Human Resources 101

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“You give me the right people, and I don’t care what organization you give me. Good things will happen. Give me the wrong people, and it doesn’t matter what you do with the organization. Bad things will happen.”

—COLIN POWELL

Introduction

In health care, as in many service businesses, the most valuable resource is people. Many clinical nutrition managers (CNMs) have little or no experience with the human resources (HR) functions of hiring, counseling, and so on, when they take their first management position. Clinicians are often promoted due to such qualities as their strong technical skills, work ethic, and personal desire for advancement. However, the skills that lead to a registered dietitian’s (RD’s) promotion might not be the skills necessary to be an effective manager. Promotion to CNM is often an RD’s first exposure to management. Navigating labor laws and the hiring process in general can be a challenge, and mistakes can have legal, financial, and emotional costs. It is important to understand the basic HR functions as well as the laws that govern them.

Research shows that sound hiring choices are directly linked to a company’s financial returns (1). As a CNM, you may be responsible for hiring and managing RDs; dietetic technicians, registered (DTRs); kitchen supervisors; diet office staff; and possibly tray-line or room-service staff. Becoming a manager does not automatically mean you know how to interview, coach, train, evaluate, or otherwise manage employees effectively. However, all of these skills can be learned, and there are many people available to help you do so. In this chapter we discuss the hiring process,
employee management, and how best to partner with your HR team to maximize your effectiveness.

The Hiring Process

Many HR and management skills are best learned from interactions with people, not from reading books. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to start with a basic understanding of important processes and concepts. Accordingly, this chapter reviews five key components of the hiring process: recruiting, applicant screening, interviewing, checking references, and making the job offer.

Recruiting

The first step in the hiring process is recruiting. Recruitment refers to the process of attracting, screening, and selecting qualified people to interview for a position within your organization.

Working with Human Resources

The role of HR in the recruitment process varies from institution to institution. In some cases, the HR department closely manages the process, from sourcing candidates and completing the screening interview to determining the appropriate salary level and extending the job offer. In other facilities, HR plays a smaller role in this process and you may be responsible for some or all of these steps. It is important to meet with your HR staff before you begin recruiting so you have a clear understanding of their role in the process and yours. The following are important areas to address:

- What methods will be used for recruitment? What resources are available to you and how are costs allocated?
- Who is responsible for verification of a candidate’s licensure and registration status?
- What kind of paperwork is involved in opening a position for recruitment and selecting a candidate for hire? For example, your facility may have specific forms, requisitions, or worksheets that you must complete to create the job description, set its pay grade, and get approval for new hires.
- How soon can someone start work after an offer is made? The amount of time typically depends on how long the background check, pre-employment physical (including a tuberculosis test), and employment verification processes take.

Establishing a Recruitment Strategy

When determining your recruitment strategy, it is essential that you know your environment and competition and ensure that the job description posted by HR makes sense and is up to date. For example, if you are recruiting for clerical or patient services staff, consider who is your local competition for such employees and how your institution’s pay scale compares to that of the competition for similar jobs.
Candidates for these types of positions may also want to know whether your institution is accessible to public transportation and if public transportation runs when shifts begin and end.

If you are looking to hire RDs or DTRs, potential recruitment resources include the following:

- Dietetic internship directors, DTR program directors, and university faculty—these individuals typically keep in touch with their students and know who is actively and potentially looking.
- Local sales representatives for pharmaceutical companies—they often travel to multiple institutions and know many of the clinical dietitians in their service area.
- Professional associations—many local dietetic associations offer online job posting opportunities as well as free networking opportunities at meetings; additionally, many dietetic practice groups offer the opportunity to share information on open positions at no cost.
- Job sites, such as JobsinDietetics.com or Monster.com.
- Social networking sites—find out whether your facility has a Facebook page and if so, if you can advertise there. Can you use one of the professional networking sites, such as LinkedIn or Yahoo? (See Chapter 9 for more information on social networks.)

You can accelerate your recruitment learning curve by asking other managers at your institution what strategies they have found successful for hiring frontline staff. For example, if the laboratory manager has been consistently successful posting open positions on community college bulletin boards or websites such as Craigslist, can you do the same? If your institution holds or participates in job fairs, find out how you can be included. If there are dietetics programs in your local area, you might wish to recruit undergraduate or graduate students looking for nutrition experience—these students may become valuable employees with a passion to learn.

Talk to your staff and find out how they found out about their jobs at your institution. Current employees can also be a great source of referrals. In fact, many hospitals pay bonuses for employee referrals. If your institution has such a bonus program, find out if your positions are, or can be, included.

**Writing the Job Posting**

When writing a job posting, it is important to include key information in a succinct format that will get the attention of your desired audience (see sample in Figure 1.1 on page 5). The following are key elements to include:

- Job title
- Company (brief description and why it is a good place to work)
- Overview of responsibilities
- Reason for job opening if applicable (eg, department growth or new project)
- Requirements or qualifications—be sure to distinguish between what is desirable (eg, nutrition support order writing experience) and what is mandatory
Applicant Screening

The second step in the hiring process is applicant screening. A well-conducted pre-screening process should save you significant time and frustration in the hiring process, result in a solid list of applicants to interview more thoroughly, and provide some initial insight into those applicants. The following are steps in effective applicant screening:

• Provide your HR department with an accurate position description, including licensure or registration requirements, shift or schedule requirements (such as need to alternate early or late shifts, work weekends, or attend early morning rounds), and soft-skill requirements, such as team skills or strong verbal communication skills.
• Review resumes and cover letters. Cover letters should be well-written, error-free, and succinct summaries of an applicant’s qualifications. Resumes should also be error free and well formatted and reflect the skills and experience listed in the job posting. Look for keywords that match the qualities you are seeking and potential red flags, such as long gaps in employment or short tenures at multiple positions (“job hopping”).
• For hourly positions that do not require a resume, look for job applications that are complete and error free. Evaluate carefully how well a candidate’s skills, education, and experience match the position you have posted, and note if you find any of the potential red flags listed in the previous bullet point.
• Conduct a short phone interview with each promising candidate to help evaluate the applicant’s verbal communication skills, probe deeper into his or her qualifications, and identify whether salary expectations are in line with what the position pays, if this is a concern. (Note: In some facilities, this function may be performed by the HR department.)

