



— WORKFORCE STRATEGY / TALENT MOBILITY / INTERNAL CAPABILITY

The Workforce You *Already Have*

Why healthcare's next talent strategy starts with developing, moving, and retaining the people already inside the organization.

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— EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Healthcare Can't Hire Its Way Out

For two decades, the healthcare workforce question has been the same: *where will we find more people?* More nurses. More physicians. More allied health professionals. More leaders. More applicants. More pipelines.

That question is no longer sufficient on its own. As external recruiting becomes slower, more expensive, and more competitive, a second question deserves equal weight in the executive suite: *how much of tomorrow's workforce can we build from the talent we already have?*

This brief examines internal mobility, career pathways, skills development, leadership pipelines, alumni talent, and workforce intelligence — not as employee-experience initiatives, but as components of a talent acquisition strategy hiding in plain sight.

ON THE MARK PERSPECTIVE

Healthcare's workforce challenge isn't simply a shortage of people. It's also a challenge of identifying, developing and deploying talent differently.

SECTION 01

The External Talent Market Isn't Getting Easier

Recruiting difficulty hasn't eased in 2026 — and organizations are already responding by developing the workforce they have.

68%

Of HR professionals report difficulty recruiting full-time employees in the past 12 months — 53% of those say it has become harder than a year ago.

SOURCE: SHRM, 2026 TALENT TRENDS REPORT

42%

Of HR professionals report difficulty retaining full-time employees in the past 12 months.

SOURCE: SHRM, 2026 TALENT TRENDS REPORT

41%

Of HR professionals train existing employees to fill hard-to-fill roles, rather than relying on external hiring alone.

SOURCE: SHRM, 2026 TALENT TRENDS REPORT

SHRM surveyed 2,094 HR professionals via its Voice of Work Research panel (Feb. 9–20, 2026), representing organizations of all sizes and industries across the U.S.¹ The pattern is consistent with the American Hospital Association's 2026 Health Care Workforce Scan, which documents hospitals redesigning staffing models, expanding team-based care, and investing in upskilling as structural responses to sustained workforce pressure — not temporary fixes.²

ON THE MARK PERSPECTIVE

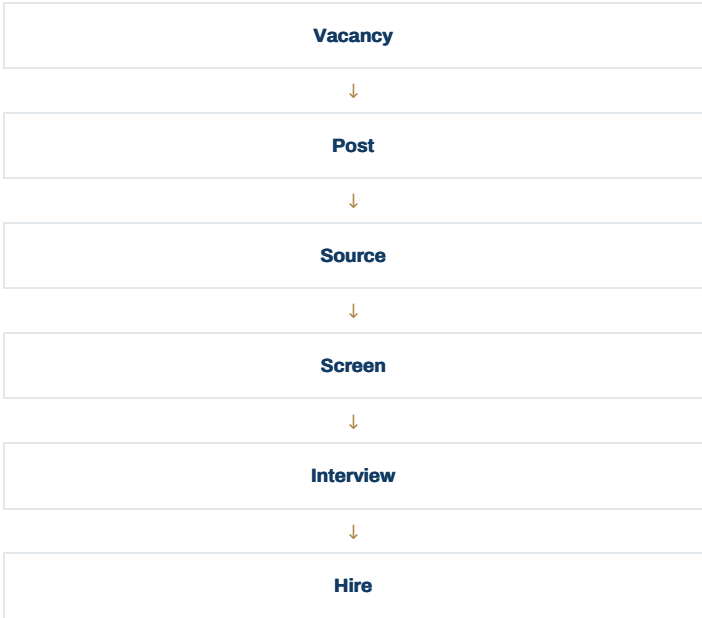
If talent is becoming harder to acquire externally, the talent already inside the organization becomes more valuable — not less relevant.

