

Career Counsel

By Betsy S. Hersher and Graeme Udd

Gazing Into the Crystal Ball

The aging population in the U.S. will affect your career and open new opportunities for personal growth and career success.

You can't look into a major business publication these days without seeing dire predictions and alarmist rhetoric regarding the future of health care delivery in the United States. With the aging of the population, how will our health care delivery system sustain itself with ever-rising costs?

At the center of this hoopla is the new health care technology that will drive research and fuel and sustain our increased longevity. Political perspectives aside, what is actually being done to prepare for this rapidly growing demographic? Statistics suggest that by 2010, a quarter to a third of the U.S. population will be over 65 years old. This very real trend directly impacts your career in health care IT in many ways, but in this article we will deal specifically with only two.

New career tracks emerge

Entirely new roles and responsibilities are emerging in direct response to the needs posed by the aging population. For example, we are seeing increased demand for experience and expertise within the major area of quality. Different organizations have disparate definitions, so quality is an as-yet-undefined role. The chief quality officer and director of quality positions are hot jobs; however, strategic responsibilities and priorities vary widely between quality in an IT setting and quality in a wider operational and tactical sense. Executive-level privacy and security positions are similar in this respect.

Many of these roles require little or no health care background in order to be successful. In fact, because these are new positions for health care, it may be easier to step into these roles from outside the industry. They can also provide an alternative career track for executives who are looking for new opportunities and challenges within health care, as well as for executives in health care IT who are looking for wider or different strategic roles in hospital or health system administration and governance.

Another new and exciting area in health care is that of the project management office. Increasingly, the director of project management role is gaining importance. When a CIO has a \$400 million dollar project at stake, he or she often needs another executive on his/her senior management team with specialized expertise. For this role, a specific certification is highly recommended, if not required: the project management professional certification, or PMP. The PMP career track offers executives from inside and outside health care (and health care IT) opportunities for advancement through an alternative career path.

Getting older, getting better

All of these emerging health care opportunities aren't strictly for younger executives or those just entering the marketplace. With increased longevity and quality of life, older, seasoned executives are also taking advantage

and using their significant career experience and expertise to leverage themselves into new and more challenging positions.

People aren't retiring anymore when they hit 65. Why retire when you have more time, more drive and more mission-critical knowledge to share? Why retire when you're at the top of your game? Career paths and potential opportunities can change quickly in this volatile and fast-paced market; that's why it's essential to stay focused and alert to industry trends and currents. Remember that you have the chance to do something different, to get your MBA or new certification, to use your unique gifts and skills in exciting ways. New opportunities for career success mean that you have something to give, and the health care delivery system needs it now, more than ever.

Ms. Hersher is founder and president of Hersher Associates, Ltd., a health care consulting and executive search firm located in Northbrook, IL. She is an expert in organizational assessments, position design, and executive recruitment and retention.

Mr. Udd is a research consultant with Hersher Associates.

February 2007 • ADVANCE for Health Information Executives

This article has been reprinted with permission from ADVANCE Newsmagazines.

www.advancweb.com/HIE