

## Meeting Staffing Challenges Using Interim Professionals: A Win-Win

By Steve Geyer

As [Corazon](#) works with clients across the country, there are recurring themes that our team looks to address the needs and common struggles of healthcare providers. It should come as no surprise that staffing is one element that continues to be an increasing topic of concern, even though the reason why has changed over time.

The lack of staffing resources was a significant challenge for many organizations as our world abruptly changed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Primary Care Collaborative, a staggering 1 in 5 healthcare workers quit their jobs when the pandemic struck. While Corazon worked with clients to develop recruitment strategies – both short- and long-term, the healthcare community has entered a new phase where there has been some stabilization of staffing in many regions, but “with new staff comes new challenges.” For example, a manager of a previously tenured team will now often find themselves with multiple new hires that require an assessment of their abilities, development of a training plan, adjustment of current workflows, and more. Combining these factors with maintaining the normal demands of the department, including quality and patient satisfaction, may include partial or full responsibility typically provided through other positions (at various levels or titles) that may have been eliminated due to perceived cost savings. **Welcome to the post-COVID environment.**

### So, What is Next?

Preparing an almost entirely new team is not one of the usual responsibilities listed in any healthcare leader's job description. According to Recruit Shop, it is estimated that each new employee requires 71 hours of training to fulfill their job requirements. After successfully recruiting for open positions, many leaders feel a sense of achievement. However, these leaders soon realize that the real work has just begun in successfully establishing a full staff. Managing new employees with diverse backgrounds and high salary expectations can cause a lot of stress and once they are onboarded, determining how to **train, maintain, and retain** this new group of professionals can be daunting. A new team may consist of a diverse group of individuals including new graduates, transfers, travelers, and experienced professionals. Together, the entire team (i.e., leader(s) and staff) are now navigating uncharted territory that was not present for most people before the COVID-19 pandemic. Many are skilled at integrating and orienting new team members, but this becomes more challenging when a larger number of staff are hired within a short period of time.

However, given increased salaries, competitive landscape, and other resources (e.g., recruitment support) that are needed to achieve the minimum staffing levels, the employee team becomes a substantial investment that must be protected.

Having an experienced and impartial “pinch hitter” during this crucial time can make all the difference. It can determine whether your team will thrive, and remain dedicated, or if you will have to go through the staff replacement process all over again. At Corazon, we offer our clients a reliable and innovative solution that saves them from the costly process of losing and then re-hiring multiple FTE's: **Interim Professionals**. Corazon's Interim Professionals provide an insurance policy that yields quick benefits and long-term results.

### Building the Roadmap

Admittedly, it's hard to “know what you don't know.” This mantra remains valid for a newly hired employee, despite the thoroughness of the hiring and screening procedures. The first role of any effective interim should be an assessment of the current situation and to provide feedback to guide their work plan for the duration of the project. For example, consider the case of an Interim Corazon Clinical Nurse Specialist (CNS) or others that may be tasked with developing a staff training plan, as there are three steps to follow as outlined below:

- **Step One:** Evaluate the hospital's existing staffing data, which includes FTE counts, schedules, tenure, and competencies, and then find meaning in that data. This is done to devise an actionable plan for current staff improvement efforts and to instill consistent training for any new hires.
- **Step Two:** Lead staff quality improvement initiatives through the designed, innovative plans to promote greater team development. Patient safety is reinforced through establishing multidisciplinary teams and implementing evidence-based alternatives in solving clinical problems and/or patient care concerns.
- **Step Three:** Support other team members through information sharing, teaching, research, and enhanced service development.

By following this proven process, Corazon Interim Professionals have been successful in positioning teams to prioritize patient-centered best practices and achieve higher team engagement levels that support increased staff retention.

### Creating a New Direction for the Future

Corazon has learned through many years of placing seasoned professionals, that transitions can always be an opportunity. When a team is not as firmly established, then they tend to be more open to change. An Interim can take the opportunity to improve processes that are inefficient, come up with innovative solutions, and update or develop policies and procedures. This is also an opportunity for the Interim to cross-train the staff in other areas or to assist with finding additional coverage.

Additionally, the Interim Professional can provide:

- An overall assessment of the service line, department, or clinical program to determine any other goals that will bring value during their assignment at your organization;
- Further development or update of any quality, operational, or financial report cards or dashboards;
- Input to address other issues such as length of stay, inventory, or vendor costs; and,
- Rapid results due to the vast experience with other facilities.

According to SHRM (Society for Human Resource Management), the cost of losing an employee can equate to double that employee's annual salary. Conversely, Corazon's client partners that have engaged with our interim professionals have experienced average increased revenues of up to 15-20%.

### Ensuring Success

During conversations with healthcare C-Suite Executives and Service Line Administrators across the country, the most prevalent approach among leaders is to absorb additional responsibilities when positions become vacant. Particularly in Corazon's distinct service lines (Cardiovascular, Neuro, Ortho, and Surgical Services), the success of these services is vital to sustaining the viability of the provider organization. Suddenly, leaders being burdened with more work in addition to giving the "freshman" team the attention they need, becomes a triple-play when you add the already formidable day-to-day responsibilities. But given that the need for this kind of resource is temporary, an Interim Professional is "tailor-made" as the perfect solution.

Although the interim leadership need may be temporary, a full-time leader establishing their role with the new team is critical. A great interim professional excels as a supplemental resource for the full-time leader at their direction and effectively embodies the organization's culture

and carries their message. As the interim is fulfilling their assigned responsibilities, they are providing insight, observations, and guidance to the leader as a second pair of eyes that can elevate and advance their ability to lead exponentially. Additionally, the Interim can serve as a mentor, confidante, and even the resource needed to deliver hard messages.

There are many upsides to utilizing Interim Professionals that have a defined duration to achieve the organization's objectives. Rapid productivity like this only comes from considerable experience and skills that have been honed in multiple settings. Prior to the beginning of an assignment, the interim should be able to speak to prior work where they have made a quick impact, established relationships and credibility, and most of all left the organization and the team in an improved situation compared to before their support. And [Corazon](http://www.corazoninc.com) can bring those Interim Professionals to you. **That is a future that is bright.**



Steve Geyer is a Senior Vice President at Corazon, Inc. a national leader in program development for the Heart, Vascular, Neuroscience, Spine, and Orthopedic service lines, offering services in Consulting, Recruitment, Interim Management, and Accreditation. To learn more, visit [www.corazoninc.com](http://www.corazoninc.com) or call 412-364-8200. To reach the author, email [sgeyer@corazoninc.com](mailto:sgeyer@corazoninc.com).