SECTION 02

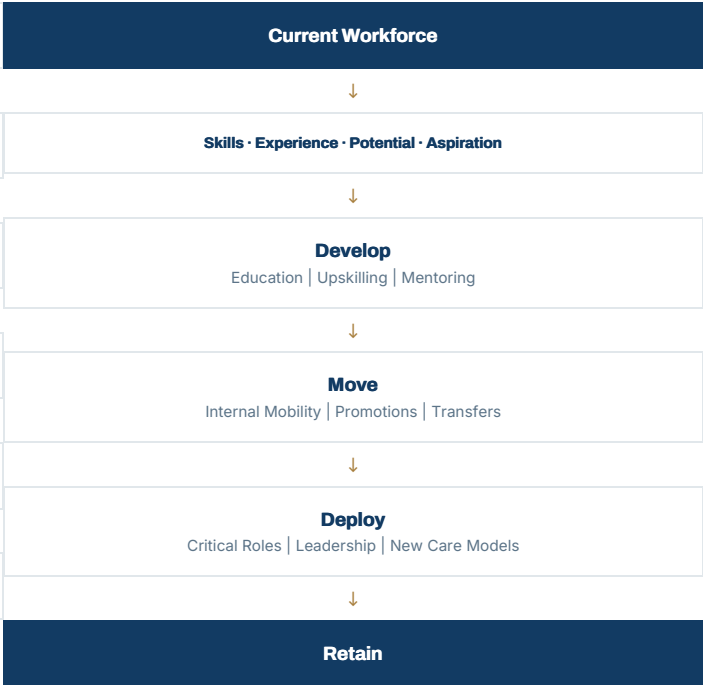
Your Workforce Is Also Your Talent Pipeline

External recruiting should feed into a larger talent ecosystem — not stand apart from it.

OLD MODEL



NEW MODEL



The AHA's 2026 Health Care Workforce Scan documents this shift directly: hospitals are redesigning staffing models around team-based care, creating new roles that require accelerated training, and building education pathways rather than depending solely on external sourcing.²

ON THE MARK PERSPECTIVE

The strongest candidate pipeline may already be on the payroll.

SECTION 03

Before You Recruit Outside, Look Inside

Internal mobility is not simply a retention program. It is a workforce capacity strategy.

Employees who make an internal move — a promotion or lateral transfer — are 40% more likely to remain with their employer for at least three years. Organizations with high internal mobility also see meaningfully longer average employee tenure.³

Healthcare offers unusually clear internal pathways compared to other industries — clinical ladders, specialty transitions, and leadership tracks already exist in most organizations. The opportunity is making them visible and intentional, not inventing them from scratch.

The pattern is intuitive: employees who can see their next opportunity inside the organization have less reason to look for it outside.

ILLUSTRATIVE PATHWAYS — NOT RESEARCH FINDINGS

— Medical Assistant → LPN — LPN → RN	— Student Nurse → Graduate Nurse → RN — RN → Specialty RN
— Bedside RN → Nurse Leader — APP → Clinical/Operational Leadership	— Recruiter → Workforce Intelligence / TA Leadership

EXECUTIVE QUESTION

How many positions are we recruiting externally for today because we failed to build the talent internally yesterday?

SECTION 04

Development Is Becoming a Sourcing Strategy

Two problems often exist inside the same organization — and neither side can see the other.

EMPLOYER

“We can’t find the talent.”

EMPLOYEE

“I can’t find my next opportunity.”

One in four U.S. employees — 25% — report that they lack opportunities for career advancement at their current job. While 63% of employees say their organization does provide advancement opportunities, Gallup found those opportunities are not evenly distributed: employees with less formal education and those at smaller organizations report significantly less access to growth.⁴

SHRM's 2026 data shows 41% of organizations already train existing employees to fill hard-to-fill roles.¹ The organizations solving their recruiting difficulty and their employees' advancement concern may be the same organizations — if career pathways are treated as a workforce supply strategy, not simply an employee benefit.

ON THE MARK PERSPECTIVE

Development is not only a retention lever. Done deliberately, it is a sourcing strategy that starts inside the organization instead of outside it.

SECTION 05

Don't Forget the People Who Left

The talent pipeline doesn't end when an employee leaves — if the relationship is maintained.

A growing number of health systems are formalizing "boomerang" talent strategies — maintaining relationships with strong former employees and inviting them back when the fit is right.

