Hundreds of new hires; help wanted sign is still out

Hospital Expansion Creates Campus Boomtown

The general economy may still be sluggish, but at University of Colorado Hospital, a job recruiting and hiring boom continues.

The headcount at UCH rose 15 percent between March 2012 and March 2013, driven by robust patient volumes and the need to gear up for a much larger Emergency Department — now open — and the AIP 2 tower, which will begin a phased opening April 29.

Without people to staff them, new buildings are nothing more than impressive shells. That’s why the hospital has had a “huge hiring surge” the past several months, said Mame Fuhrman, director of talent acquisition for University of Colorado Health. One notable example: between March 2012 and March 2013, the hospital hired 251 nurses, 88 more than the year before.

“Last year at this time, we were trying to fill 45 nursing positions,” Fuhrman said. “Now we need more than 100.”

The story of the surge is told twice a month, as new employees pack a conference room on the sixth floor of the Leprino Building for orientation. In March alone, 160 new employees came on board, Fuhrman said. The last three orientations drew a combined 200 attendees. A separate orientation had to be planned to accommodate the latest group of nurse interns, known as advanced care partners (ACPs). To date, 57 ACPs have joined the hospital in 2013, the largest number ever.

The search for new talent continues. Nurses remain in particularly high demand, but the hospital is also looking for food service workers, telemetry techs, case managers, pharmacists, ancillary health techs, respiratory therapists and other staff that form the backbone of a health care organization.

The job is complicated by the fact that the hospital environment is not static. People come and go, demand changes for various positions, and patient volumes rise and fall in different areas.

“‘It’s a bit of a moving target,’ Fuhrman said of the hiring picture. ‘We’re constantly reassessing where our greatest needs are.’"

Calling out around the world. The hospital has been casting its recruiting nets widely, particularly in its search for nurses, said Betsy Slemmons, RN, nurse recruiter in Human Resources.
strategies include beefing up the public Web site, which now posts job openings across the UCHealth system; attending national and local nursing conventions and posting ads on organizational Web sites; manning booths at local job fairs; running print ads; and launching pay-per-click ad campaigns on Facebook.

The general idea is to pinpoint the hospital’s recruiting efforts as precisely as possible, Slemmons said. For example, a national Facebook campaign targets traveling nurses 25 to 35 years of age. For these nurses, the hospital pitch is the Colorado lifestyle, encapsulated in the phrase “Mountains, sun and urban fun!” Slemmons said.

A second Facebook ad aims to recruit nurses looking for extra shifts to the hospital’s resource pool. It targets those who live within 50 miles of Aurora and touts the hospital’s top ranking in the metro area and the state by US News and World Report and its three-time designation as a Magnet nursing facility.

**Towerling achievements.** The most immediate challenge is meeting nursing demand created by the opening of AIP 2. For example, the new Neuro ICU, which opens May 6, will have 24 beds, up from the current 10. Slemmons said the hospital will fill that gap with nurses hired last year to staff the Critical Care Surge Unit, carved out of the current inpatient Post Anesthesia Care Unit. The PACU will get that space back after AIP 2 opens.

The Cardiac intensive care and progressive care units, which are also moving to AIP 2 with Neuro, are looking to hire four additional nurses.

Slemmons said as of the third week of April she was still recruiting nurses to cover the opening of four new ORs May 13; Medicine Specialties, which will move to AIP 2 June 8; and BMT/Oncology, which opens an expanded unit in AIP 2 July 1.

The Emergency Department, meanwhile recently had its own mini hiring surge, adding 10 care team assistants and 15 techs to staff the new space and implement a revamped care delivery model.

But the hiring needs extend to AIP 1 as well. For example, the hospital currently needs about a dozen nurses to staff a medical/surgical progressive care unit that will occupy the 10th floor space in AIP 1 vacated by the cardiac units, Slemmons said. The new unit will care for patients whose acuity level puts them between placement in an ICU or a medical/surgical unit.

In addition, the Pulmonary Unit, which is staying in AIP 1, is adding 18 beds June 9. To cover that, the unit needs a dozen experienced, full-time nurses; 10 certified nursing assistants; four ACPs; and six new grad nurses, said the unit’s nurse manager, Kaycee Shiskowsky, RN.

**In-house help.** While the hospital looks for new nurses to add to the fold, it’s enticing its 53 travelers to sign on permanently. Slemmons said travelers recently received a mini email blast notifying them that they could receive an additional 12 hours of paid time off if they hire on with the hospital by June 24. So far, five have accepted the offer, Slemmons reported.

The hospital also relies on its well-regarded and growing Post-Baccalaureate Nurse Residency Program to fill its staffing pipeline, Slemmons said. Graduate nurses commit to UCH for a minimum of two years, but the retention rate after that period regularly exceeds 90 percent.

More broadly, UCHealth is fine-tuning a staff-sharing system that would allow nurses and other employees from one system hospital to work at another on a short-term, contract basis. There are
wrinkles to iron out – each hospital still has different policies and guidelines, timekeeping systems, benefits, orientations and so on – but the approach could help UCH plug short-term gaps while AIP 2 gets up and running, Fuhrman said.

Longer term, the staff-sharing system aims to help employees at each of the hospitals make more informed decisions about switching permanently from one site to another, Fuhrman added.

“’It’s a chance for people to ’try it before they buy it,’” she said.