

USING REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIP TO BUILD AND FILL CAREER PATHS IN HEALTH INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

*A Response to Critical Healthcare
Workforce Needs and Healthcare Reform*



U.S. Department of Labor
EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING ADMINISTRATION

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Washington, DC 20210



REGISTERED
APPRENTICESHIP
Earn. Learn. Succeed.

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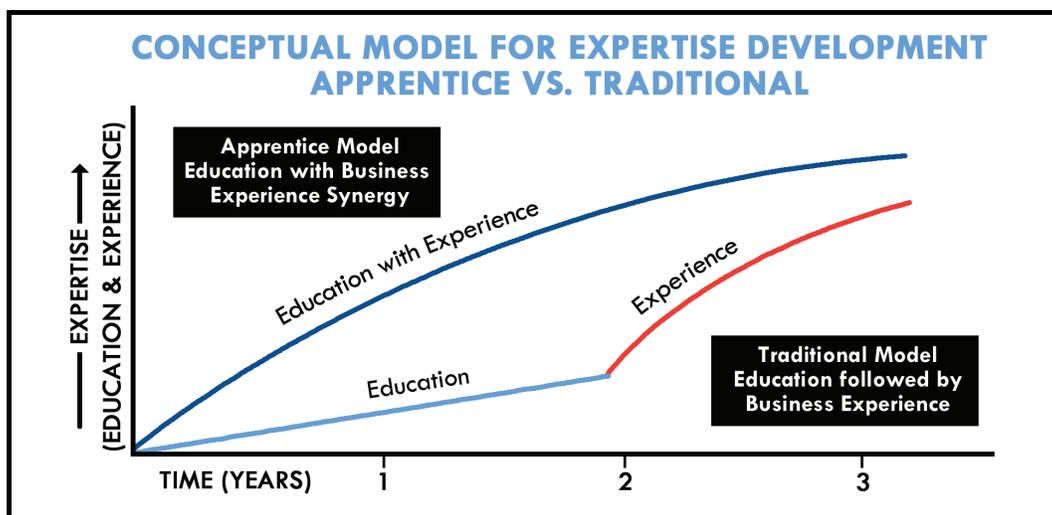
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INTRODUCTION

Despite the current recession, healthcare remains one of the few areas of the economy that continues to grow and add jobs. With the development of a national healthcare information infrastructure, the field of health information technology is expected to grow nearly 20 percent by 2016 according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Since 2003, the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Apprenticeship (OA) has focused on the healthcare industry and information technology to address both chronic workforce shortages and increasing skill demands for key occupations. Since then, apprenticeship programs have been developed in several healthcare information occupations (see appendix for a list of occupations). These programs offer competency-based and time-based models, portable credentials and wage increases, responding to the needs for a high-skilled health information workforce.

There is increasing recognition that apprenticeship training is a highly effective workforce strategy for building skills and earnings in entry- and middle-level jobs, for increasing productivity and for aligning employer demands with the supply of workers for this industry. Registered Apprenticeship can be a critical part of the workforce strategy related to healthcare reform and is currently included in the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) bill, "Affordable Health Choices Act." Currently, the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the U. S. Department of Labor (DOL) are undertaking a joint evaluation on the Registered Apprenticeship model in long-term care. Registered Apprenticeship is seen as a way to train workers and address some of the workforce issues including recruitment and retention, training a quality workforce and improving quality of patient care.

The potential in utilizing Registered Apprenticeship, an "earn while you learn" model, is that workers' skill levels increase simultaneously while they are studying their occupation or profession, so they become more productive at a faster rate than taking only classes. Employers who use the Registered Apprenticeship model see this as a big advantage as their primary complaint about college graduates with associates or bachelors degrees is that they have no work experience. For workers, this model sets them on a career path leading to jobs with higher wages as workers show their increased value, creating the opportunity for upward mobility.



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WHAT IS REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIP?