Meritus Health

Approximately 15% of all hires across the past two fiscal years were rehires. Team Member Services records show more than 350 people previously employed by Meritus were hired again between 2024 and 2026, at a health system employing more than 4,400 people in Hagerstown, Maryland.

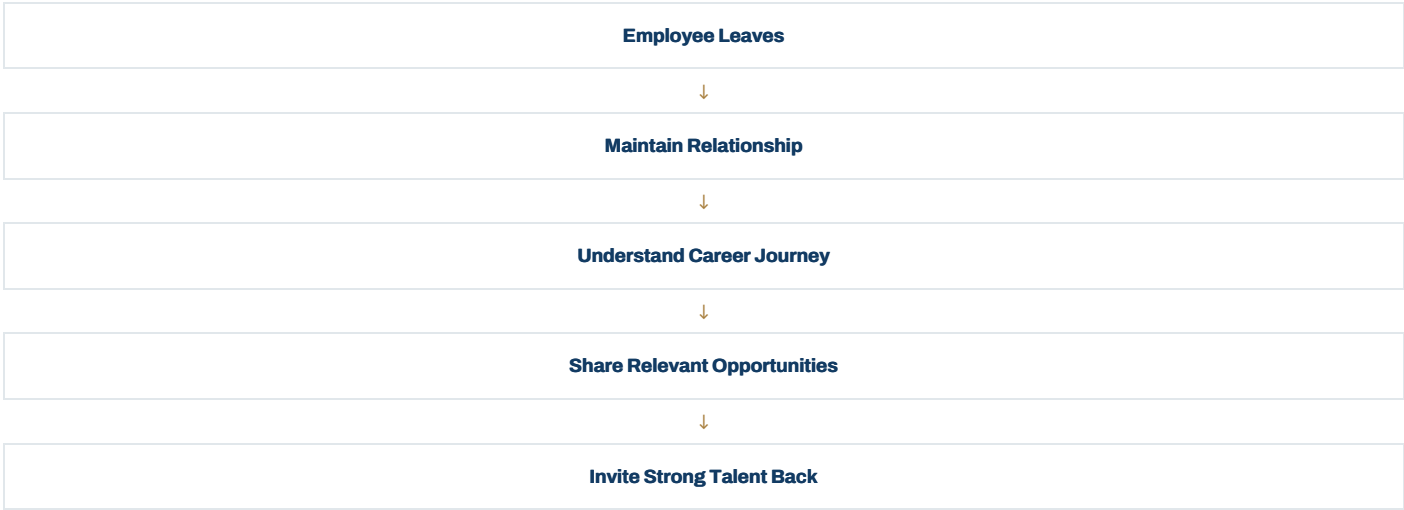
SOURCE: MERITUS HEALTH

Providence Health & Services

Rehired approximately 2,600 former employees in 2023, a nearly 44% increase from the 1,800 boomerang hires recruited in 2022, according to the organization's chief people officer.

SOURCE: PROVIDENCE CHRO GREG TILL, REPORTED BY HR BREW

ALUMNI TALENT STRATEGY



SECTION 06

Internal Mobility Requires Leadership Capacity

Great managers develop talent. But great talent eventually becomes ready for something else.

70%

Of the variance in team engagement scores is explained by the manager — a finding Gallup has reaffirmed annually through 2025.

SOURCE: GALLUP, STATE OF THE AMERICAN MANAGER (2015; REAFFIRMED 2025)

40%

Early-tenure RN turnover under nurse managers with 90 direct reports, versus 27% at 30–45 direct reports.

SOURCE: AONL & LAUDIO INSIGHTS, SPRING 2025

Manager capacity and manager quality are related but distinct problems. A talented manager stretched across too many direct reports cannot provide the coaching, visibility, and development conversations that both retention *and* internal mobility require — regardless of skill.

Organizations should also examine whether managers are incentivized to develop talent that moves through the enterprise, or only rewarded for keeping employees on their own team. A manager who "loses" a strong performer to a promotion elsewhere in the organization has often done their job well — but performance systems don't always see it that way.

