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Human Resources Issues

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Speaker

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Presentation Available

<https://www.cahps.ahrq.gov/News-and-Events/Podcasts.aspx>

Lise Rybowski

Slide 1

The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality's CAHPS User Network welcomes you to the CAHPS podcast series on improving patient's experiences with care. I'm Lise Rybowski from the Severyn Group and I work on quality improvement projects for the CAHPS Yale team. I'm here today with Wendy Leebov, a nationally recognized expert in leadership effectiveness, staff retention, and the quality patient experience. Prior to her current role, Wendy served the Albert Einstein Healthcare Network in Philadelphia for over 20 years in roles such as VP of Human Resources and Associate VP of Organization and Staff Development.

Slide 2

In our earlier podcasts in this series we talked about why improving patient experience is so important and began discussing some of the factors that are important to any quality improvement effort, such as organizational culture and leadership. Today we're going to highlight another one of those factors: human resources and personnel. Wendy, thanks for joining us today.

Wendy Leebov

My pleasure and thanks, Lise, for inviting me. I have been a longtime advocate for the key roles HR plays in advancing quality improvement. And that's what I'd like to discuss with you today.

Slide 3

As I see it, there are three ways human resources can drive and support quality improvement through your organization: (1) by behaving as role models of quality improvement by being movers and shakers for the sake of quality improvement; (2) by aligning human resource policies and practices so that they drive quality improvement forward; and (3) by providing partnership and support to leaders to help them with learning, hardwiring and accountability so their QI initiatives take hold and hold the gains. Let me say a bit about each.



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Slide 4

How can HR serve as QI role models? By engaging HR staff and defining and making explicit the mission and vision for HR, first of all, and then engaging human resource staff in consistent mission driven quality improvement processes for human resources itself. So being a role model of quality improvement in action throughout HR. Now this involves using a balanced scorecard to hold ourselves in HR accountable, looking particularly at our business processes, our internal customer perspective on human resource services, the financial perspective of how we're contributing to the financial health of the organization, and how we're contributing to learning and growth throughout the organization. And by using the feedback from these scorecard methods, spark quality improvement initiatives to make human resources all that more effective.

Slide 5

The second strategy for enhancing HR's contribution to the advancement of QI throughout the organization involves aligning human resource policies and practices to actually support quality improvement. Now I'm talking about HR's role in creating organizational culture. By culture, I mean the way we do things here, and human resources has the power to define many of the ways people do things in your organization.

Slide 6

Your human resources team has an opportunity to rethink everyday HR practices to ensure that they align with and advance QI processes and results. Which practices help to comprise your culture that also HR can influence? Leadership, measurement, process design, performance management and accountability, training, reward and recognition, and many more. And the fact is HR is influential on all of these. So you can have those various practices in your organizations working in cross purposes or you can line them up so that they are all pushing managers, leaders, employees in the same direction and that's what I mean by aligning HR practices to support and drive quality improvement.

Slide 7

Now what are the key HR policies and practices that need to be aligned with a quality improvement driven culture? Hiring, new employee orientation, job descriptions, expectations and performance review, performance management and accountability, training, annual performance review, reward and recognition, employee engagement processes, and employee communication. And I'd like to say just a bit about how each of these practices can be aligned so that they advance quality improvement.

Slide 8

Starting with hiring. It's very important to standardize a behavior-based interview process using competency-based questions, a standard form, and a standard peer engagement process.

By standardizing this process you can improve the quality and gain some consistently positive results. And this process needs to be used in pre-screening job candidates. HR needs to train managers to consistently use the standardized process and the result is reducing variation and hiring practices so that everybody is using evidence-based behavioral interviewing to screen candidates and make hiring decisions. And in terms of hiring, your methods need to screen for employees who fit with the organization's values and the priority on achieving excellence through steady improvement.

Also, HR needs to advocate strongly against hiring warm bodies when there are job openings. People need to have the patience to hire for quality or everyone in the organization pays, and you're working against your commitment to quality improvement.

Slide 9

Now think about new employee orientation, typically also in the domain of human resources. The new employee orientation strategy needs to orient new folks to your quality improvement commitment. It needs to feature selected QI achievement that demonstrates the kinds of initiatives that make this a better organization all the time.

You would need in your orientation to walk through the organization's QI infrastructure and approach so people understand the prominence of quality improvement as an everyday approach to making this a better organization. And finally, in new employee orientation, clarify how every employee is key, not just the people in the quality department.

Slide 10

Now consider job descriptions, expectations and performance review, because these also are practices within the domain of human resources you'll need in order to advance your competency-based job descriptions, job-specific expectations about what people are expected to do daily and consistently at what level of quality in order to be deemed as doing a great job.

HR needs to help managers clarify and, this is really important, raise expectations when processes are improved or changed. Frequently they're quality improvement teams that achieve wonderful results in the short run, but then job expectations of people aren't changed and the result is that employees revert back to the old process. So HR has a pivotal role in helping managers clarify and change and raise expectations when there are quality improvements that need to be implemented over the long haul. And finally HR needs to make sure that the performance review form and process aligns with the core values of the organization and evaluates employees based on their job-specific expectations.

Slide 11

Now how about training? Typically HR plays a critical role if not a leadership role in providing the non-clinical training throughout the organization. And key wide training needs to be integrated into skill building offerings – skills such as meeting facilitation, decision making, situation analysis, flow charting and process improvement skills. The HR department needs to measure the results of training and use them to drive improvement in the training process itself. HR needs to provide technical assistance to managers who need to train employees to change their behavior so that they can implement and hardwire process improvements.

And finally HR needs to provide training and coaching on employee engagement, performance management and accountability to managers so they can be effective in engaging their teams and so that they will help their teams speak the truth about quality and work together on achieving improvements.