Preparing for the Interview

The third, and perhaps most challenging, step in the hiring process is the interview itself. Interviewing candidates is an art but also requires certain skills. You have to be a good listener; you need to know how to redirect a conversation; you must be able to distinguish between applicants who simply want the job and the superior candidate who can get the job done; and you have to ensure you are abiding by employment laws and the requirements of your institution.

Understanding the Law

To master the interview process, begin by learning the laws that govern this process. Although sometimes confusing and complicated, employment regulations are
Location: Regency Medical Center, Dallas, Texas
Posting date: September 1, 2014
Open position number: 01678
Job title: Clinical Dietitian
Work type: Full time
Work schedule: Days
Hiring manager: Alice Smith, MBA, RD, LD

JOB SUMMARY:
• Provides medical nutrition therapy using evidence-based practice to optimize patient care. Provides consultation to the health care team to ensure efficient and effective nutrition care of patients. Monitors and evaluates patient care and nutrition outcomes on an ongoing basis. Educates patients, health care team members, dietetic interns, and members of the community. Participates in ongoing process improvement activities within the Department of Nutrition Services and the institution.
• Maintains a customer-service, patient-centered approach at all times when fulfilling job duties. Meets the qualifications to provide care for patients in the specific age range of assigned clinical area. Works under the direction of the Clinical Nutrition Manager in the Department of Nutrition Services.

COMPETENCIES AND SKILLS:
• Demonstrates competence in written, oral, and electronic communication skills.
• Demonstrates effective ability to function in an interdisciplinary environment.

EDUCATION AND EXPERIENCE:
• Bachelor's or advanced degree in dietetics or nutrition required.
• Registration with the Commission on Dietetic Registration, or eligibility for registration when hired, required. If eligible for registration, must obtain registration and licensure within 6 months of hire.
• At least 2 years of clinical experience preferred.

WORKING CONDITIONS/PHYSICAL DEMANDS:
Work is typically performed in both inpatient and ambulatory settings.

REGENCY HEALTH SYSTEM:
Regency Health System serves nearly 2 million people in North Texas and has been nationally recognized for innovative practices and quality care. Regency is a not-for-profit health system and a premier teaching institute. Regency was named to the Becker’s Hospital Review “100 Best Places to Work in Healthcare” list for 2012.

Regency offers a competitive compensation package beginning day one of hire, including comprehensive medical and retirement program benefits, and more.

We are an Affirmative Action, Equal Opportunity Employer.

TO APPLY: www.regencyhealth.com/employment

Figure 1.1 Sample Job Opening for a Clinical Dietitian
The Clinic al Nutrition Manager’s Handbook
designed to eliminate bias, discrimination, prejudice, and unfair hiring practices, and
to ensure that all candidates are judged solely on the basis of their ability to do the
job. There are a number of federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
(EEOC) laws that you should understand. Since a hospital’s labor pool is typically
larger than 20 employees, the following laws are most likely applicable at your in-
stitution (2):

- **Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964**: This law, which applies to employ-
  - ers of 15 or more individuals, prohibits employers from discrimination based
  - on race, color, gender, national origin, or religion.
- **Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) laws**: EEO rules prohibit specific
types of employment discrimination, such as discrimination on the basis of
race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, or status as an individual with a
disability or as a protected veteran.
- **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990**: ADA bars discrimination
due to physical or mental disability and requires reasonable accommodation of
individuals with disabilities during hiring and employment (applies to em-
ployers of 15 or more individuals).
- **Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA) of 1967**: ADEA, which
  applies to employers of 20 or more individuals, prohibits discrimination against
employees age 40 years or older in favor of younger employees. There is no up-
per limit to the age; therefore, mandatory retirement is illegal in most cases.

The US Department of Labor (DOL) administers and enforces most labor laws and
is a reliable resource if you wish to know more about the individual statutes.

To avoid any potential violations of the antidiscrimination statutes during the
hiring process, it is essential that you understand whether interview questions are
legal or illegal (see Table 1.1 for examples) (3). If you are in doubt about whether a
question is legal, a good rule of thumb is to ask yourself whether the question relates
to the specific functions of the job. If it doesn’t, don’t ask the question.

In addition to employment law, you must also know your state’s licensure laws
as well as your hospital’s policies related to registration and licensure. Can you hire
a candidate who is RD-eligible but does not yet have the credential? Is a license re-
quired to practice in your state? In many states, a dietitian must be licensed to prac-
tice (4). If you reside in one of these states, is there an option for provisional licensure
and, if there is, how long does it take to obtain a provisional license?

**Doing Your Homework**

Far too often, busy managers (is there any other kind?) do not prepare sufficiently
and fail to get the key information during the interview that they need to make an
informed decision. Be sure to prepare ahead of time and write out your questions so
you do not forget in the interview what you most want to find out about the candi-
date. According to Davila and Kursmark, managers most often make hiring errors
because they do not gather enough information and make improper assumptions.
In fact, research reveals that more than 70% of managers spend less than 5 minutes
preparing for interviews (1). A CNM describes an HR hiring error of this nature in
Box 1.1.
Table 1.1 Examples of Illegal and Legal Interview Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Illegal Questions</th>
<th>Legal Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How old are you?</td>
<td>Are you over the age of 18?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When is your birthday?</td>
<td>Can you, after employment, provide proof of age?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In what year were you born?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In what year did you graduate from college/high school?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Marital and family status</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you married?</td>
<td>This job requires 25% travel. Do you have any restrictions on your ability to travel?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With whom do you live?</td>
<td>Do you have responsibilities or commitments that will prevent you from meeting specified work schedules?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you have children?</td>
<td>Do you anticipate any absences from work on a regular basis? If so, please explain the circumstances.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many children do you have?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you pregnant?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you expect to have a family?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are your child care arrangements?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How is your family’s health?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Religion</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What religion do you follow?</td>
<td>Are you able to work Saturdays or Sundays? <strong>Note:</strong> Tread carefully here. If the respondent says that he or she has religious obligations that limit availability, you should indicate that your company makes reasonable efforts to accommodate religious beliefs or practices. However, you are not required to make an accommodation if doing so would create an undue hardship to the business (3).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnic origin</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you speak Spanish?</td>
<td>What languages do you speak?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Box 1.1 Lessons from the Field: A Hiring Error

