



How standards help protect frontline healthcare workers

Healthcare services are united in facing the coronavirus pandemic, with many thousands of vital workers and carers at the frontline.

Unprecedented measures have been put in place worldwide to meet this challenge – such as recalling retired medical staff and deploying final year medical students. In New York alone, one of the hardest hit states in the USA, over 90,000 people volunteered to join the battle against coronavirus.

Further to the current acute shortages, staff recruitment and retention has been a longstanding sector challenge. Funding cuts, an ageing workforce, rising demand for services and a growing technology skills gap has driven shortages of healthcare workers globally. In the UK, for example, estimates put the staff shortfall as high as 250,000 by 2030.

Realistically, these issues will only likely worsen in the immediate post-coronavirus landscape. Recruiting, developing and retaining the right healthcare talent therefore remains an enduring sector priority. Healthcare organizations should take a holistic, standards-based approach to this challenge to optimize outcomes both short and long-term.

The right business continuity management (BCM) plan can minimize the impact of unexpected events. ISO 22301 specifies requirements for a management system to protect against, reduce the likelihood of, and ensure an organization recovers from disruptive incidents.

In healthcare, where any disturbance to normal operations is felt most by ground level staff often working directly with the public, a BCM will alleviate any undue stress and help protect overall staff wellbeing.

Healthcare companies should also consider sector-specific guidelines, such as the PAS 2015 framework for health services resilience, which combines risk assessment, stakeholder and partner cooperation, optimal communication and public information sharing. PAS 2015 is a useful resource for NHS-funded organizations to handle crises swiftly and safeguard their staff in the process.

A broader management standard for healthcare managers to consider is ISO 9001 which focuses on organizational quality. Although it takes a holistic perspective, its principles impact employee wellbeing beneficially in a multitude of ways – ensuring adequate staff training and providing clarity around roles, responsibilities and progression, as well as fostering an environment that supports wellbeing.



It also goes without saying that the human resources (HR) function is essential in healthcare – where staff turnover and burnout is a constant challenge. BS 76000, the people management standard, helps healthcare companies protect their greatest assets, with a strong focus on nurturing and retaining existing talent.

These sentiments will be particularly meaningful following coronavirus, when the reputation of healthcare institutions will undoubtedly be staked on how well they looked after their staff before, during and after the fact.

Further, training and development is another key element of employee engagement. PD 76006 is a guide written by experts on learning and development (L&D) strategy. It can be used to benchmark training and progression processes to maximize employee opportunities.

Another factor that boosts employee engagement and satisfaction is diversity and inclusion. The demographics of healthcare workforces are typically quite diverse although genders, social backgrounds and ethnicities are often grouped by role: for example, in the U.S. only nine per cent of nurses are male.

The upcoming BSISO 30415 addresses this and certification will display that the management team are committed to valuing individual differences.

Finally, it would be remiss not to touch on standards that tackle occupational health and safety in the workplace. Coronavirus has shone a spotlight on the importance of the health and safety of healthcare staff in atypical circumstances.

ISO 45001 is the catch-all occupational health and safety (OH&S) standard for safe working conditions, whereas the upcoming ISO 45003 will focus on psychological health in the workplace. PAS 3002 outlines a general code of practice for ensuring both. Certification displays best practice and acts as a signal to employees that their safety is a top priority.

Needless to say, now's a critical moment for the healthcare sector. Those that put standards at the forefront of their employment strategy will better weather the staffing challenges of the coming years.

Summary

- The coronavirus outbreak unites healthcare workers all over the world in facing their greatest challenge to date.
- Unprecedented measures have been put in place to mitigate this challenge, which has been exacerbated by shortages of appropriately skilled healthcare staff in both developed and developing economies.
- The healthcare sector must tackle the various recruitment and retention challenges it faces in order to deliver the highest possible quality care.
- Developing a Business Continuity Management (BCM) plan with ISO 22301 will protect against disruptive incidents, alleviate stress and promote the well-being of staff.
- Healthcare companies should also consider sector-specific guidelines, such as the PAS 2015 framework for health services resilience.
- Improving quality with ISO 9001 will have a positive impact on employee engagement and performance, while fostering an environment that supports their well-being.

- ISO 28000 offers guidance on supply chain security, with a comprehensive risk-based security management system - combining robust auditing with supplier visibility and contingency planning.
- Sustainable food production is expected by consumers and regulatory bodies alike.
- ISO 14001 can be used to reduce environmental impact and meet legal requirements.
- Every employer has a duty to protect the health, safety and well being of their staff. ISO
- 45001 enables an organization to proactively improve its occupational health and safety (OH&S) performance, and ISO 45003 focuses on promoting psychological wellbeing.
- Taking a systematic, standards-based approach to all aspects of food management makes it faster and easier to maintain compliance, while keeping up with new requirements in an ever-changing regulatory landscape.

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