Slide 12

And very key in terms of aligning HR practices is the whole area of performance management and accountability. HR needs leaders to initiate courageous conversations with executives when there are accountability weaknesses running through the organization and holding the organization back from it being the best that it can be.

HR frequently can institute a system of "360 surveys" that provide executives and leaders at all levels in peer evaluations and evaluations by their direct reports as well, around being role models of quality in the way they approach their job. HR needs to educate leaders and all managers on the whole concept of zero tolerance and

what qualifies in your organization. There has to be some level below which people cannot drop or you are dropping the standards for everyone and interfering with your quality aspirations.

HR needs to institute a system of planned performance conversations between managers and their high, middle and low performers. And annual reviews are not sufficient, there needs to be much more regular and ongoing coaching. Also, the HR can make the annual performance review process meaningful instead of a painful exercise that produces very unsubstantial feedback to employees and misses the opportunity to help them improve their performance. And finally, related to performance management and accountability, human resources needs to empower managers to use progressive discipline successfully and quickly for the sake of quality decisions.

Slide 13

Then HR is also pivotal in the reward and recognition strategies typical for your organization. And I feel strongly that your mix of methods needs to ensure that there are performance-based not just longevity-based awards and pay. You know I can't tell you the number of times I've been to employee recognition dinners where the worst thorn in the organization's side won the biggest color TV set because they'd been in the organization for 35 years. That's an example of an unaligned, misaligned recognition practice that does not advance—in fact, it flies in the face of—your commitment to quality.

So HR needs to initiate performance-based recognition and ideally pay and/or incentives for improvements, not just for status quo. And HR needs to provide managers with the resources, the training and expectations for performance-based recognition.

Slide 14

Then finally HR has a pivotal role in employee communication and engagement processes. Not only does HR typically manage the employee satisfaction measurement process, but more recently it's typical that HR is monitoring employee engagement.

And if HR's focus is on satisfaction and not engagement, too often in my view, human resources looks for more benefits to offer, more time off, more amenities. And sometimes working on satisfaction directly can produce decisions that even fly in the face of quality improvement. A much better focus for HR, a much more powerful focus, is on employee engagement which, P.S., is the number one employee satisfier as well. And employee engagement is a prerequisite to teams sharing responsibility for making process improvements and having a stake in achieving and hardwiring the results.

As HR professionals, you're also closely involved with employee communications: newsletters, posters, emails, creating message points when executives communicate with employees. And you can ensure that these address quality improvement efforts and results and in no way get in the way or muddy the message that a commitment to quality involves.

Slide 15

Now all of these HR policies and practice mean nothing unless you educate managers well to embrace and use them consistently. And this makes it very important for HR to have a system for screening for and spot checking management competency and compliance with your policies that drive quality performance and results.

Slide 16

The last opportunity that human resources has to advance quality, in my view, involves providing support to managers throughout the organization. How? Human resource staff need to move from being technical experts on the transactions of human resources; compensation, employee relations, benefits and the like to being business partners, consultants with department managers, helping them to set expectations, providing coaching and help with performance management, helping managers prepare meaningful performance reviews and make quality-driven compensation decisions and engaging with department teams in departmental QI initiatives to identify ways HR can help with hardwiring improvements that these departments are making.

And of course, HR can provide support by initiating organization development and organizational change expertise as the organization is moving to engage everyone in living the mission and values of the organization.

Slide 17

Now all of these opportunities are grounded in the need for some mindset shifts for many human resource staff. In my view, leaders and staff need to move from a transactional focus to a strategic focus. Instead of thinking we've always done it this way, think: it's a new day and how can we do it better?

Instead of posing obstacles to people that makes them feel paralyzed about moving on accountability issues and giving all the reasons why you can't, switching to the mindset how can we get the results we need from each and every employee? There's an important need to shift from directing managers to partnering with managers, from focusing on implementing policy to helping people be creative for the sake of quality. And also, not waiting until managers ask for help, but actively monitoring scores and initiating support and consulting services with managers, serving as true business partners to help every manager manage their employees, their workforce, much more effectively.

Slide 18

So HR has the power to support and advance quality improvement, the process and the results by being role models of QI, by aligning HR policies and practices to support quality improvement and providing partnership and support to leaders to help them with learning, hardwiring and accountability.

Slide 19

The fact is human resources is powerful and visible. Use your power and visibility to advance quality for the sake of patients, families, your communities and the entire health care team.

Thank you and I do hope this proves useful to you.

Lise Rybowski**Slide 20**

Thanks so much, Wendy, for sharing your expertise with us today. I really think you've offered us a lot of great ideas for managing human resources in a way that supports an improved experience for both employees as well as the patients. In our next podcast, Marjie Harbrecht of HealthTeamWorks is going to talk to us about teamwork. You can download all of the podcasts in this series at the CAHPS user network Web site at www.cahps.ahrq.gov. That's w-w-w.c-a-h-p-s.a-h-r-q.g-o-v [www.cahps.ahrq.gov].

Slide 21

For more information on this and other factors important to QI, check out the CAHPS Improvement Guide on the Web site. This guide has a lot of useful information from planning a QI initiative to specific strategies that

you can use. You can also access other quality improvement resources, such as case studies detailing the use of CAHPS survey results for quality improvement.

The CAHPS User Network also offers free technical assistance and can be reached by calling the CAHPS help line at 1-800-492-9261 or via email at cahps1@ahrq.gov. That's c-a-h-p-s, the number one, at a-h-r-q.g-o-v [www.cahps.ahrq.gov]. We thank you for joining us and we look forward to bringing you more stories and experiences from users of CAHPS surveys.

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