

**Assessment of Strategies to Retain Experienced Technical and Professional**  
**Healthcare Personnel after Retirement Age**

**Summary and Implications\***

**Background**

The healthcare system in the United States faces a critical shortage of skilled workers, particularly in nursing and other allied health fields, such as radiology, respiratory therapy, physical therapy, and laboratory technicians. This worker shortage is due in large part to the aging of the baby boom generation, as a significant segment of the healthcare workforce nears retirement age. While there are a number of efforts underway to expand the pool of potential candidates for such positions, there is a concern that recruitment efforts will be insufficient to meet the projected demand.

In 2006, the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration awarded a grant to the State of Maryland Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation, in partnership with Johns Hopkins Hospital, Cedars-Sinai Health System and Hospital Corporation of America, to conduct focus group research among technical and professional healthcare workers who were either approaching retirement or who had recently retired. The primary objective of this research was to determine strategies that could be implemented to improve the retention of nurses and allied health workers who are approaching retirement.

**Findings**

Over the course of approximately four months, twenty-one (21) focus groups were conducted among four segments of mature healthcare workers over the age of 50. Some of the findings are as follows:

- Many current healthcare workers want or need to continue to work because: (1) they find their work to be challenging and personally rewarding; (2) they realize they need to accumulate more retirement savings before they can afford to retire; or (3) the cost of health care coverage requires them to continue working.
- Many mature workers do not feel valued or appreciated by the hospitals they work in, both in terms of compensation and treatment in the workplace.
- Mature workers perceive that hospitals give younger workers preferential treatment and have few retention efforts in place for older workers.

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\* This Summary and Implications was prepared by the Employment and Training Administration and does not necessarily reflect the study authors' opinions.

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## Employment and Training Occasional Paper 2008-04 Assessment of Strategies to Retain Experienced Technical and Professional Healthcare Personnel after Retirement Age



- Although many may want to continue working, the possibility of injury or loss of physical capacity due to aging, as well as the mental demands of their jobs, often dictate how long older employees will be able to continue working.
- Mature workers do not feel that hospitals are doing enough to make part-time employment available or more attractive. In addition, some hospitals do not offer health care benefits to their part-time staff, and, for hospitals that do, the out-of-pocket costs for health insurance are higher for part-time workers.

### Policy Implications

Some incentives or conditions revealed by the study that employers could offer that would encourage older employees to continue working include:

- Financial incentives, such as salary adjustments for experience, retention bonuses, or an increase in employer matching contributions to retirement accounts.
- Flexible scheduling, such as part-time employment, reduced schedules, or paid time off.
- Better health care benefits for part-time workers.

According to the report, one very strong theme that emerged from the focus groups was the feeling among many older workers of not being valued, appreciated, respected, or not being paid at a level commensurate with their years of experience. The report encourages hospitals to find ways to show older employees that their experience and years of service are valued.

