Equity in Hiring: Best Health Care Recruitment Practices

How equitable is your hiring? Learn how to transform your workplace by creating equity in hiring practices.

Published September 27, 2023



Equitable hiring is critical for your patients and the health of your organization. But when bias creeps into your hiring practices, you wind up with a less diverse, less inclusive, and less effective workplace. The impact of unfair hiring can be felt everywhere, damaging workforce morale and hurting patient well-being. In fact, the American Hospital Association states that “diverse and inclusive hiring is central to health equity.” This means that as the workforce becomes more diverse and equitable, patients also receive more equitable care.

But while it’s easy to say “hire equitably,” it’s harder to put equity in hiring into motion. We break down the impact of unfair hiring practices and what you can do to have a more non-discriminatory workplace.

What Is Equity?

The term equity refers to a sense of fairness and justice. While *equality* in hiring means treating every candidate or employee the same, *equity* means acknowledging that we do not all start from the same place. In order to be an equitable employer, you don't just have to treat employees equally – you have to adjust your approach based on your employee's position.

As an example, a 2021 report found that half of LGBTQ+ community members faced job discrimination. An equal response would involve simply doing your best to ensure that employees are treated fairly. But this response, though well-intended, doesn't acknowledge the heightened difficulty of navigating a workplace while LGBTQ+. An equitable employer could offer additional resources for members of the LGBTQ+ community to help them air grievances and report bias without retaliation. Another resource could be an anonymous suggestion box, either physical or an online form, so employees can provide feedback without the anxiety.

Why Is Equity in Hiring so Important in Health Care?

When you practice equity in hiring, your workforce becomes more diverse. This allows traditionally underrepresented groups the opportunity to work and make a livelihood. This can improve employee satisfaction and help your bottom line. Here are just some of the many reasons why equity in hiring is important in health care.

Improved Patient Outcomes

According to one study by UC Denver, "patients generally fare better when care [is] provided by more diverse teams." These findings suggest that diverse health care teams bring a range of perspectives and experiences, leading to improved patient outcomes. Diversity and equity don't just help your staff – they affect your patients, too.

Culturally Competent Care

When underserved populations aren't brought into the hiring fold, it causes a lack of diversity in the workforce. This means that it's less likely a patient with unique cultural needs will see themselves reflected in their care staff. For example, if a patient only speaks Spanish, they might be able to communicate with Spanish-speaking staff until an interpreter can be sourced. Without this kind of care, the chances are higher that the patient could experience a breakdown in communication, lower satisfaction levels, and decreased trust in the health care system overall.

Social Responsibility

Employees thrive in inclusive and equitable work environments where they feel valued and respected. Employers have the ability to ensure that our workplaces are accessible to qualified candidates, regardless of their identity and background. It's a moral imperative that employers seek to hire

equitably and provide space for underrepresented communities. Failing to practice equitable hiring can also open employers up to legal ramifications.

Combating the Staffing Shortage

By actively promoting and implementing equity in hiring, health care organizations can attract a broader pool of qualified candidates – including individuals from underrepresented communities. This approach helps mitigate the staffing shortage by tapping into talent that might have been otherwise overlooked in traditional hiring practices.

How Can You Improve Equity in Health Care Hiring?

1. Assess Your Data

To understand where you stand on equity in hiring, take a look at the numbers.

If you collect your candidates' demographic data, analyze that information to see if you're attracting workers who represent your community. If you don't collect this information, consider an alternate approach. For instance, send out surveys to understand if your employees are satisfied with their workplace equity. You might also invite patients to provide feedback, as they personally feel the effects of a diverse (and not-so diverse) workplace.

Analyze your findings to see what you could change. Is your candidate pool homogeneous? Do you have a diverse range of candidates but not a diverse workforce? There might be some conscious or unconscious bias hurting your hiring process.

2. Use Inclusive Language in Your Job Description

Not all job descriptions are equally welcoming and inclusive. It takes time and thought to write a job description that promotes diversity and equity. Here are some of the factors that you should consider.

- **Use gender-neutral language:** Avoid using gender-specific pronouns or job titles. Instead, opt for inclusive terms such as "they," "their," or "the candidate."
- **Emphasize diversity and inclusion:** Explicitly highlight your commitment to diversity and inclusion with an equal opportunity statement that emphasizes your company values.
- **Focus on essential qualifications:** Avoid unnecessary requirements that may disproportionately create barriers for certain groups.
- **Provide accommodation information:** Include information about disability accommodations. Mention that the company is willing to make reasonable accommodations during the application process and throughout employment.

- **Describe your workplace culture:** Highlight any efforts the company has made to foster an inclusive culture, such as diversity training, employee resource groups, mentorship programs, and other inclusion-related programs.

3. Expand Community Recruitment Efforts

Partner with local organizations that support underrepresented populations. Place ads in community-specific newspapers with a diverse audience, for example. Diversify the job fairs where your organization has a presence. Build partnerships with organizations and institutions that focus on supporting underrepresented communities in health care.

4. Curate Diverse Interview Panels

Having a diverse group of interviewers can help mitigate biases, bring varied perspectives, and contribute to fair and inclusive decision making. You won't be able to cover every identity when putting together an interview panel, but you can increase the likelihood that someone will see themselves reflected in the room and decrease the chance of unconscious bias.

5. Provide Training and Education

Work with outside agencies to train hiring managers in equitable recruiting practices. If you're unable to bring in outsider trainers, develop training within your HR team. Don't ask employees to run these trainings themselves, as this puts undue labor on already underrepresented groups.

Potential Types of Training

- **Unconscious bias training:** Unconscious biases can color a person's perceptions, decisions, and behaviors. This training helps participants understand how biases affect their workplace interactions and provides strategies to mitigate its impact.
- **Diversity and inclusion training:** Diversity and inclusion training focuses on promoting understanding, acceptance, and appreciation of difference. It educates employees about the value of diversity and the importance of creating an inclusive environment.
- **Legal and policy training:** This type of training ensures that employees are aware of their rights and responsibilities in the workplace. It covers important laws and regulations related to employment, such as equal opportunity employment, anti-discrimination laws, and accommodations for individuals with disabilities.
- **Cultural competency training:** This type of training aims to develop employees' understanding of different cultures and cultural practices. It helps individuals recognize and appreciate diverse cultural backgrounds, traditions, and communication styles.

- **LGBTQ+ inclusivity training:** LGBTQ+ inclusivity training specifically focuses on creating a supportive and inclusive environment for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer individuals. The training typically addresses issues related to workplace discrimination, microaggressions, and creating an inclusive culture. It may also provide guidance on using inclusive languages and respecting diverse gender identities.

6. Regularly Evaluate and Improve Equity in Hiring

Just as you started by evaluating diversity and equity in health care, return to these numbers once you implement new strategies to boost equity in hiring. Are they showing an improvement? If not, what can you do differently? Continue assessing your data (whether it's demographic data or qualitative employee survey response) to track your process and maintain inclusivity.

Better Hiring with Viventium Recruiting Powered by Apploi

We know that health care employers need software that works together. That's why Viventium offers a recruiting and hiring platform through Apploi to provide a seamless candidate experience. Reach out to schedule your free, personalized demo.

This information is for educational purposes only, and not to provide specific legal advice. This may not reflect the most recent developments in the law and may not be applicable to a particular situation or jurisdiction.