

There are a number of factors to consider when evaluating whether to provide child care benefits. Below is a set of questions to help get you started on designing family-friendly work/life programs that deliver improved employee satisfaction and productivity.

- Determine target population and employee needs:
 - Segmentation and propensity to "utilize" services
- Determine priorities
- Program Considerations:
 - On-site / Near-site care
 - Tuition discounts / subsidies, etc.
 - Backup care programs

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