“When I was promoted to CNM, my first task was to hire a registered dietitian (RD) to replace me. A good personal friend (also an RD of many years) recommended a friend of hers. This candidate did interview well, but I did not interview others and did not fully investigate her job history. Almost immediately after hiring her, red flags went up—she was bad-mouthing previous bosses, she abused her salaried status, and she became sloppy with her work. I was hesitant to discipline her because I considered her more of a friend than an employee. After she was a no-show for a weekend shift (guess who had to cover!) and then blew off a class she was scheduled to teach, I finally took action and drafted a letter with help from human resources. One week after I gave the letter (which stated objectively the poor performance and what was expected), she just walked off the job. Lesson learned. Just because someone is a personal friend does not mean they are the best candidate for the job, and being a manager means sometimes you can’t be everyone’s friend.”
The following steps may be helpful in organizing your interview:

- **Determine the skills/competencies needed for the position beforehand.** Make a list of what you are looking for. For example, if you are interviewing for an outpatient RD, requirements might include experience with motivational interviewing, proven counseling skills, program marketing and development experience, and demonstrable public speaking skills. When interviewing candidates for a diet office supervisor position, you would want to find out about their management skills, employee counseling experience, attention to detail, problem-solving skills, customer service abilities, and knowledge of your particular computerized diet office system, such as CBORD or Computrition. Also determine what soft skills (or “people” skills) the candidate needs to have. These sorts of skills, which may be even more important than technical skills, involve how people relate to each other. Examples include skills in communicating, listening, giving feedback, showing initiative, negotiating, collaborating and cooperating as a team member, solving problems, and resolving conflicts.

- **Write out appropriate interview questions.** Your interview questions should reveal your candidate’s technical skills, knowledge, behaviors, likes, dislikes, and key motivators (1). Start with the job description if you are unfamiliar with the job’s requirements. Determine what questions will elicit answers that let you know whether or not a candidate has the skills and traits needed for the position. A scripted list of job-related questions will prevent you from straying into illegal question quicksand. Also, preparing questions in advance helps ensure consistency among interviews for the same position. When you gather the same information from all the candidates, you can more objectively compare their suitability for the job.

- **Review the candidate’s resume and/or application prior to the interview.** You create a poor impression of your managerial skills if you review application materials in front of interviewees. They may conclude that you are disorganized and do not prepare in advance.

- **Ensure that you can conduct the interview in a private space where you are not easily distracted.** The diet office and the cafeteria are not good places to conduct an interview. If you do not have a private office, schedule a room or borrow an office for the interview.

- **Plan several “ice-breaker” questions.** A few casual questions unrelated to work at the start of the interview can enable you to establish rapport and put the applicant at ease. Questions about weather and traffic are usually safe.

- **Learn from experienced interviewers.** If your interviewing experience is limited, you may want to ask your HR team if you can observe them interviewing or ask them to suggest a manager within your hospital who is skilled at interviewing for you to observe. Another option would be to have someone from HR sit in with you during your first few interviews and coach you.

- **Plan to interview multiple promising candidates, and ask others to help you evaluate them.** Other people can and should help evaluate your pool of candidates. Feedback from others can help you avoid making choices based on the natural bias to choose someone similar to you (5). You may find input from
people who will be colleagues or collaborators with the new hire to be especially helpful.

**Chapter 1: Human Resources 101**

The **Interview**

At the start of the interview, set a collegial tone. Let your candidates know that you are glad to meet them and express your appreciation for the time they have taken to interview with you. Use your prepared ice-breaker questions to get the conversation started. Remember, you may be nervous, but your candidates may be even more anxious. It is important to build rapport and set them at ease.

Occasionally, a candidate will volunteer personal information. Take care to not pursue these topics in ways that might run afoul of labor laws or your institution’s hiring policies. For example, if your job applicant shares that he or she is arriving to the interview late because his or her child missed the school bus, it is best to avoid comments and further questions about this topic as you do not want to open yourself to potential charges of discrimination based on marital or family status. Instead, move on to your structured questions.

After breaking the ice, explain how the interview will proceed and then try to follow that format as closely as possible. State that you will be taking notes to help you remember, so candidates do not get concerned when they see you writing things down.

The notes you take should be clear and factual. Avoid writing down opinions or interpretations of what you think a candidate said. Focus on the degree to which the candidate meets the competencies. Careful note taking is especially important if you are interviewing many people for the same position, as doing so enables you to distinguish one candidate from another. In addition, these notes serve as your documentation of how you reached your hiring decision. Be aware that your HR department may require that you keep interview notes for a designated period of time in case any questions about hiring practices arise.

Be sure to manage your time. If you’ve set aside an hour for an interview, do your best to stick with that schedule. However, it is good to be prepared to cut the meeting short and jump to the “wrap up” questions if the interview does not require the full amount of time. Do not waste your time or the candidate’s by stretching the meeting out.

As you talk with the candidate, share relevant information about the job. Be sure job requirements and performance expectations are clear. For example, explain whether employees are expected to work on weekends or take calls. Managers often make hiring errors because they do not gather enough information or confirm that the candidate fully understands what the job involves. If you are hiring for a clinical position that requires working every fourth weekend, teaching a weekly evening class, or attending early morning bedside rounds, share that information during the interview and get agreement from the candidate that he or she can accept these responsibilities.

