

Four important trends shaping tomorrow's workforce

By Terri Gaffney, MPA, RN

The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010 prompted the most sweeping healthcare changes in the past 50 years. These changes are empowering providers and consumers to redefine how care is delivered.

Today, health care is no longer contained mostly within hospital walls. Instead, we're seeing a strategic shift to deliver complex, dynamic healthcare services to the right patient, at the right time, in the right setting. Nurses are being called on to navigate through a changing environment, embrace new and emerging roles, master emerging technologies, engage patients in new venues, and coordinate care across teams and populations.

To find success in tomorrow's workforce, we not only must understand the nature of the changes taking place; we also must acquire new skills and competencies and exploit emerging opportunities to deliver greater value. As leadership guru Peter Drucker said, "Problem solving, however necessary, does not produce results. It prevents damage. Exploiting opportunities produces results."

Among the changes shaping today's health care, four trends are especially significant—consumerism, digital health, big data, and care coordination.

Consumerism

Initially, the drive toward consumerism was fueled by shifting healthcare costs from employers to consumers. As consumers shouldered more of the financial

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burden, they assumed more responsibility for their healthcare choices, becoming better informed in the process. A recent survey of healthcare consumers found that 64% actively seek information about their health condition instead of relying solely on their healthcare provider. Today, educated consumers are demanding high-quality care delivered at easy access points.

Consumerism is driving healthcare organizations to find innovative ways to meet consumer demands. To provide care through easy access points, some hospitals have partnered with retail clinics; others are offering extended clinic hours or delivering services in nontradi-

tional settings, such as soup kitchens. Still others have established online health portals where consumers can view their medical records, make appointments, and communicate with providers via e-mail. Some healthcare organizations have embraced telehealth services; video consultations are expected to grow from 5.7 million in 2014 to 130 million in 2018.

The consumerist movement offers opportunities for nurses not only to return to their roots of community-oriented care but also to develop new care models. Using innovation and creativity, we can explore the intersection between health outcomes and patient experience, driving greater value by creating unique patient experiences.

Digital health

As we're all aware, technology is spurring healthcare innovations. Fitness trackers, introduced just a few years ago, are worn by about 20% of consumers today. Adopting the notion of gamification (applying game-design thinking to nongame applications), organizations are harnessing consumers' competitive spirit to drive behavior change.

Such advances in digital health are just one of several disruptive influences transforming health care. Through mobile apps, remote monitoring, wearable technologies, three-dimensional printing, and robotics, digital applications and devices are reducing costs, improving outcomes, and increasing consumer satisfaction. The transformative capacity of these technologies is

still emerging, and nurses can help target these strategies where they make the most sense. By understanding and embracing digital health, we can anticipate how emerging technologies may change practice and prepare for these challenges.

Big data

The ability to turn data into wisdom is becoming a game changer in the healthcare arena. The capacity to aggregate, store, combine, and analyze large data sets (known as big data) has increased with advances in digital data and computing. Bringing data together in intelligent and actionable ways offers great opportunity for improving quality of care and patient outcomes. For hospitals, it's now a strategic priority.

While healthcare organizations see the value in emerging analytics, integrating clinical data into easily usable systems remains a challenge, particularly with a shortage of managerial and leadership talent in this area. As nurses, we must become experts at managing information and assume leadership roles in this transformative space.

Care coordination

Care has been transitioning from inpatient to ambulatory care settings over the past 10 years. Today 65% of healthcare services are delivered in ambulatory settings. As healthcare organizations strive to provide care to the right patient, at the right time, in the right setting, coordinating care to reduce costs, improve outcomes, and ensure safety has become an even more pressing priority.

Organizing patient care activities and sharing information among all participants involved in the patient's care lie at the heart of care coordination. Using a holistic approach, nurses are guided by patient needs and preferences when coordinating

care across settings and among providers. Yet our leadership in this area remains undervalued. We need to highlight our expertise in customer insight, patient experience, and effective and efficient use of healthcare resources.

Finding success with the four forces

Given the pace of change in today's healthcare environment, staying informed of these four crucial trends—and preparing to embrace them—can pose a challenge. Consumer demands have given rise to new expectations. Digital health, big data, and care coordination offer the chance to craft elegant solutions to complex issues. To success-

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fully leverage emerging opportunities to create new value, nurses must build on the competencies of leadership, patient-centered care, systems-based practice, informatics and technology, and teamwork. Lifelong learning and skill development are key strategies to finding success in tomorrow's workforce. We must take advantage of every opportunity to communicate the unique perspective we provide. By embracing creativity, innovation, and customer insights, we can redefine health care.

As nurses, we're well-positioned to assert our leadership, shape practice, and ensure the human component stays at the forefront of health care. As patient needs become more com-

plex and care environments more dynamic, not only must we be problem solvers; we also must influence decisions and leverage opportunities to produce results. ■

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