

The Elder Care Work Environment

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People are living longer in longer and for now this has led to a larger elder population in many of the worlds developed countries. With so many elders, many of these countries are seeing shortages in elder care workers. These jobs often are picked up by immigrant workers, which brings with it more problems, such as cultural misalignment, and biased behaviors among both the care givers and the care receivers. However, in time, as the elder population levels out, the elder care worker industry is further advanced, and cultural separations are diminished, the working environment will progress to be better for both patients and workers.

Currently, much of the North American health care system is undervalued in a way comparable to the American education system. Lack of standardization, low pay, and high stress work environments are just some of the reasons that the industry is seeing a shortage of workers. This has also led to increase in immigrant workers within the industry that I'll talk about later. As big of a problem as this is, they're things that are not only fixable, but things that will be fixed over time passively by technological advancements and actively by people that don't want to age in the same environment, as these issues are becoming more and more publicized. In any industry with a shortage of workers, the two most common ways to fix it, by any economical standard, are to either increase incentive to join that workforce, or decrease the hinderances of joining it. In most cases this means lower required qualifications and higher pay. In a medical industry like this though, qualifications can only be dropped so far before the consequences become far to too risky. So, higher pay is the next best course of action to solve this issue. Some do feel that cheaper labor in the form of immigrants is accomplishing the same thing, but with so many other industries relying on the same thing, I doubt this will last. Eventually pay

will increase, both to the workers and to the facilities themselves, greatly increasing motivation to work in this industry and helping to build a better work environment.

With more money to the facilities comes other benefits. Technological advances are making the job easier all the time. A job that used to require multiple people can now be accomplished by one or none with the assistance of machinery and robots. What used to require a person to monitor regularly, can now be monitored remotely, or even automatically by a computer. Advances like these will only continue not only as technology does, but also as motivation to develop these advancements grows. Many people in my generation and the generations adjacent are seeing the elder health care environment as something they are likely to be a part of and want to build a better one, both for themselves and their loved ones.

These advancements go beyond technological though. Logistical advancements that increase efficiency can have a similar effect in allowing one person to do their job easier, decreasing overall stress of the job. Standardization throughout the industry, and related industries, like health insurance, would greatly assist in this aspect, and will continue to advance but perhaps not as much as everyone would like.

Culture and value conflicts among workers and patients is another issue that I believe will correct itself over time. Currently we see a lot of bias here. Racism and ageism can cause major conflicts between people, especially when health is concerned. A patient may deny care because they don't like the person offering it. A care giver may deny care because they don't like the patient. On top of this, America is a very individualistic society, making it very hard for elders to give up their independence, a primary requirement of elder care. That mixed with a very ageist society only further discourages people from entering the elder health care industry. But these problems have only decreased over time. Laws are being passed to include and protect more and more people all the time, and eventually society will

adopt these views culturally as well. The abolishment of slavery was met with much resistance but supporters are now part of a small and ever shrinking minority. As progressive views spread, communication between patient and care giver will only increase in a positive way. Perhaps by the time my generation is the elder generation, biased views will be a non-issue within the health care industry.

The elder health care system, specifically in America, is certainly filled with issues. A worker shortage, cause largely by a poor work environment, is becoming a bigger and bigger problem each day. But over time, I believe that pay will increase, biased views will diminish, and technological advancements will decrease the hinderances and increase the motivations of entering this industry which will be benefit society as a whole. It may be long overdue, but the elder health care industry will continue to progress for both patients and caregivers.