

# Our Clinicians Are The Heart of AHCH

In the ever-changing world of healthcare, home health agencies have become accustomed to evolving their business models; Not only to remain compliant (and solvent), but to improve care and reduce costs. It's time to continue the evolution and aim for "happier caregivers." (Robert Love, Triple Aim Needs Fourth Target: Clinician Experience, 2017).

The national narrative on the Triple Aim is evolving into a movement to be modified to the Quadruple Aim. While

the three dimensions of the Triple Aim (improve care, reduce costs, enhance the patient experience) are worthy of pursuit, a growing body of thought leaders believe that there is a critical component missing: enhancing the clinicians' experience, or clinical satisfaction.

I happen to completely agree with this concept – as does our entire leadership team. It is a movement, however, that requires the involvement of everyone in healthcare, not just the formal leaders.

There are many reasons to focus on the work experience of our clinicians, including but not limited to job satisfaction, patient satisfaction, employee retention and just better business. For me these are all important, but at the core of it I believe we need to create a workplace culture where clinicians are professionally fulfilled while enjoying self-care and life balance.

One of the pioneers of this concept, Herb Keller of Southwest Airlines, set an unprecedented example when he proclaimed that the people in an organization are more important than the customers. "If your people are happy, they are much more likely to make your customers happy," he argued. Novel at the time, Keller's management philosophy is now widely adopted at top companies, *but not often in healthcare*.

For so many reasons we must do better.

This has been a year of significant change, particularly for the Intermittent program at AHCH. But the reach of change has touched the entire agency. In the face of value-based purchasing and looming industry changes, our Intermittent business model needed to evolve drastically to address clinical outcomes, star ratings and financial performance.

We have advanced the effort with a sincere eye on balancing the business, clinical and clinician needs – but we need a stronger focus on doing everything possible to ensure the success of our entire clinical team.

## A Message From Our President Kenneth Albert III RN, Esq



In late June, a letter signed by the senior management team (SMT) was sent to all members of our professional clinical team. In it, we wrote the following: "*While it's true that it takes all types to make a team function, and that all AHCH employees and volunteers are valued, the reality is that our mission is rooted in patient care. Without clinicians like you who embody the values that AHCH has become known for, our organization as it stands today would not exist.*" Not only does our SMT believe this, but I have seen many examples of non-clinical staff and volunteers identifying with the responsibility of making our clinical team successful.

Another very important reason to focus on clinician satisfaction is our need to recruit and retain the brightest and best nurses, therapists, aides, physicians and nurse practitioners. The Maine Nursing Action Coalition recently completed a significant study of our nursing workforce and the picture is concerning. We have hundreds of nursing vacancies across Maine and by 2025 the shortage is forecast to be 3,200. This is largely a problem of age. Thirty percent of Maine's full-time nurses are age 55 to 64. Some 12,000 are age 45 and over, compared to 7,764 nurses age 44 and under. Maine graduates roughly 900 nurses a year with a nursing faculty that has gone from 169 positions to 130. Further, 32 percent of full-time educators are over age 60.

We know that we need to incentivize the profession to grow our numbers, but it is not only about salaries. The Quadruple Aim suggests that for all members of the professional clinical team we must also provide enhanced learning opportunities; inspirational supervisors/managers; pathways for growth; employee engagement on both personal and professional levels; increased flexibility; self-care strategies; traditional and innovative benefits; and the right technology and equipment to meet the demands of clinical practice.

For clinicians reading this, I am sincerely interested to know if you agree with this list. Will such a focus truly enhance the culture at AHCH so that

professionals will want to be part of our team? Does the list miss anything? I would sincerely appreciate a note, email, or conversation about your thoughts on the matter.

I would be remiss if I didn't focus on our patients as well. In a White Paper published by Press Ganey, *The Critical Role of Patient Satisfaction in Attracting and Retaining Home Health Care Workers*, it was written that "it is especially important to highlight the most positive aspect of home health care: the impact patients (and families) have on home health care employee satisfaction." Caring for home care and hospice patients in the home tends to provide clinicians "a tremendous sense of pride, often more so than in other fields."

We clearly have a clinical workforce that takes pride in the quality of care and service our agency provides. Mary Newberry, Director at Riverside Home Health Care, is quoted by Press Ganey: "It is really pretty simple: The happier your employee, the better your patients are going to be taken care of. The better your patients are taken care of, that boosts the happiness factor and satisfaction in the employee again." Also well-studied is the association between employee satisfaction and patient/family perceptions of quality of care in both home care and hospice. Clearly patient and employee satisfaction is a synergistic dynamic.

In closing, I would like to provide all employees with another quote from the letter that went to our clinical team in late June: "*As we've moved through change, we have not lost sight of the people we serve and our organization's mission. And while there has been much attention paid to positioning AHCH for a bright, successful future, we have most certainly not lost sight of those who are paramount in AHCH being able to fulfill its mission – the skilled, talented and dedicated clinicians like you.*" The movement surrounding the Quadruple Aim acknowledges that we must take care of our clinicians so they can take care of their (our) patients.

I seek the assistance of *all* employees – including our clinical team – to make sure that we do everything within our means to advance the Quadruple Aim at AHCH.