During interviews, focus on hiring the right candidate. Do not rush the interviewing stage just to fill the position, even if you are under pressure to do so. You will potentially be living with the decision for a long time.
Interviewing Methods

There are two common interviewing methods used in health care: (a) standard/psychological/job-related and (b) behavioral/situational. Standard/psychological/job-related interviewing involves general questions related to job qualifications, education, experience, and accomplishments of applicants (see Box 1.2). If an applicant meets requirements and responds appropriately to the interview questions, he or she is judged qualified for the position. Traditional interviewing has been criticized because candidates who are skilled at interviewing can anticipate what the interviewer will want to hear and prepare answers ahead of time.

Box 1.2 Standard Interviewing Questions

Tell me about your experience working on teams.
What has been your greatest work accomplishment and why?
Why have you changed jobs so frequently?
What are your strengths and weaknesses?
What did you enjoy most about your last or present job?
What is the greatest value you bring to your organization?
What have you done to improve your professional skills this year?
What are you looking for in a new opportunity?

Behavioral interviewing uses preselected questions correlated to key competencies and requires that candidates answer by giving specific examples of past behavior (see Box 1.3 for sample questions). This method presumes that the best predictor of future performance is past performance. Many consider behavioral interviewing to be the most accurate interviewing method for identifying performance effectiveness (1). The advantages of behavioral interviewing cited in the literature include the following (1,3,6):

- The technique is inherently nondiscriminatory and focuses on abilities, not disabilities.
- Interviewers avoid asking careless questions and sharply reduce the risk of straying into potentially biased areas of questioning.
- Questions are open-ended and require much more than a yes-or-no response.
- Candidates must give detailed examples that illustrate how they have performed a specific skill or demonstrated a specific competency.
- Interviewers can make hiring decisions based on the proven capabilities of applicants.
Peer Interviewing

Peer interviewing is an interviewing process that uses a panel of people within the organization to gain a more complete idea of a candidate’s appropriateness for a position. For peer interviewing to be effective, several factors must be in place. First, prepare a decision matrix that identifies for the panel interviewers the key attributes an employee should have for that particular position (see Figures 1.2 and 1.3 on pages 12 and 13). This type of tool ensures the interviews are consistent and helps provide objective, accurate data about the various candidates. Second, select high-performing employees to participate in the peer interviewing process and make sure that they are trained on use of the matrix, the ins and outs of the selection process, performance standards for the position to be filled, improper and illegal questions, and how to ask behavioral questions (7). Your facility may offer training in peer or team interviewing. If so, take advantage of this resource. Third, only present peer teams with candidates after you have interviewed them and determined that they seem qualified for the job. Finally, participating candidates should be sufficiently briefed and informed so that they can prepare for a potentially new interview experience (8).
**Table 1.2** Sample Decision Matrix for Hiring a Diet Office Supervisor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Desired Competency</th>
<th>Behavioral Question/Qualification</th>
<th>Scoring Guidelines (1 = poor; 3 = fair; 5 = excellent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Problem solving</td>
<td>Give me an example of when you solved a tough problem.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prioritizing</td>
<td>Think of a day when you had plenty of things to do. Describe how you scheduled your time.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiative</td>
<td>Give me an example of a time you went beyond your boss’s normal job expectations in order to get the job done.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diligence</td>
<td>Tell me about a time when you had to do a job that was particularly uninteresting. How did you deal with it?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical skills/experience</td>
<td>Minimum: 2 years supervisory experience. Experience in diet office.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication effectiveness</td>
<td>Written and verbal communication prior to, during, and after the interview.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionalism</td>
<td>Poise, professional attire, language, thank-you note sent, etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are several reasons to conduct peer interviews, including the following:

- Peer interviews can help develop a sense of cohesiveness among interviewers.
- Participation in peer interviewing allows employees to have ownership in the selection process. They are truly invested in the success of the new hire.
- When the new hire starts, employees who were involved in the interviews already believe that they can get along with that person.
- Research indicates that peer interviewing enhances employee retention (9).
- Peer interviewing is fairly easy to learn.
- This type of interview gives the candidate (who is also evaluating the company) a chance to interact with your “best and brightest” (7, 9).

While peer interviewing has proven to be very advantageous, there are several disadvantages to the peer interview process that, while not outweighing the advantages, should be considered as well:
## Outpatient Dietitian: Hiring Worksheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competency</th>
<th>Behavioral Question/Qualification</th>
<th>Scoring Guidelines</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creativity</td>
<td>What have you done that was innovative?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiative</td>
<td>Give me an example of a time when you went beyond your employers’ normal job expectations in order to get the job done.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal savvy</td>
<td>Describe a situation where you tried but were unable to build rapport with someone. Why didn’t your efforts work?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action oriented</td>
<td>Can you tell me about a time that you seized an opportunity and took the ball and ran with it?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>RD/LD. Minimum 2 years of experience as outpatient RD. Motivational interviewing, program development, and media skills/experience.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionalism</td>
<td>Poise, professional attire, language, thank-you note sent, etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Written and verbal communication prior to, during, and after the interview.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 1.3** Sample Decision Matrix for Hiring an Outpatient Dietitian

- The time spent preparing for and conducting peer interviews can become too much for employees when they have other responsibilities.
- Peer interviewing does not work if the team is not high performing and capable of collaboration. You have to make sure you have the right employees doing the interviews. For example, some employees may be determined to reject talented applicants they see as potential competition for promotions.
- Candidates can be intimidated when facing a panel of several people.
- Employees may misunderstand their role in the hiring process and become discontented if you do not follow their recommendations. You must make sure that you clearly tell your employees what impact their input will have on the final decision. Consider how your employees will handle it if you do not select their favorite.
- Candidates may ask the panel touchy questions about management or salary. Train your employees to expect sensitive questions and advise them how to defer those issues to the hiring manager.
- Employees with little experience in interviewing may not be objective in their evaluations. Even experienced interviewers can struggle with this challenge.

