



Staffing and Technology Survey

May 19, 2003

2003 HIMSS STAFFING & TECHNOLOGY SURVEY

The 2003 HIMSS Staffing and Technology Survey studies the impact that technology has on the decisions organizations make on staffing. The survey was conducted at the HIMSS Annual Conference and Exhibition in San Diego, from February 9 to 13, 2003. All attendees, exhibitors, and exhibitor guests were able to respond to the survey, which was downloaded onto 24 handheld devices located throughout the convention center. A total of 375 responses were received.

About the Respondents

More than two-thirds (67 percent) of the respondents work in healthcare provider organizations, 18 percent work in consulting firms, and seven percent work for vendors. The remaining eight percent of respondents described their workplace as “other.”

Approximately one-third of respondents identified themselves as “C-level” executives. Specifically, 27 percent of the respondents said their position was CIO, CTO or director of IS, and eight percent indicated that they were another C-level executive, such as CEO or CFO. Another 10 percent of respondents were senior managers, and 22 percent characterized themselves as management or department heads/directors. The remaining respondents reported that their titles were consultant, staff, clinical informaticist or physician/nurse/other clinician.

Is Technology the Solution?

It is widely recognized that American healthcare providers are facing a staffing shortage, particularly among nurses. For example, the Department of Health and Human Services predicts that there will be a projected shortfall of 800,000 registered nurses by 2020. Many believe technology can help lessen the impact of staff shortages, particularly by automating clerical and other tasks to give practitioners more time for direct patient care. This survey examines how technology can be best used to mitigate staffing shortages among healthcare providers.

According to survey respondents, technology should have an impact on increasing worker efficiency to mitigate healthcare workforce shortages (see Figure 1). Nearly 53 percent of respondents indicated that technology would have a great deal of impact on increasing worker efficiency to mitigate healthcare workforce shortages. Another 42 percent said the implementation of technology would have some impact on mitigating workforce shortages. Only two percent of respondents indicated that technology would not resolve workforce shortages. These percentages remained generally consistent among the two-thirds of respondents who worked in provider organizations.

Despite this consensus that technology will help to mitigate staffing shortages, only one-quarter of respondents indicated that maximizing efficiency and productivity through the use

of technology was the most important effort that a healthcare organization can undertake to address staffing shortages (see Figure Two). Rather, nearly half of the respondents (45 percent) indicated that re-evaluating workflow and processes should be the focus of healthcare organizations. Respondents were less likely to suggest that employee benefits and retention programs would successfully mitigate staffing shortages. Only 10 percent of respondents indicated that offering competitive salary and benefits packages would relieve staffing shortages; focusing on recruitment and retention was identified by only nine percent of respondents. The opinion of those in healthcare provider organizations mirrors that of the entire sample.

Additionally, respondents have differing perspectives about the focus an organization should take on technology (see Figure Three). Thirty percent of respondents indicate that an organization can best maximize the impact of technology on workforce shortages by utilizing IT and support staff. Another 29 percent indicate that the focus should be on end-user training. Only 20 percent suggest that an organization should purchase new technology. Again, the response of those individuals in provider organizations closely paralleled that of the entire sample.

Who will benefit from technology implementation?

More than half of the respondents identified nursing (32 percent) and physicians (27 percent) as the two professional staffing areas that would be most positively affected by the introduction or improvement of technology (see Figure Four). Respondents in provider organizations were somewhat more likely to identify a benefit for nurses (36 percent) and physicians (30 percent). On the other hand, only four percent of respondents suggested that physician extenders, such as physician assistants and nurses, will be positively affected by the implementation of technology.

Although respondents indicated that nurses and physicians should benefit greatly from increased and improved use of technology in the daily environment, they reported that the largest benefit could be increased patient safety, not a reduction in the amount of time that clinical staff spends on administrative and clerical functions (see Figure Five). Nearly 60 percent of respondents indicated that patients will be the benefactors of the increased use of technology as a result of increased patient safety or reduced medical errors. And 66 percent of those working for provider organizations felt similarly. Only 24 percent of respondents indicated that increased use of technology would either reduce time spent on clerical and administrative functions by clinical staff (15 percent) or increase the time that clinical staff is able to devote to direct patient care (nine percent). Additionally, only six percent of respondents indicated that technology will increase staff retention and satisfaction.