EXECUTIVE QUESTION

Do your managers see internal mobility as losing an employee — or developing organizational talent?

SECTION 07

Can You Actually See the Workforce You Have?

You cannot deploy talent you cannot see.

WORKFORCE REPORTING <i>“How many employees do we have?”</i>	WORKFORCE INTELLIGENCE <i>“Who is ready to move — and where?”</i>
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EXECUTIVE INTERNAL TALENT DASHBOARD

Internal Fill Rate What share of open roles are we filling from within?	Internal Mobility Rate How often do employees move to new roles internally?	First-Year Retention Are new hires becoming successful employees?	Career Progression Rate How many employees advance within a given period?
Critical Skill Coverage Do we have internal depth in roles that matter most?	Leadership Bench Strength Which critical roles have a ready internal successor?	Boomerang Hire Rate How many hires are returning former employees?	External Recruiting Dependency Where are we unnecessarily reliant on outside hiring?

ON THE MARK PERSPECTIVE <i>Most organizations can report headcount. Far fewer can answer who is ready for what's next.</i>
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SECTION 08

Five Moves to Build the Workforce You Already Have

01 See the Talent

Move beyond headcount and job titles toward visibility into skills, experience, career interests and potential.

02 Build Pathways

Identify critical roles that can be supported through education, upskilling, specialty transitions, and career progression.

03 Make Mobility Normal

Make internal movement an expected, measured component of workforce strategy — not an exception.

04 Keep the Door Open

Treat strong former employees as part of the broader talent ecosystem, not a closed chapter.

05 Measure the System

Track internal fill, retention, mobility, progression, bench strength and external dependency alongside traditional recruiting metrics.

— QUESTIONS FOR YOUR NEXT WORKFORCE REVIEW

- ? What percentage of our positions are filled internally?
- ? Which critical positions have no internal pipeline?
- ? Where are employees leaving us to obtain opportunities we could provide?
- ? Can we identify employees by skills — or only by job title?
- ? How many former employees return — and could that number grow?
- ? If external recruiting became significantly harder tomorrow, where would our workforce strategy fail first?

EXECUTIVE EVIDENCE

Sources & Further Reading

This brief synthesizes current research and executive guidance from leading workforce and healthcare organizations. Every statistic was verified against its original source.

01 SHRM — 2026 Talent Trends Report: Data-Driven Insights for the Future of Work

Survey of 2,094 HR professionals, Feb. 9–20, 2026.

shrm.org/about/press-room/shrm-unveils-2026-talent-trends-report

02 American Hospital Association — 2026 Health Care Workforce Scan

Released December 3, 2025.

aha.org/aha-workforce-scan

03 LinkedIn — Global Talent Trends, 2024

Internal mobility and employee retention findings.

04 Gallup — One in Four U.S. Employees Lack Advancement Opportunities (American Job Quality Study)

Survey of 18,429 U.S. workers, Jan. 13–Feb. 25, 2025.

news.gallup.com/poll/695996

05 Meritus Health — Rehire and boomerang employment data

Team Member Services records, 2024–2026.

meritushealth.com

06 HR Brew, citing Providence Health & Services CHRO Greg Till — Boomerang employee rehiring data

2023 rehire figures reported 2024.

hr-brew.com/stories/2024/09/03/boomerang-employees-cooling-labor-market

07 Gallup — State of the American Manager: Analytics and Advice for Leaders

2015; reaffirmed in State of the Global Workplace through 2025.

news.gallup.com/businessjournal/182792

08 AONL & Audio Insights — Early-Tenure Nurse Retention: Trends and Leader Strategies

Spring 2025; data as of March 2025, 10,000+ nurse managers, 300,000+ employees, 100+ hospitals.

aonl.org/system/files/media/file/2025/04/Early-Tenure-Nurse-Retention-Trends-and-Leader-Strategies.pdf



**On The Mark helps healthcare executives build
the workforce they already have — before they
recruit for the one they don't.**

*Precision workforce intelligence for health system leadership — turning talent signal
into strategic decisions.*

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