As noted earlier, a decision matrix can help objectify the peer interviewing process. Before the interviews begin, review the matrix with the panel members.
and run through questions that can be used to collect relevant information about the candidates. Shortly after an interview, the interviewers use the matrix to rank the interviewee based on how well he or she answered the questions. The matrix is important because it:

- Makes evaluation of all candidates more objective and consistent
- Ensures the interview team selects the right questions for the attributes identified
- Facilitates the decision-making process and prevents emotional decisions

**Telephone Interviews and Other Remote Methods of Interviewing**

Telephone interviews are often used as an expedient, less-expensive method of interviewing. They can be very helpful in screening, especially if a candidate is not local; however, they tend to be unpopular with both candidates and managers. If you use telephone interviewing in your recruiting process, be aware that you may not learn as much about the candidate as you would from a face-to-face interview. To obtain the best information possible, telephone interviews should be as structured as face-to-face interviews are structured.

Video conferencing, Skype, and FaceTime are emerging as alternatives to telephone interviews. These options may be worth investigating at your institution.

**Ranking and Selection**

Once the interviews are complete, you will need to review the completed decision matrix and rank your candidates. It is best to complete the decision matrix on each candidate as soon as the interview is complete, while your notes make sense and the interview is still fresh in your mind. Ideally, all interviewers rate the candidates separately and then get together to discuss their findings, compare their ratings, and tally the scores if a numerical rating system has been used. Ranking competencies in order of importance can help identify the strongest candidate for the position if two or more promising applicants have similar overall scores. No candidate is a perfect match. In addition to interview rankings, you should also consider background and reference checks, salary requirements, information obtained from other sources, and credentials in making your decision.

**Reference Checks**

The fourth component in the hiring process is the reference check. Before you make a job offer, you or your HR department should check the candidate’s references. Some, but not all, HR departments do this as standard operating procedure. Due to liability concerns, many references will not provide much information about previous employees other than verification of their entry and exit dates and possibly the reason for exit and eligibility for rehire. Keep in mind that the same discrimination laws that apply to interviewing also apply to reference checking. Do not ask about
marital status, age, disabilities, religion, ethnicity, or other issues related to protected class status.

Do not let your excitement or relief in finding the “perfect” candidate or your impatience to fill the position lead you to make the critical error of skipping reference checks. Even when a candidate’s resume and interview responses seem highly credible, you need to conduct due diligence. If you are serious about specific candidates, make sure their work history is accurate, and check at least a reference or two. It is also critical to verify a candidate’s licensure and registration status before making a job offer. At a minimum, the reference check should include the following (10):

- Verification of employment dates
- Verification of position or title held
- Eligibility status for rehire
- Reason for separation
- Recommendation for another position/role

Box 1.4 describes what could happen if these steps are not followed.

**Box 1.4 Lessons from the Field: Checking References**

“I had an employee with a BS in Nutrition who worked in the diet office. Excellent worker; everyone loved her. She kept applying for the local internship and getting rejected. I wrote a letter on her behalf, saying what a great employee she was and that I thought she would make an outstanding dietitian. She got accepted. After she completed her clinical rotations, she came back and asked if I had any dietitian positions open. I hired her for a per diem position. After a few months, the internship director broke the news to me that she had not completed any of her classroom assignments for the internship. They gave her a couple of months to complete the assignments, but she did not do so. I had to terminate her employment, as she did not meet the standards for a registration-eligible dietitian. It gave me a big lesson on always checking credentials and not going on trust for what someone tells me, even someone I know well.”

**The Job Offer**

The fifth and final step in the hiring process is the job offer. Be sure to work with your HR team to understand your facility’s salary guidelines and determine whether your salary range is competitive in the market place. For example, your employer might have data showing what your company and multiple direct competitors pay employees with jobs similar to the one you are filling. The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics also conducts biannual compensation and benefits surveys for the dietetics profession, which can be a source of regional and position-specific salary trends (11).
Also work with HR to learn how salary negotiations should take place. The availability of online sources of compensation information, such as salary.com, has leveled the playing field between employer and prospective employee when it comes to negotiations and job offers. It is therefore more important than ever to be proactive so you can hire top-quality candidates. If you have the option, be prepared to counteroffer when a candidate asks for more money. However, the reality is that most RD positions are set within the facility budget and CNMs have little flexibility in salary negotiations. If you cannot negotiate on salary, your facility’s benefits package may be a selling point to candidates. Be sure that you can articulate its advantages to prospective employees. For example, if your hospital offers a 401K retirement plan and matches up to 5% of employee contributions, let candidates know that this offering is above average and translates to dollars beyond the salary alone. Are you able to offer a sign-on bonus in lieu of a higher initial salary? Do you have a career ladders program that offers the potential for additional compensation? Does your facility pay higher salaries to RDs with advanced degrees or advanced certification such as Certified Diabetes Educator (CDE) or Certified Nutrition Support Clinician (CNSC)? Does your facility pay registration and licensure fees or Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics membership dues? Is there an allowance for professional development or conferences and continuing education events?

Other perqs, such as free parking, subsidized bus or train transportation, reduced rates for health insurance, free or reduced-rate health club memberships, subsidized day care, and flexible scheduling or no weekend work, may all give you the edge over your competition. Tuition reimbursement is an important but often overlooked benefit that might be very enticing to your prospective employee.

Finally, as you prepare to make an offer, make sure you think about its implications for salary equity within your department. Work with your HR team to ensure that the offer is not inappropriately out of line with what other staff members earn.

If you are having a difficult time attracting and hiring quality candidates, do your homework. Where are these desirable candidates accepting jobs, and why? If candidates are choosing sales positions over your offerings, keep in mind that very few hospital positions can compete with the salary and benefits of sales positions. If candidates are electing to work at other hospitals, you may have more leverage. Find out when and how salary budgets are set at your institution. Do you have any outcomes data to show the value of your department? What skills do your RDs have and what are their responsibilities? How long has it been since you last updated job descriptions for your staff? If your RDs are performing tasks typically associated with advanced practice, such as enteral and parenteral nutrition order writing, research, and feeding tube placement, you may be able to get job descriptions revised and regraded. Look at other advanced practice clinician job descriptions, such as those for advanced practice nurses, and talk to other professionals at your institution who have successfully raised salaries to gain ideas.

