

## Report on Medicare Compliance Volume 29, Number 5. February 10, 2020

### Integrity Is Seen as 'Backbone' of Compliance, with ROI; Hospitals Foster Speak-Up Culture

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By Nina Youngstrom

It takes hospitals almost three months to recruit a registered nurse and last year cost \$53,600–\$138,600 in recruitment, labor and overtime, according to the *NSI National Health Care Retention & RN Staffing Report*.<sup>[1]</sup> After all that time and money, hospitals have a big stake in keeping nurses and other good employees by showing them they work for an ethical organization, which means, addressing compliance and quality-of-care concerns and making clinical and business decisions that are in the best interests of patients and consistent with the mission statement, experts say. Otherwise, organizations risk an expensive and demoralizing revolving door, in addition to the omnipresent threat of whistleblowers.

“If it takes \$56,000 to onboard a nurse and that nurse comes into a system where he or she feels it’s not a safe place to raise concerns, that nurse will leave, and you have to spend another \$56,000 to recruit another nurse,” said Loree Simmons, assistant director of compliance and integrity at Novant Health, which has hospitals and clinics in North and South Carolina and Virginia. While multiple factors contribute to an employee’s departure, one study<sup>[2]</sup> from Bentley University found that more than 80% of millennials believe it’s a priority to work for a socially responsible and ethical company.

Encouraging a speak-up culture, which means employees report problems without fear of retaliation, is one dimension of the emphasis on integrity and ethics. Confidence in reporting should go hand in hand with faith in your organization’s integrity, because it’s not always obvious what the right answer is to a compliance question, Simmons said. But the words can’t ring hollow. “Most organizations have a mission statement. They probably have core values,” Simmons said. “But if we held our conduct as individuals and as a system up to a mirror, can we truly say we do what we say we do?” She said this question has come up more lately as compliance programs mature and aspire to be less reactive, and there is a premium on evaluating their effectiveness.

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