



2018 DMEC Hospital System Best Practices

WHITE PAPER

*Managing Maternity Accommodation and
an Aging Workforce within Hospital Systems*





OVERVIEW

Hospitals and healthcare systems, like many other organizations, face several challenges related to managing aging workforce populations, alongside younger workers starting families and entering the workforce.

With hospital systems' unique staffing requirements, the challenge of working with these groups revolves around simultaneously maintaining a present and efficient workforce while allowing individuals accommodations based on their specific needs.

This white paper features:

- a review of workforce trends within hospitals and healthcare settings;
- an overview of federal laws that apply in these situations;
- suggestions for effective accommodations that support aging work populations;
- options for pregnancy and maternity leave accommodations; and
- important considerations for employers.

This white paper will shed light on the scope of these workforce challenges and provide effective ways to accommodate the unique work populations in hospital settings.

CHALLENGES OF A HEALTHCARE WORKFORCE

Women comprise 80% of the healthcare workforce in the United States¹. This presents unique challenges to health systems that must balance the needs of all age groups from those just entering the workforce, to the “sandwich generation”, and finally, to the aging nurses and healthcare providers.

- **Millennials:** Millennials comprise more than one-third of the U.S. labor force and are the largest generation currently in the workplace². Born between 1981 and 1996, Millennials rank achieving work-life integration as more important than all other job-related goals.³ Millennials are also far more likely to take parental leave than former generations⁴, leaving potentially large gaps in an industry dominated by women.
- **Generation X:** Born between 1965 and 1980, Generation X is also known as the “sandwich generation”. Typically, they are raising their own children, while also caring for their aging parents

¹ Advisory Board. August 2014. *Women Make up 80% of Health Care Workers – But Just 40% of Executives*. Retrieved from <https://www.advisory.com/daily-briefing/blog/2014/08/women-in-leadership>

² DMEC. September 2018. *Riding the Demographic Wave: Millennials and Mental Health*. Retrieved from <http://dmecc.org/2018/09/14/riding-the-demographic-wave-millennials-and-mental-health/>

³ PRNewswire. January 2018. *World Services Group Study Finds Millennial Professionals Favor Work-Life Integration Over Building Wealth*. Retrieved from <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/world-services-group-study-finds-millennial-professionals-favor-work-life-integration-over-building-wealth-300576980.html>

⁴ EY. 2015. *Global Generations: A Global Study on Work-Life Challenges Across Generations*. Retrieved from [https://www.ey.com/Publication/wLUAssets/EY-global-generations-a-global-study-on-work-life-challenges-across-generations/\\$FILE/EY-global-generations-a-global-study-on-work-life-challenges-across-generations.pdf](https://www.ey.com/Publication/wLUAssets/EY-global-generations-a-global-study-on-work-life-challenges-across-generations/$FILE/EY-global-generations-a-global-study-on-work-life-challenges-across-generations.pdf)

and managing their careers. While men are involved in caregiving responsibilities, an estimated 66% of caregivers are female, and female caregivers may spend as much as 50% more time providing care than male caregivers.⁵ This has important implications for a female-dominated workforce.

- **Baby Boomers:** Born between 1946 and 1964, many Baby Boomers are either retirement age or quickly approaching retirement age; however, many are staying in the workforce longer. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the labor force has seen a dramatic increase in the number of aging workers remaining in the workforce, with individuals between 65-74 increasing to 83.4%.⁶ Older workers are among the most skilled, productive, and reliable employees;⁷ however, they are at greater risk for health issues and longer disability durations⁸. This can present challenges in healthcare settings where the average age of a nurse is 50 years old.

FEDERAL LEAVE AND ACCOMMODATION LAWS

There are numerous legal and accommodation obligations that employers need to consider and apply to their workforce. Employers need to know the applicable laws for their organizations. If state and federal laws conflict, employers should work with the employee to provide the best option for the employee's specific situation. Both federal leave and accommodation laws need to be addressed as part of a compliant program, including:

- **The Pregnancy Discrimination Act (1978):** The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) defines discrimination under this act as "because of or on the basis of pregnancy, childbirth, or related medical conditions." Women affected by pregnancy, childbirth, or related medical conditions should be treated the same for all employment-related

purposes, including receipt of benefits under fringe benefit programs, as other persons not so affected but similar in their ability or inability to work.

