White Paper

The Importance of Soft Skills in the Healthcare Profession
Soft skills are generally defined as the personal characteristics that enable an individual to interact effectively and harmoniously with others, and are essential for successful performance in any interpersonal setting. These attributes are even more crucial in the healthcare industry, where medical professionals and employees more closely interact with patients and teams, oftentimes under extremely difficult and emotional circumstances. As such, healthcare providers must thoroughly screen job candidates to ensure they possess the soft skills required to deliver an exceptional level of care and service to patients, while also being able to successfully collaborate with staff members to maximize organizational effectiveness.

The Current State of the Healthcare Industry

Currently employing nearly 17 million people across the U.S. with an estimated annual revenue of $1.668 trillion,¹ healthcare is one of the largest and constantly evolving industries of our time. However, along with several other industries in the U.S., including transportation and engineering, the healthcare industry is currently facing a shortage of qualified job applicants with required skills, with some of the least competition nationwide for available open positions.² In light of this candidate and skill shortage, healthcare organizations must ensure they maintain a high level of patient care and satisfaction by thoroughly screening applicants to make the best hiring decisions possible. According to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, healthcare occupations are expected to grow by 19 percent through 2024, largely in part to aging populations and increased access to healthcare insurance through federal reform programs.³

Aside from the specific technical requirements for positions in healthcare, including medical degrees and professional training, those employed in this profession also require exceptional soft skills, such as communication ability and time management skills, to effectively collaborate with colleagues and successfully interact with patients. Often overlooked during the interview process, these soft skills are quickly becoming a core recruitment criteria for many healthcare positions, especially as patients are demanding a better level of service due to the rising cost of healthcare premiums. As Modern Healthcare reports that only 251 U.S. hospitals receive a five-star rating for patient satisfaction,⁴ hiring a workforce with excellent soft skills, as well as technical skills, should be a top priority for any healthcare organization.

The Top Soft Skills Required in Healthcare

Communication Ability
Effective communication abilities are essential for individuals in any healthcare setting, from a physician discussing a complex diagnosis with a patient, to medical billing staff interacting with insurance companies to properly reconcile invoices. Prospective candidates will need to display competence in effectively interacting with various organizational levels and communication styles, and must be comfortable discussing a wide range of highly sensitive information in a professional manner. Additionally, in situations including medical emergencies, the need for clear, succinct communication is paramount, as time is of the essence in many instances.

Teamwork
Much of the work in the healthcare industry is collaborative, with many individuals interacting in teams alongside others, such as surgeons and nurses. Being able to effectively work in groups and contribute to a greater goal is essential for successful performance, and also improves the level of care and safety for patients. According to a study published in the *American Journal of Public Health*, teamwork is particularly essential to patient care in health systems with many levels of health workers.⁵

Adaptability
Due to the fast-paced and highly dynamic nature of patient care, those in the healthcare industry must be extremely adaptable to rapidly-changing conditions. This means being able to quickly switch responsibilities in an emergency room setting, or knowing how to handle a complex medical procedure in a calm and calculated manner. Whatever the circumstances, healthcare professionals must be ready for the unexpected at any moment, and be able to determine the best course of action for any situation.

Empathy
In a service-oriented industry such as healthcare, the ability to understand the feelings and needs of patients and their families is crucial to maximize the level of care and customer service provided to them. Healthcare professionals must be sensitive to patient needs and develop meaningful relationships to promote a sense trust and respect. Along with patient-focused empathy, healthcare employees must also show empathy towards colleagues, by being able to understand their unique perspectives and challenges to increase interpersonal effectiveness and promote teamwork.

Time Management
Healthcare professionals must display competency in time management skills to successfully handle position responsibilities and maintain a professional environment when interacting with patients and colleagues. Having the ability to prioritize daily workload and effectively execute multiple tasks simultaneously is vital for all positions. Additionally, related to adaptability, workers in this industry must be able to quickly reprioritize and manage their assignments due to last-minute scheduling adjustments, medical emergencies, and ever-changing organizational needs.

⁵. *American Journal of Public Health*
Effectively Identifying Soft Skills in Healthcare Candidates

One of the best ways to quickly identify soft skills in candidates applying for positions in the healthcare profession is to conduct detailed behavioral and cognitive assessments prior to extending an employment offer. Providing valuable insight into a candidate’s personality, communication style, motivations, critical thinking abilities, and other personal qualities not evident from a resume, assessments can help recruiters to reduce hiring risk by gaining a better understanding of a candidate’s unique strengths and weaknesses relative to the position. Additionally, the use of assessments can also be leveraged to determine a candidate’s level of cultural fit to the organization to help reduce the likelihood of future turnover and the need to backfill a position. According to Becker’s Hospital Review, it is estimated that every percentage point increase in nurse turnover costs an average hospital about $300,000 annually.⁶

How iCIMS and Its Partner Ecosystem Can Help

Simplify Your Talent Acquisition Experience

iCIMS partners with the talent acquisition industry’s leading assessment software providers to enable healthcare recruiting professionals to streamline their candidate selection process, make more informed hiring decisions, and reduce unnecessary expense and hiring risk to their organization. By integrating talent assessment software with their applicant tracking system, recruiters can quickly and easily conduct detailed candidate assessments as part of the application process, and can choose from pre-determined assessments or develop custom sets of questions based on specific position requirements and organizational needs. Furthermore, seamlessly integrating talent acquisition and assessment software systems also centralizes candidate information into a single system of record to promote data integrity and reduces the need for manual, redundant data entry activities. In doing this, the chance of costly human error is greatly reduced, further enabling healthcare recruiters to maximize effectiveness and productivity to make the right hire while also helping to reduce overall recruitment costs.

Develop Passive Candidate Relationships to Enhance Recruitment Processes

Before conducting candidate assessments, utilizing applicant tracking software that includes recruitment marketing capabilities can be used to build and engage talent pools of qualified passive candidates to source from when the need to hire for highly-specialized healthcare positions arises. By employing the use of ongoing recruitment marketing updates, including organizational news and current employment opportunities, healthcare recruiters can increase engagement and interest among desired passive talent to help reduce the need for lengthy candidate searches. Once the need to fill a position is identified, recruiters can quickly source from their pre-existing talent pools and move best-fit candidates forward in the hiring process to help reduce cost-per-hire and time-to-fill metrics.

Connect with iCIMS on social media!

6. Becker’s Hospital Review