**New Employee Orientation**

New employee orientation is one of most important, but most neglected, functions in the workplace. Research suggests that new employees decide within the first 30 days
whether they feel welcome in their new work environment. To succeed in their jobs, new employees need to be drawn into the team and the organizational family. Recruitment Solutions found that 47% of employee turnover occurs in the first 90 days (3). An employee handbook and reams of policies and procedures do not comprise a sufficient orientation program. Employees often complain that orientation is boring or overwhelming or that they are left to “sink or swim” after they are hired. As a result, new employees are not productive and may leave the organization within the year.

Typical organizational goals of new employee orientation programs in health care include the following:

- Reduce start-up costs associated with new hires.
- Reduce the new employee’s anxiety.
- Reduce employee turnover.
- Prepare the new employee to have realistic job expectations.
- Ensure the employee understands and can meet regulatory agency requirements.

Effective methods to engage new employees include the following:

- Assign your highest performers to “buddy” or mentor new employees.
- Make sure the employee’s work space is clean, ready, and comfortable.
- Make sure key coworkers know that the employee is starting, and make sure introductions are made. For example, arrange a group breakfast or lunch on the employee’s first day.
- Develop an effective orientation program that starts with the basics and does not cram everything into a one-day session.
- Make the orientation process fun and interesting.
- As a manager, stay involved. Meet regularly during the first 30 to 90 days to evaluate the new employee’s progress, clear up any confusion about job responsibilities, and develop your relationship.

The following are necessary components of effective orientation programs in health care:

- Training on all relevant regulatory requirements, such as Health Information Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) compliance, fire safety, and patient rights and responsibilities. These topics are usually components of your hospital’s orientation program and typically must be completed within 30 days of hire.
- Important department policies.
- Key job responsibilities.
- Skill competency verification. Documentation is typically required within 30 to 90 days of hire. Check with your institution to ensure your process meets its standards.
- Introductions to teammates and other staff the new employee needs to know.
- Regularly scheduled meetings between the new employee and his or her direct supervisor. The goal is to build the relationship between the employee and the manager and evaluate the employee’s initial progress. In Hardwiring
Excellence, Studor recommends that managers ask the new hire the following four questions after 30 days of employment (7):

◊ How do we compare with who we said we were? In responding, the employee might bring up issues such as real or perceived discrepancies between actual schedules and what hours he or she expected to work.
◊ What are we doing well?
◊ At your previous hospital, what are some things that you saw that you feel could make us better? This question invites the employee to help maximize the department’s opportunities for process improvement.
◊ Is there anything that you are uncomfortable with that might cause you to leave?

Common Management Challenges

First-time CNMs often encounter HR situations that are completely new to them. This section covers several issues that many CNMs identified as particularly problematic for them as new managers.

Managing in a Union Environment

In addition to HR issues that are typical in any nutrition department, CNMs managing in a union environment face distinctive challenges. The union contract sets specific parameters for a variety of employment-related issues, such as compensation and benefits, working conditions, job security, disciplinary procedures, employees’ rights, management’s rights, and contract length. If you are new to the union environment or new to a particular institution with a union contract, you must familiarize yourself with several things. First, learn about the historical and current relationship between the union(s) and management, including past and present grievances, negotiating points during the last contract renewal, and key players involved on both sides. Second, be knowledgeable of the tenets of the collective bargaining agreement that could affect how you address performance management challenges. Learn the meaning of every paragraph that relates to items such as performance management evaluations, scheduling, job tasks, and so on. For example, what options do you have if the diet office staff needs to be trained on a new diet office system? Can you ask them to come in early or work extra hours? When staff or management take issue with a policy or action, people will likely refer to the contract repeatedly to “prove” a point. You will be surprised at the variation in each person’s interpretation of the contract, so make sure you know its true meaning. Third, learn to work closely with union representatives as well as management experts working in the staff relations or
HR department. These people can serve as resources who can help you decide how to best respond to myriad situations that may arise. Ask your HR team to identify a department leader who can mentor you in navigating the union environment.

Documentation and communication take on even more importance in this environment. Be sure that you communicate pertinent information regarding any changes, new initiatives, and other relevant matters to union leaders before you share it with the rest of the team. This way, the union can be prepared for any questions or concerns from its members. The steps in the performance management process are similar in union and nonunion environments. In either setting, you usually begin by coaching an employee whose performance is unsatisfactory. Then, if performance does not sufficiently improve, you issue a verbal warning followed by a written warning. If these steps do not work, disciplinary action, such as suspension and termination, is an option. However, there are some important differences to note when you work with unionized employees. For example, a unionized employee typically has the right to have a union representative present during any disciplinary meeting that includes a written warning or suspension. This right to union representation is usually restricted to disciplinary meetings.

By keeping the union informed and involved in the performance management process, you may avoid defensive actions and disputes regarding disciplinary decisions. However, you should not expect that involving and informing the union will mean it necessarily will accept your decision to discipline an employee. The union’s role is to appropriately represent the employee, and it may act if the employee’s contractual rights seem to have been violated. Be sure to keep complete, factual, detailed, and timely documentation of performance situations and actions. You will need this documentation to justify any performance management decisions if the union initiates proceedings such as grievance hearings or arbitration.

Managing Various Generations

Managers and supervisors in most organizations today are faced with the prospect of managing employees from four generations: those who came of age during World War II, Baby Boomers, and Generations X and Y. Each generation comes to the workforce with its own priorities, preferences, and work styles (see Box 1.5 on pages 20–21) (12). To maximize your managerial effectiveness, you should understand the key motivators of each generation, how they best learn, and how they best receive information. For example, with Xers and Yers being the predominant groups in the workplace today, the traditional management model of “top-down, boss-is-always-right” may not be effective. Many CNMs in the field talk about the increased demands of their Generation X and Y employees for flexible work schedules and input in policies such as the dress code. The issues described in Box 1.6 (see page 21) are common ones for many CNMs today.
Box 1.5 Generational Snapshots

Matures/Traditionalists/Veterans

Who are they?