The key concept of a Registered Apprenticeship training program is that it must combine paid on-the-job training with classroom instruction. This approach provides the apprentice with income while training and gives the employer the ability to select and train workers to meet their industries' specific skilled needs. This relationship is entered into under apprenticeship training Standards, which establish the terms and expectations of training for all parties. This model is extremely effective and mutually rewarding in that apprentices are able to earn while they learn and employers have an effective recruitment tool to select workers willing to learn a new trade or skill. It also provides the grounded expertise and knowledge individuals need to do their jobs well and advance in their careers. The following are the key components of the Registered Apprenticeship model:



- **On-the-Job Learning:** 80 percent of employee learning happens in the workplace. Apprentices benefit from real-world application of theory-based instruction as they work in their own job settings. The subject content and time requirements of an apprenticeship program depend on the occupation and the needs of the employer and are designed to ensure increased job competency over time.
- **Related Instruction:** Apprentices receive highly skilled technical training in the apprenticeable occupation. Instruction is often provided onsite by the employer, at local training centers or at local community colleges and, increasingly, through distance and computer-based learning.
- **Mentoring:** Apprentices work and learn under the direction of qualified personnel, or mentors, who are experienced and proficient in their field. Mentors are not necessarily supervisors, but coaches who help apprentices learn skills they need to do their jobs successfully.
- **Incremental Wage Increases:** A key element of Registered Apprenticeship is the provision of incremental wage increases as apprentices enhance their skills and job proficiency. Proficiency, indicated by exhibited job competencies, is a direct result of on-the-job learning, mentoring and related instruction experienced by apprentices.
- **Portable, Nationally Recognized Credential:** Upon completion of an apprenticeship program, apprentices receive a Certificate of Completion from DOL (or State Apprenticeship Agency recognized by DOL) that is accepted throughout the industry and the country.

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WHY REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIP AND HEALTH INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY?

Registered Apprenticeship is a successful training and employment model that is used in a variety of industries to train highly skilled workers. Registered Apprenticeship is results-driven, with over 87 percent of employer-sponsors expressing great satisfaction with the model. In a recent study by the Urban Institute, more than 80 percent of sponsors said that they use Registered Apprenticeship to meet their need for skilled workers. Seventy-two percent said that Registered Apprenticeship helps them identify which workers possess needed skills; and 68 percent think that the model raises productivity, strengthens worker morale, and improves worker safety (Lerman, *The Benefits and Challenges of Registered Apprenticeship: the Sponsors' Perspective*, the Urban Institute, 2009). It has been used as a method to train under-utilized talent pools by recruiting entry-level employees and directing them through upward career paths that result in economic security and middle class status. Many apprenticeships—particularly in health information technology—are combined with, or are stepping stones towards, Associates and Bachelors degrees.

“Earning a paycheck while in training for a profession is a very compelling model, particularly in the current economy.”

Earning a paycheck while in training for a profession is a very compelling model, particularly in the current economy. The model offers structure and rigor that helps professionalize entry-level healthcare occupations and prepares individuals for the challenge of higher level careers. The apprenticeship model is used extensively in healthcare without being called “apprenticeship.” Nurses do clinical rotations and doctors must have residencies before they complete their degrees. Nearly all healthcare occupations require a demonstration of competency before a certificate or credential is awarded. The on-the-job aspect of apprenticeship is consistent with the requirement for demonstrated skills in these higher level occupations. Mentoring plays a critical role in experts teaching on-the-job skills to novices who learn through doing.

Registered Apprenticeship and Healthcare Reform:

There is great interest throughout the healthcare industry in Registered Apprenticeship and there has been some initial success in registering and implementing programs. Employers, both union and non-union, see the value of the structured training model to significantly improve worker skill development, increase productivity and provide a return on investment.

Registered Apprenticeship can be an integral part of healthcare reform by providing rigorous training to workers. It also prepares employees to be able to advance up a career ladder into higher-level occupations. The Registered Apprenticeship model in long-term care is currently being evaluated through a joint HHS-DOL study, but the basic model can be, and is applied to a multitude of occupations that require highly skilled workers. The following anecdotal information from interviewed employers shows that Registered Apprenticeship helps to address several key issues in health information technology:

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Recruitment and retention: Job seekers who have a clear understanding of position requirements and have an opportunity for advancement along a career lattice are more likely to remain in their jobs longer. The “earn while you learn” aspect of the apprenticeship program helps to retain workers as they become loyal to an organization that invests in them and helps advance their careers. The mentoring component supports new hires as they acclimate to the demands of the job. Employers agree that the model helps create a pipeline of workers who start at the entry-level and advance to higher positions. Many of these workers would have had little or no career pathway without the apprenticeship model being available to them.