When asked which technologies would have the most impact on maximizing the time clinical staff devote to patient care, 51 percent of the respondents identified an electronic medical record (see Figure Six). This was followed by point of care technology (43 percent), and mobile communication and wireless technology (34 percent). Messaging functionality and real time alerts and asset (equipment) tracking were each identified by less than 10 percent of respondents. With the exception of a slight emphasis on bar coding, the responses of those working in healthcare provider organizations mirrors that of the entire sample.

Conclusion

Staffing shortages and the use of technology intended to soften the effects of such shortages are important objectives for the healthcare information technology industry. The use of IT to improve patient safety and reduce medical errors is becoming more prevalent, as evidenced by the increasing use of bar coding technology and CPOE software. While most respondents reported that technology would improve worker efficiency, nearly half identified the importance of re-evaluating workflow in any IT implementation effort. This is a clear message that even the best technology, when implemented on top of bad processes, will not have a positive effect on efficiency or productivity of the workforce. It is important for organizations to focus on maximizing what they have and build upon that instead of buying new technologies for which the organization's culture or people are not ready. Technology will not work if it is simply placed on top of an existing, poorly designed workflow. The process needs to be refined before an IT system can be successfully implemented.

Respondents have demonstrated that information technology, while beneficial in reducing medical errors, does not necessarily mitigate staffing shortages. Technologies that were identified as having the greatest impact on maximizing clinical staff time include an EMR, point-of-care technology and wireless computing. This may indicate that timely access to clinical information when, and where the caregiver requires it for patient interactions, is critical, and will therefore contribute to the delivery of safer patient care. The learning curve associated with the EMR may deter older nurses, for example, from re-entering the workforce altogether. Nursing informaticians are the ideal candidates to train and support the staff for undertaking the adoption of an EMR and its related IT components.

About HIMSS

The Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society (HIMSS) provides leadership in healthcare for the advancement and management of information technology. Headquartered in Chicago, HIMSS provides services to more than 13,000 members, including IT healthcare corporations, firms and professionals from around the globe. Through the collaboration of 42 chapters and 19 special interest groups, HIMSS directs and shapes the healthcare industry, encourages emerging technology and promotes public policies that will improve healthcare delivery. For more information, visit HIMSS at www.himss.org.

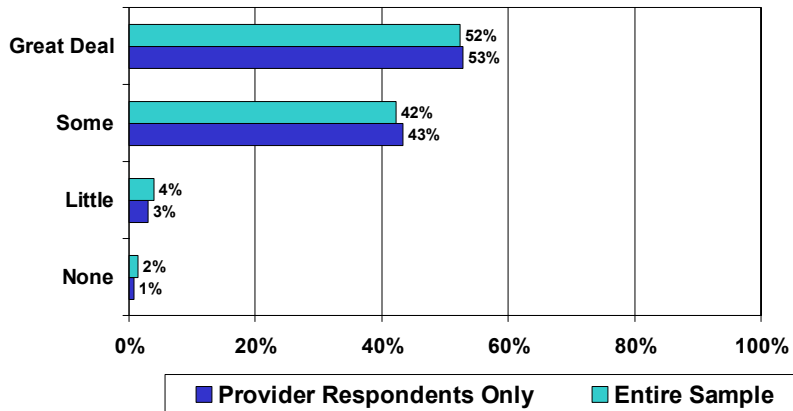
For More Information, contact:

Joyce Lofstrom
Corporate Communications Specialist
HIMSS
312/915-9237
jlofstrom@himss.org

Appendix One—Tables

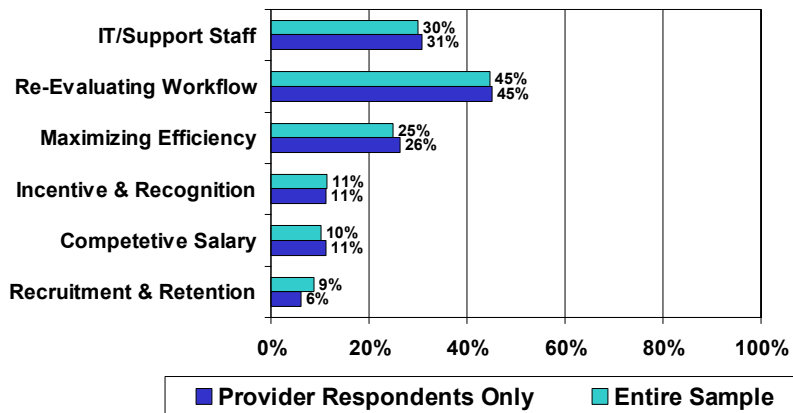
Impact of Technology on Mitigating Healthcare Workforce Shortages