• Born between 1922 and 1945
• The silent generation, grew up in the Great Depression and WWII
• The smallest group in today’s workforce
• The wealthiest group in today’s workforce

Values/characteristics:

• Duty before fun
• Respect authority
• Adhere to the rules
• Sacrifice
• Loyalty
• Great faith in institutions
• Demand quality

Baby Boomers

Who are they?

• Born between 1946 and 1964
• The largest generation (77 million) in the United States
• Traditional upbringing, followed by youthful rebellion
• Have entered or are nearing retirement

Values/characteristics:

• Optimism
• Involvement/loyalty to organization
• Strong work ethic
• Limited work-family balance
• Question authority
• Desire quality
• Buy now, pay later attitude
• Continuous learners

Generation X

Who are they?

• Born between 1965 and 1980
• Grew up during Watergate, the PC boom, the Reagan presidency
• Comfortable with technology

(continued)
Box 1.5 (continued)

Values/characteristics:
- Skeptical of institutions
- Reluctant
- Respect production over tenure

Generation Y/Millenials

Who are they?
- Born between 1981 and 2000
- Also referred to as the Echo Generation
- Just starting to enter the workplace
- Extremely comfortable with technology

Values/characteristics:
- Realism
- Parental involvement/structured upbringing
- Extreme fun
- Social/confident/inclusive
- Merged families
- Multi-taskers/entrepreneurial
- Work is a means to an end
- Demanding/questioning

Source: Data are from reference 12.

Box 1.6 Lessons from the Field: Working with Younger Employees (Generations X and Y)

“If I had to identify my two biggest issues [as a manager of younger employees], they are the dress code and texting. First, the RDs lobbied to wear scrubs and the request was denied by the administration. Then, they pushed for a business-casual dress code, which we tried but had to do away with because ‘business casual’ became rumpled and progressed to beach wear.

“The second issue of concern is texting. We have RDs texting when they are unable to work due to illness, rather than calling me on the phone. This is in spite of the fact that our cell phones rarely get service in the hospital so I can’t receive their texts. Now we also have to deal with Facebook and Twitter and online shopping at work.”
Perhaps the biggest challenge for many CNMs is effectively managing the newest generation to the workforce, Generation Y. Research suggests that Generation Y employees learn best from a “coaching” style of leadership and are looking for a mentoring relationship with their supervisors or their team (13). Business leaders suggest that Generation Y employees can benefit from mentors who can help them understand corporate culture and business decision-making. In return, ask these younger employees to mentor older workers on new trends, such as advances in technology, social media best practices, pop culture, and word-of-mouth marketing (14).

Other recommendations for working with Generation Y include the following (13,14):

- Let them set their goals.
- Don't skimp on the praise.
- Listen to them.
- Don't assume they share your goals.
- Address performance issues quickly. Provide direct, prompt feedback.
- Explain the “why” behind the decisions you make.

Box 1.7 provides a CNM success story with Generation Y.

Box 1.7 Lessons from the Field: Empowering Staff to Find Solutions

“I had a problem with my younger staff continually approaching me with problems, but no solutions. This resolved when I changed my response to the complaints and asked for solutions. I actually found that my staff seemed to feel more empowered and engaged once they realized they have the solutions and can implement them.”

Of course, in addition to generational differences, individual employees are shaped by other social and personal factors, which might include gender, race/ethnicity, personality, and thinking style. A hospital needs to provide excellent and efficient service seven days a week, and in this demanding environment a manager cannot possibly cater to every desire of his or her employees regarding working conditions. However, your team will benefit greatly if you aim to accommodate individual differences and provide options when possible in the following areas:

- **Supervision**: Can you individualize the method and degree of supervision (how much or how little) for each employee?
- **Feedback**: What types of constructive criticism and acknowledgement are best for different employees?
• **Technology and equipment**: Can you make available tools that reduce tedious processes and expand your employees’ time available for patient care?

• **Scheduling**: Is there room for scheduling flexibility that prioritizes factors other than seniority? For example, can you set up a rotating schedule for covering less-desirable shifts or have teams self-schedule within defined parameters?

• **Work assignments**: How can assignments and tasks be delegated to provide the right balance of opportunity for specific individuals and team growth?

• **Professional development**: Can training and skill-building opportunities be offered in different packages to suit different learning styles? For example, could a training program blend traditional, instructor-led classes (which may appeal more to older employees) and web-based self study (which might particularly excite Generations X and Y)?

• **Communication**: Can your staff effectively communicate across multiple channels, such as print, e-mail, inter- and intranets, phone and voicemail, and face-to-face encounters? What communication methods work best for the individuals being addressed? If you think intergenerational communication styles may be in conflict on your team, consider group discussions with your team about generational differences. During your meetings, ask your team members which “generational” profile best seems to describe them. You may find that some identify with a group older or younger than the generation into which they were born. Ask your team members which of the characteristics attributed to their generation are most important to them.

• **Opportunities for innovation**: Are you prepared to capitalize on the entrepreneurial strengths of employees (such as your Generation Xers) by “outsourcing” challenging problems to special teams? For example, can your staff help develop a marketing plan, choose a new productivity system, or sketch the format to be used for nutrition documentation in the electronic health record system? Consider assigning special projects to small teams composed deliberately of people from several generations, to gain the synergy of their complementary strengths.

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**Cultural Competence**

Cultural competence has recently emerged as part of a strategy to reduce disparities in access to and quality of health care. A culturally competent staff is prepared to tailor health care delivery to meet patients’ social, cultural, and linguistic needs. As the CNM, you need to be culturally competent. Furthermore, your team needs cultural competence to work with each other and other health care team members, and, even more important, to provide care effectively to patients with diverse values, beliefs, and behaviors. This topic is addressed further in Chapter 8.