- **Cost-effective training method:** Staff replacement and recruitment are among the highest costs to healthcare providers. By increasing retention, recruitment costs decrease. Employers indicate that the Registered Apprenticeship model is superior to the classroom-only approach to train workers. Apprenticeship helps reduce the problem of employers having to rely upon academic credentials when hiring Health Information Technology (HIT) workers.
- **Increased productivity and Return On Investment:** Registered Apprenticeship is a demand-driven system based upon the needs of employers to ensure and increase productivity. Employers use the system to help identify worker training needs that may hinder productivity. Anecdotal evidence shows that with Registered Apprenticeship productivity increases and cost-recovery periods are shorter.
- **Increased diversity:** The model is helping to increase diversity, according to healthcare providers, not only for the entry-level occupations but also as a pipeline and career ladder to higher level jobs. A goal of many of the providers is to create a workforce that approximates the composition of the patients they serve.

WHO ARE OUR PARTNERS?

Through a proven system of public-private partnerships, Registered Apprenticeship partners with a wide range of organizations including (but not limited to):

- Businesses, employer and industry associations
- Labor management organizations
- State and local workforce development agencies and programs
- Two- and four-year colleges that offer Associate and Bachelors degrees in conjunction with apprenticeship certificates
- U.S. military
- Community leaders and economic development organizations

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HOW DOES REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIP BENEFIT EMPLOYERS?

In addition to available tax benefits and workforce development grants in some states, Registered Apprenticeship benefits employers by providing them with a pipeline of skilled workers with industry-specific training and hands-on experience. Registered Apprenticeship programs are customizable to match employers' needs and highly flexible to always meet employers' changing requirements.

HOW DOES REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIP BENEFIT INDIVIDUALS?

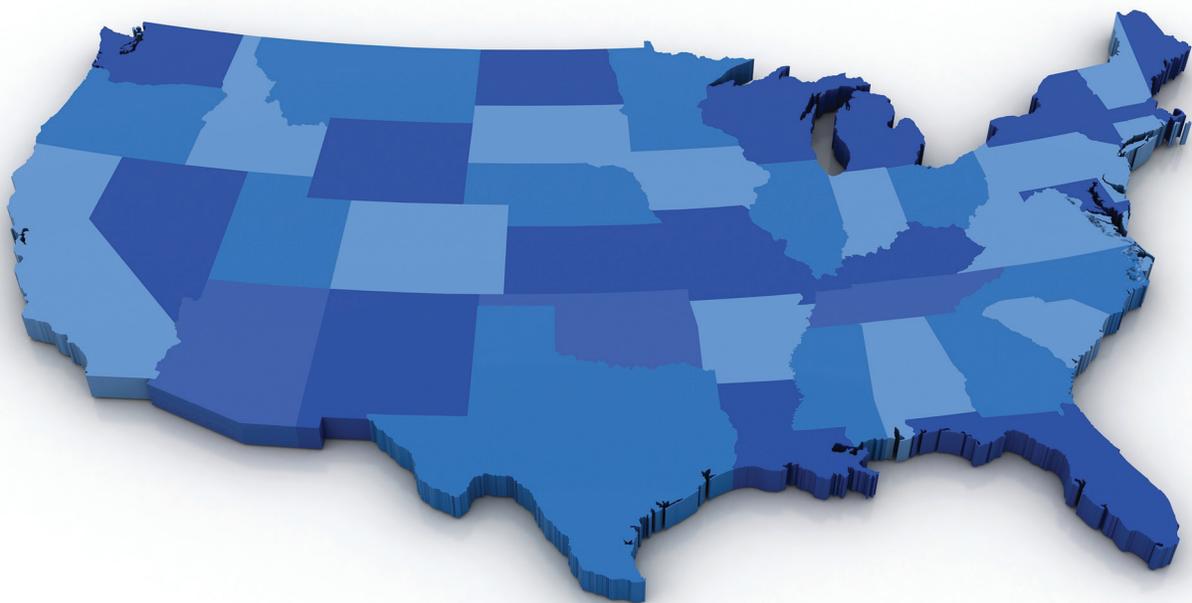
From day one, apprentices receive a paycheck that is guaranteed to increase as their training progresses. Apprentices also complete a combination of industry-specific classroom education and hands-on career training leading to nationally recognized certifications.

