

CASE STUDY : ALEXANDRA HEALTH

Work-Life, a key component of Talent Management: Managing Older Employees at Khoo Teck Puat Hospital and Jurong Medical Centre

Introduction

Alexandra Health (AH) is the healthcare cluster currently managing two entities: Khoo Teck Puat Hospital (KTPH) and Jurong Medical Centre (JMC). KTPH is the first general, acute-care hospital built to serve more than 650,000 residents and workers in the North of Singapore. The hospital offers a comprehensive range of healthcare services, including 13 specialist clinics providing services ranging from geriatrics to paediatrics.

The hospital currently employs more than 2,500 employees, of whom 40% are older employees, aged 40 years and above. With a significant proportion of older employees, AH saw a need to align its work-life strategy to its overall talent management strategy.

A Work-Life Strategy for All

AH strongly believes that its people are its greatest asset. Its talent management framework focuses on developing people internally as well as attracting and retaining high-quality talent with a passion for healthcare. Its work-life strategy is centred on the principle of being all-inclusive, catering to all races, nationalities and ages. The strategy seeks to build a strong, unified work culture and a knowledge-based workforce built on Institutional knowledge and wealth of healthcare experience of staff.

The benefits of a matured workforce include staff who are well-trained, experienced and capable of delivering a high level of patient care and service. These employees also help to create a stable workforce, being more committed to the job and cause less disruption to work.

This is especially evident when staff from Alexandra Hospital were transitioning to the new premises at KTPH. The knowledge of experienced staff as well as best practices established ensured the seamless transition to the new operations. As mentors, older employees also contribute by transferring their skills and knowledge to the new employees.

Key Success Factors for Work-Life

Where many organisations typically face challenges in getting their employees to embrace FWAs and other work-life initiatives, AH's focus on employee engagement and leadership commitment contributed to its success in promoting and implementing work-life. In terms of employee engagement, AH recognises the need to engage and involve all employees in its work-life activities. The organisation monitors the participation rates of its programmes as well as link staff rewards to participation. These programmes are also customised to include participation from all age groups. Secondly, AH's leaders pave the way towards work-life integration by "walking the talk". Leaders actively participate and promote the various work-life programmes.

Range of Work-Life Initiatives for Older Employees

To enable its staff to cope with working in a 24/7 hospital environment, AH's work-life policies and practices were designed to provide flexibility of work and time. Specific policies and processes were

also developed in consideration of older employees and their occupational and social needs. Examples of work-life policies and programmes include the following:

Re-Employment Policies: Recognising the passion to serve, AH was one of the first employers to establish its re-employment policy for employees who wish to continue working for the hospital after the official retirement age of 62 years. To date, approximately 90% of these employees were re-employed after their retirement age.

Flexible Work Arrangements (FWAs): AH has put in place FWAs such as flexi-hours, part-time work and job rotation schemes for its operations staff. For older employees, the flexi-hours policies are extended to them no less than the younger workforce. These FWAs provide older employees with the flexibility to plan their work according to their abilities and preferences as well as to meet their other social and family commitments.

Leave Benefits: Aside from statutory requirements, older employees are also entitled to benefits such as Family Care Leave. The adoption of such benefits meets the employees' needs for family time as well as demonstrates Management's efforts to promote a balanced and all-inclusive approach.

Employee Health & Wellness Programmes: As one of the Health Promoting Hospitals in Singapore, AH conducts programmes and activities to promote healthy living among its staff. This also ensures that older employees are able to maintain their health for employability in their senior years. Through its Health for Life Clinic, AH offers free health screening for its employees. Older employees are also encouraged to participate in education programmes, such as geriatric training conducted by the Geriatric Medicine branch.

In line with its work-life strategy, AH also encourages staff to exercise together and participate in sporting activities. For example, qigong and tai chi classes are regularly organised for its older employees. The hospital holds an annual Fitness Challenge that assesses employees' physical fitness through various exercises. The programme was also customised to suit older employees, such as having 1.6km walk instead of a 2.4km run.

Physical Work Environment: AH believes that an important aspect of work-life is a conducive, physical work environment. This is particularly important to older employees whose jobs entail physical stresses.

Unlike other healthcare service organisations, AH's housekeeping services are in-sourced. Through job redesign in 2007, the hospital's Environmental Services Associates (ESAs) are able to contribute at a value-added level. Beyond housekeeping duties, ESAs are also responsible for infection control and keeping the hospital's environment conducive for healing. Of the 140 ESAs currently employed, approximately 70 of them are 40 years old and above. To enhance safety and care for this group of employees, job redesign and equipment engineering were applied to assist with their work and to minimise injury and maintaining a safe work environment.

For the Porterage Attendants, of whom 80% are older employees, equipment such as the customised mortuary transfer trolleys were used extensively.

Other Work-Life Employee Support Schemes:

Future developments in the pipeline supporting work-life, include the rollout of a Flexi-Dollars scheme, which provides employees with credits to purchase a range of staff benefits and health services according to their individual preferences. For example, older employees who prioritise health and wellness over other benefits such as union savings plans can opt to pay for outpatient medical, insurance and wellness programmes.

Employee Success Stories

Joseph Robert Roch, 58, is one of the valuable older employees in the organisation. As an Environment Service Associate Team Leader, he firmly believes in being the face of the hospital, etching a positive impression of AH in the minds of every patient and visitor he meets. Apart from being a patient greeter who positively influences his peers and colleagues, he also participates actively in WOW trainings as a trainer, educating younger colleagues on the importance of good customer service. He is currently on part-time arrangement.

Elsie Lee, 41, the coordinator of AH's internal counselling arrangement known as *Peers Around Lending Support* (PALS), has also benefitted largely from the flexible work arrangements that have been made available to the staff of AH. Being on a part-time arrangement allows her the flexibility to manage and balance the demands and responsibilities at home and at work. She is grateful to have the opportunity to be on this arrangement and is highly motivated to continue giving her best to the organisation.

Mr. Woo, an Environment Service Associate Team Leader, was given the opportunity to be on a part-time arrangement as requested. Having been exposed to duties involving direct patient care, he cultivated a sense of compassion for the elderly and sick, and took on the responsibility of caring for his mother because of a recent fall that she had suffered. This arrangement allowed him to ensure that at least one family member is present to provide care for his elderly mother at any one time, thereby creating harmony between his work and personal demands. Today, Mr. Woo works from 6pm to 10pm on weekdays and on weekends whenever required.

Measuring the Success of Work-Life Initiatives

To measure the success of the work-life initiatives, AH adopts tools such as employee opinion surveys and employee engagement surveys to gather feedback from its employees on how they feel about the initiatives and their effectiveness in meeting employees' needs. In addition, HR also monitors the participation rates of its various work-life programmes. Monitoring and analysing statistics on employee engagement and retention enables HR to continuously improve and measure effectiveness at the programme as well as at the organisational level in meeting its overall talent management objectives.

AH continues to find ways to improve work-life integration for all its employees. HR will review and consolidate its work-life initiatives into a holistic framework covering the social, financial, mental, personal and physical health aspects of employees.