



VITALS

A Weekly Safety Newsletter For Medical Transport Professionals

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Emerging Issues in Private Emergency Medical Transportation: Turnover, Demand & Selection Part 1

A Professional Approach to Turnover

One of the operationally debilitating factors that enhances risk and creates an unsafe workplace is attrition. As the disparity between the sizes of the pools of potential, acceptable employees and the need for them increases, we have the management equivalent of a ventilation-perfusion mismatch. Fortunately, there are management scientists who can provide a systematic approach to help decrease turnover by using predictive psychometrics to help us hire people who will stick around.

Brian G. Whitaker, Ph.D. has written a white-paper for Avesta entitled "Emerging Issues in Private Emergency Medical Transportation: Turnover, Demand & Selection", which Avesta has graciously allowed us to publish as a series of three articles in "Vitals." Although the title of the paper contains the word "Emergency", its content has direct applicability to paratransit systems. The series is not solely for managers. Talk about these issues with your staff.

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Introduction to Emerging Issues in Private Emergency Medical Transportation:

According to the Employment Policy Foundation, employment turnover rates for the medical transportation industry as a whole average 18.2% annually. More specific to the EMS industry, the most recent Bureau of Labor Statistics (2007) estimates put turnover rates for EMS employees at 11.4%, significantly below the transportation industry average. However, that figure includes career-based fire service employees, which are normally employed by municipalities. Most private-based EMS organizations report turnover rates much closer to the national average of 39.7% across all transportation sectors.

Many private-based EMS organizations not only suffer from high turnover rates, they are especially vulnerable in larger service areas where employee loss to peer EMS agencies offering sign-on bonuses, relaxed workloads and subsidized pensions are primary drivers of turnover. It is expected that turnover rates will rise as this emerging trend continues and an increasing number of EMS agencies turn to luring employees away with perks.

To compound this issue, the supply of EMS professionals is not expected to meet the forecasted demand of the patient population over the next few decades (the percentage of the US population age 65 or older is expected to increase from 12.5% to 16% by 2020 and 21% by 2050). Indeed, the Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that an additional 69,000 EMS workers will be needed by the year 2014 in order to meet the

needs of an aging population, an increase of approximately 35%. As demand outpaces and exceeds supply, turnover for EMS positions is forecasted to rise over the coming years. Ultimately, because replacement costs average approximately \$12,000 per employee in the transportation industry (Employment Policy Foundation, 2007), turnover costs are expected to be a major expenditure for EMS agencies in the coming decades.

In order to preemptively address the rising concerns over EMS turnover, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration recently published a workforce analysis report titled EMS Workforce for the 21st Century: A National Assessment (NHTSA, 2008). This report highlighted the need for EMS agencies to focus on building and maintaining a viable workforce and specifically cited the implementation of effective human resource management practices as a key system attribute for the attainment of this goal. Fortunately, much research conducted by human resources specialists can be harnessed by decision-makers within EMS agencies and applied to their own contexts in order to build a strong workforce and minimize costly turnover. In this brief report, we will outline what human resources researchers have found to be important antecedents of turnover, describe state-of-the-art human resources system techniques that have been found to reduce turnover, and explicate some of the practical benefits that accompany the implementation of these solutions.

About the Author

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For more information on Avesta's comprehensive recruitment, selection and hiring programs or questions for Dr. Whitaker, contact (866) 342-4280 (toll-free).

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