WHO OPERATES REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMS?

Registered Apprenticeship program sponsors (employers, employer associations and labor management organizations) vary from small, privately owned businesses to national employer and industry associations. Today, there are nearly 29,000 sponsors representing more than 225,000 employers, including UPS, the United States Military Apprenticeship Program, Werner Enterprises, CVS/Pharmacy and many others.

WHERE IS REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIP?

The Registered Apprenticeship program's national office is located in Washington, DC. However, the program has a presence in all of the 50 states and some territories, in the form of federal staff and/or state and employer partners.



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SAMPLE HEALTH INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIP MODELS

Many healthcare providers use the apprenticeship model as part of a “grow your own workforce” philosophy and to reward employees. All apprenticeships are a minimum of 2,000 hours (one year) of on-the-job learning with 144 hours of related instruction. Many of these examples are competency-based models offering interim credentials as apprentices master skills and specialties.

BLUECROSS BLUESHIELD OF SOUTH CAROLINA

Programmer Analyst, Web Systems Support Programmer and Network Support Technician (Health Information Technology)

BlueCross BlueShield of South Carolina is an independent licensee of the BlueCross BlueShield Association and the largest private employer of IT professionals in the state. The company executes and monitors more than 800 million healthcare claims and eight billion online transactions a year for its private health insurance, federal government contracts and other insurance divisions. In partnership with Midlands Technical College and Alpha Training Services, the BlueCross information systems department offers apprenticeship programs involving classroom instruction and on-the-job learning for these three occupations. To qualify, applicants must have an Associates degree and some work experience. To succeed, apprentices must complete between 400-800 hours of education and more than three years of on-the-job learning. The Registered Apprenticeship program was developed in partnership with Apprenticeship Carolina, a new division of the South Carolina Technical College system, that works closely with businesses to help them develop talent. BlueCross BlueShield of South Carolina thinks that apprenticeship programs are a great way to develop expertise on their systems and information technology needs.

FLETCHER ALLEN HEALTH CARE / VERMONT HEALTHCARE AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY INFORMATION CENTER (HITEC)

Electronic Health Records (EHR) Data Abstractor, EHR System Support Specialist, Front Desk Specialist, Medical Coder, Medical Transcriptionist, and Phlebotomist

In Vermont, Fletcher Allen Health Care, in partnership with the Vermont Healthcare and Information Technology Information Center (HITEC), is preparing workers for careers in emerging Healthcare Information Technology positions. This innovative workforce development model involves career orientation, aptitude assessments, participant interviewing and selection, education delivery, transition into employment, and mentoring in a state-registered apprenticeship. It is employer demand driven, involving business and workforce analysis, performance standards, employee reviews, mentoring and retention strategies.

The partnership, started in 2003, embraces an intense competency-based education apprenticeship strategy that prepares workers in a number of growing healthcare occupations, including: Electronic Health Records (EHR) Data Abstractor, EHR System Support Specialist, Front Desk Specialist, Medical Coder, Medical Transcriptionist, and Phlebotomist. The program begins with a rigorous 8-10 week educational component, provided by HITEC and administered through the Fletcher Allen Workforce Institute, which includes 8-9 hour class days, 5 days a week, with 3-4 hours of homework every night. Following completion of the education requirements, all successful participants are employed full-time and placed in a one-year Registered Ap-

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apprenticeship program with Fletcher Allen to further their skill development in a hands-on work environment. Apprentices in the program work with designated mentors as they master the competencies of the position. The program provides the rigors of an academically reviewed curriculum that results in the attainment of college credits and nationally certified industry certifications that prepare workers for rewarding careers.