- **The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA):** The FMLA allows eligible employees up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave from their positions for serious health-related issues including pregnancy.
- **The Americans with Disability Act (ADA):** The ADA states that employers cannot discriminate against an employee with a defined disability as long as the employee can perform their job with reasonable accommodations. Pregnancy-related illness (i.e., gestational diabetes) is protected under the ADA.

It is essential to understand how to interpret these laws as they relate to the workforce. In addition, company support of employees has also been shown to improve loyalty, decrease risk of injury, and reduce litigation potential.

Employers need to engage in a proactive and interactive process with employees. The following are key steps in that process:

- Request documentation of job restrictions and limitations from the employees' healthcare providers when needed.
- Ask employees for suggestions to assist in identifying a reasonable accommodation for their current position.
- Educate employees about their options and what can be done to accommodate specific needs.
- Follow up with employees to see if accommodations are effective, and if not, work with them to find possible alternatives.

5 Family Caregiver Alliance. 2015. *Women and Caregiving: Facts and Figures*. Retrieved from <https://www.caregiver.org/women-and-caregiving-facts-and-figures>

6 Bureau of Labor Statistics. May 2017. *Older Workers: Labor Force Trends and Career Options*. Retrieved from <https://www.bls.gov/careeroutlook/2017/article/older-workers.htm>

7 American Society on Aging. *Issues, Impacts, and Implications of an Aging Workforce*. Retrieved from <https://www.asaging.org/blog/issues-impacts-and-implications-aging-workforce>

8 DMEC. March 2018. *Riding the Demographic Wave: Boom and Burst*. Retrieved from <http://dmecc.org/2018/03/07/riding-demographic-wave-boom-burst/>

OPTIONS FOR A HOSPITAL SYSTEM WORKFORCE

Understanding the unique needs of your employees is essential to accommodating and retaining an effective workforce, now and for the future. In turn, creating a supportive environment where employees can be forthright about accommodation and absence needs is not only beneficial for the employee, but also for the employer. The likelihood of employee retention and loyalty increases with organizational support, while risk of injury, extended disability leaves, and possible litigation all decrease.

While it's important to have an effective return-to-work program in place when leaves become necessary, the following modifications and accommodations can be implemented to increase the likelihood that employees are able to stay at work.

AGING WORKFORCE MODIFICATIONS

Employers can take a proactive approach to job modification by suggesting adjustments such as the ones below to create a safer, more effective work environment:

- Have employees use smart phones as memory tools and to provide reminders.
- Encourage employees to take small and more frequent breaks.
- Promote a healthy lifestyle (e.g., diet, exercise, adequate sleep).
- Provide ergonomic devices when needed.
- Allow flexible scheduling and temporary work assignments when necessary.

PREGNANCY, MATERNITY, AND LEAVE ACCOMMODATIONS

- Create intermittent or flexible scheduling arrangements (e.g., flexible arrival/departure times, shorter shifts, etc.).
- Offer lifting/ergonomic aids or temporary



reassignment of duties. Provide physical and policy accommodations as needed (e.g., relaxed dress code, stools for breaks, telecommuting, etc.).

CONCLUSION

The ultimate goal for employers is to provide a safe, effective, and productive environment for both employees and patients. Allowing job accommodations when necessary and creating a more open, communicative atmosphere, all help to make employees feel valued and appreciated.

Mature and young workers alike contribute to today's workforce. Providing a healthy work environment so that employees can perform to their optimal ability while at work or upon returning to work is a win-win for employers and employees.



The Disability Management Employer Coalition (DMEC) is the only association dedicated to providing focused education, knowledge, and networking for absence and disability professionals. Through its education programs, DMEC delivers trusted strategies, tools, and resources to minimize lost work time, improve workforce productivity, and maintain legally compliant absence and disability programs.



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