Figure 1

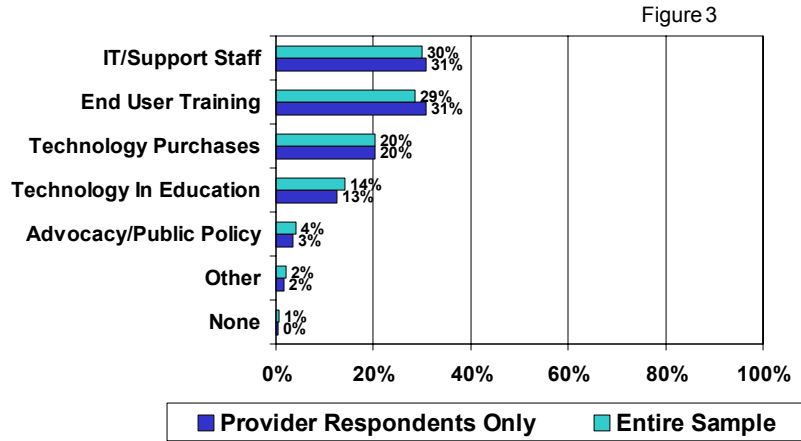


Efforts to Which Healthcare Industry Should Devote Resources to Mitigate Staffing Shortage

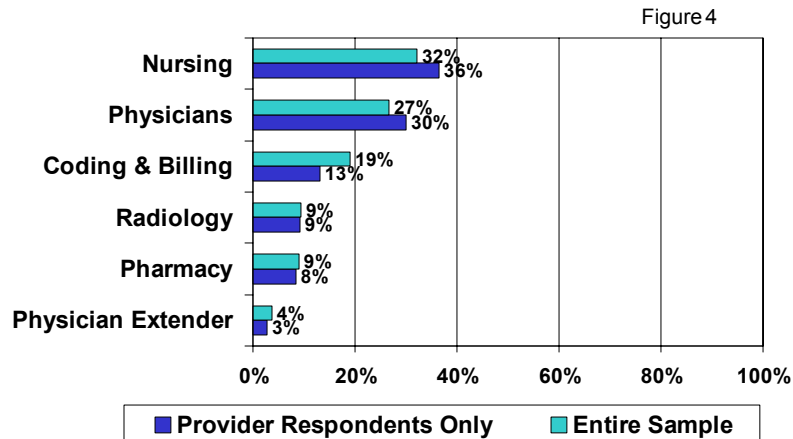
Figure 2



Areas In Which Healthcare Industry Should Devote Resources to Mitigate Staffing Shortage

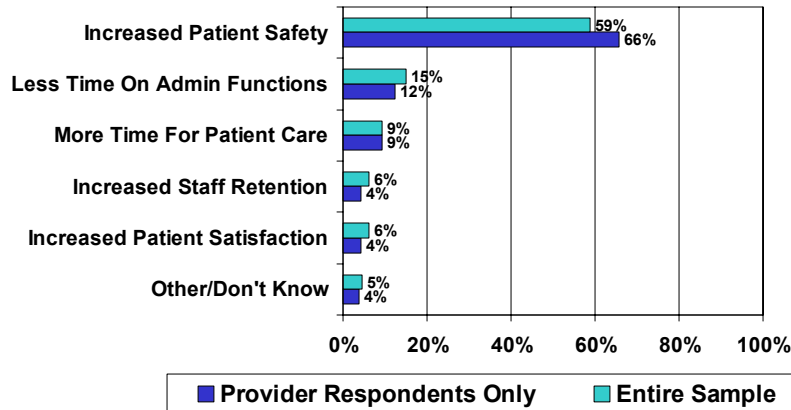


Professional Staffing Area Most Positively Impacted by Technology



Area that will Benefit Most as a Result of Technology Implementation

Figure 5



Technologies that will Maximize Time Clinical Staff Spends on Patient Care

Figure 6