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**Problematic HR Situations**

Unfortunately, many CNMs do not receive training on problematic HR situations. The following sections cover several problematic HR issues that you may encounter in clinical management and offer suggestions and resources for how to address them.
Harassment

Harassment may or may not be sexual in nature. Sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination that violates Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (15). It can occur in a variety of circumstances, and the following are some essential points to understand about it (16):

- Both men and women can be victims of sexual harassment, and both men and women can be instigators. The victim and harasser do not have to be of opposite sexes.
- The harasser can be the victim’s supervisor, an agent of the employer, a supervisor in another area, a coworker, or a nonemployee.
- The victim does not have to be the person harassed. He or she could be anyone affected by the offensive conduct.
- Unlawful sexual harassment does not necessarily involve economic injury to or discharge of the victim.
- The harasser’s conduct must be unwelcome.

Harassment at work unreasonably interferes with or alters the employee’s work performance, or creates a hostile, abusive, or offensive work environment (16). Examples of hostile behavior could include bullying, gossiping about a particular coworker, or excluding coworkers from team activities. To determine whether a workplace environment is “hostile,” the following factors are typically examined:

- Whether the conduct was verbal, physical, or both
- How often the conduct was repeated
- Whether the conduct was hostile or patently offensive
- Whether the alleged harasser was a coworker or a supervisor
- Whether others joined in perpetrating the harassment

Examples of inappropriate conduct of a sexual nature include sexually oriented jokes; sexually explicit e-mails, screen savers, posters, cartoons, and graffiti; and unwanted verbal or physical contact. The standard used by civil rights agencies and courts in determining whether a hostile work environment exists is whether a reasonable person, in the same or similar circumstances, would find the conduct offensive (16). A single incident may be sufficient to establish a “quid pro quo” harassment claim, but typically a pattern of conduct is required to establish a hostile work environment.

As a manager, you need to take all steps necessary to prevent harassment from occurring in your department (16). It is critical that you clearly communicate to employees that harassment will not be tolerated. You must set the example by being alert to the behavior of others, by not participating in anything that might be
construed as harassment (no matter how subtle), and by stopping inappropriate behavior immediately if you observe it. Carol Merchasin, a noted training consultant in the area of harassment prevention, states that a manager must use caution in the “danger zones, such as comments on personal appearance, jokes, cartoons, and nicknames that demean others on the basis of their race, gender, ethnic origin, religion, age, disability, and sexual orientation” (17).

You must also take immediate and appropriate action when an employee alleges harassment. Find out about your facility’s complaint or grievance process, and ensure that your employees also understand the process. Even if no one complains, you need to be alert to conduct that is inappropriate and make sure that you put an end to it (17). The first step is to contact your HR representative for assistance.

**Patient Privacy**

CNMs need to be knowledgeable of the component of HIPAA that addresses the privacy of protected health information (PHI), understand the policies and procedures that the institution has put in place to comply, and be proactive in educating their staff on how HIPAA pertains to their tasks and responsibilities (18). For example, PHI can be electronic or printed. What does your hospital policy state about students accessing computerized medical records? What patient information is allowed on tray tickets?

Make sure that you and your staff comprehend the requirements for reporting suspected violations. Become familiar with your facility’s policy to better understand what suspected violations need to be reported, and to whom. Also be aware that hospitals routinely audit patient’s electronic health records to ensure that only appropriate individuals are accessing PHI. Box 1.8 describes a situation in which HIPAA was violated.

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**Box 1.8 Lessons from the Field: Protecting Patient Privacy**

“I had to terminate a dietitian for unauthorized medical record access. Our IT department noted a pattern of medical record access that seemed suspicious. When we investigated, it turned out that an RD was reviewing medical records for her own personal learning on a specific disease because her mother had been recently diagnosed. Even though she had been through HIPAA training, she did not realize her actions were in violation. Because our facility has a zero tolerance policy, I had to let her go. You always think members of your clinical team are professionals and just know these things, but you can't make that assumption.”
**Fair Labor Standards Act Compliance**

The federal Fair Labor Standards Act (1938) established the minimum wage; rules for overtime pay; recordkeeping, which includes certain identifying information about the employee such as name and Social Security number as well as data about the hours worked and the wages earned; and standards for youth employment. The policies are enforced by the US Department of Labor (DOL) (19). In recent years, DOL has expanded enforcement of the act, and multiple health care institutions have been found noncompliant. For example, DOL investigators found that nurses at multiple facilities in a large health care system were owed money because the health care system's timekeeping system automatically deducted time for meal periods whether or not the employees were fully relieved of their duties (20).

Even if appropriate compensation policies and procedures are in place, violations can arise from failures in policy administration and the day-to-day practices of managers and noncompliant employees (20). The DOL may audit an employer at any time. Many investigations are initiated by employee complaints. Employers should be aware that an investigation can expand beyond the initial complaint to a review of all wage and hour practices. Examples of health care violations include the following (20):

- Computerized time systems automatically deduct meal periods even when employees work during meal breaks.
- Employees work before and after their shifts without being paid properly.
- Employees are not paid for attending training sessions.

As a CNM, you must understand the ramifications of the Fair Labor Standards Act for both your exempt and non-exempt employees. It is important to properly distinguish exempt positions from those that are non-exempt. A job title or job description does not necessarily grant exempt status; what matters is the actual work performed (19). Many people believe that all exempt workers are salaried and all non-exempt workers are hourly. That is not the case. How employees are paid does not have anything to do with how they are classified. For example, a non-exempt worker may be paid a salary, but you still have to pay attention to minimum wage and overtime requirements for this employee. The Fair Labor Standards Act website has many tools to assist CNMs in gaining understanding and developing compliance strategies for this law (19).

**Summary**

The skills required to manage various HR processes are often new to CNMs and may be outside their comfort zone. Therefore, it is vital that you partner with your HR department to understand your role and theirs as well as how they can best support you. Your people are your most important resource. Understanding and gaining competence in the hiring, orientation, and ongoing management of your staff is vital to ensure a highly functioning team that provides safe, timely, effective, and efficient patient care.
References