ASSOCIATION FOR HEALTHCARE DOCUMENTATION INTEGRITY (AHDI)

Medical Transcriptionist

The Association for Healthcare Documentation Integrity (AHDI), formerly the American Association for Medical Transcription, developed a national program for its members. The industry needs 25,000 recruits over the next few years and is making apprenticeship the centerpiece of its marketing and recruiting plan. This occupation focuses on the development and maintenance of detailed records on patient health and medical procedures. AHDI is focusing on recruiting military spouses as the job lends itself to a mobile lifestyle. It is a very flexible program because instruction and on-the-job learning can be done remotely. All work and training is done over the Internet.

MULTICARE HEALTH SYSTEM

Health Unit Coordinator

MultiCare Health Systems, made up of four hospitals in Washington State, developed a Registered Apprenticeship program for Health Unit Coordinator (HUC), an occupation they consider an entry-level component of their health information management. Health Unit Coordinators handle everything from maintaining patient records charts electronically and scheduling diagnostic tests to transcribing doctors' orders, providing an important communications link between departments, physicians and nursing staff. Apprentices are hand-selected from MultiCare employees who apply for the program. The program consists of mastery of approximately 26 separate work processes listed in their standards, including:

- Computer Skills
- Forms and Documentation
- Medical Terminology
- Confidentiality
- Charts/Records/Orders
- Confidentiality/HIPPA
- Patient Referrals
- Staffing Rosters
- Census Reports

Apprentices are paired with current Health Unit Coordinators who act as mentors and instructors, providing the apprentices with on-the-job training. Apprentices then participate in evening classes held by MultiCare that provide related instruction. All training and related instruction are delivered internally. Once an apprentice completes the program, he/she earns a state certification that includes increased pay and a career as a Health Unit Coordinator. The program offers current employees a career ladder opportunity and the possibility to continue to advance in their career.

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FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

The ‘Health Care Sector and Other High Growth and Emerging Industries’ Solicitation for Grant Applications (SGA), funded under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), has significant potential to provide needed resources to support and accelerate many of these and other related efforts. With additional support and concerted partnership efforts across federal agencies, the Registered Apprenticeship model could be a significant training solution in the development of high-skilled workers in many healthcare occupations and addresses many of the related healthcare workforce issues. In addition, broader adoption of this model has the potential to support DOL Secretary Hilda L. Solis’ vision of “Good Jobs for Everyone” and a number of DOL-related performance outcomes. In particular, the model helps entry- and middle-skilled workers adjust to the rigors and structure of demanding healthcare professions. It offers a pathway out of poverty by providing a career ladder to higher-level occupations. Finally, the model helps to diversify the workforce by bringing in talent pools who have not had the opportunity to pursue a healthcare career.

On a larger scale, this effort can be an integral part of healthcare reform and its related goal of reducing healthcare costs. Registered Apprenticeship can play an important role in developing a skilled pipeline of workers for the industry by offering lower level healthcare workers better training that results in better patient care. By better allocating resources and tasks throughout the healthcare industry, these efforts can ultimately drive down healthcare costs.

CHALLENGES

Although there is interest from the healthcare community, including HHS, and employers and unions in using Registered Apprenticeship, there are still significant challenges stemming from the lack of awareness and understanding, and in many cases significant misconceptions of the model. In most healthcare occupations, the industry does not integrate didactic learning with hands-on training with the exception of nursing and physician training. Educating the healthcare community about the model and then implementing Registered Apprenticeship are the greatest challenges. The work with HHS, particularly on the evaluation of the Registered Apprenticeship model in long-term care, will be a significant step in the process of gaining knowledge and acceptance of the model, but more is needed. Efforts by HHS, the U. S. Department of Education (DoEd) and DOL to work together to create “stackable” credentials that are industry-recognized and career pathways out of poverty and into the middle class will go far to create a skilled HIT workforce. This will require significant coordination across federal agencies and across federal and state programs.

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APPENDIX

APPRENTICEABLE HEALTH INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY OCCUPATIONS

Health Unit Coordinator
Medical Coder
Medical Transcriptionist
Information Assurance Specialist
Information Management
IT Project Manager
IT Generalist