Each year, in hospitals around the world, 195,000 patients die because of avoidable mistakes – far more people than will be killed by gun violence, drunk drivers and other vehicular accidents. Yet while these deaths can be prevented, the healthcare industry is still lacking strong support for the business tools and practices needed to engage its workforce and consequently turn these statistics around.

Reluctance to implement employee engagement programs often stems from misguided concerns about the costs and time commitment involved. Many of the most effective programs are relatively easy to implement and can be low-cost, or even no-cost. Healthcare leaders who put these employee engagement programs in place will reap the rewards of improved patient care and productivity increases that ultimately result in cost savings and a healthier bottom line.

This white paper will unbundle engagement to make it more practical and accessible, help clarify which factors actually lead to an engaged employee, and detail how to easily and inexpensively leverage those factors in the workplace.

Employee Engagement = Patient Care Quality & Satisfaction
Evidence continues to grow around the link between engaged healthcare employees and the quality of patient care and patient satisfaction. An exhaustive study that included 139,380 patients from 225 hospitals is featured in the book, *Putting Patients First*. The study found patient satisfaction levels directly relate to staff interaction and employee satisfaction levels.

A separate study at a major New York hospital reported similar findings. The study, “The Relationship Between Employee Satisfaction and Hospital Patient Experiences,” conducted by The Forum: Business Results Through People, affiliated with Northwestern University, also points to recognition as a key contributor to employee engagement. Recognition isn’t viewed solely as acknowledgement for a job well done, but also as a pathway to employee participation in decision making, and an opportunity to be heard by management and fellow healthcare professionals. These practices result in “more respect and visibility,” which also enhances engagement. The study emphasizes that how these employees feel about what they do is just as important as what they do. Patient experiences will not be any good if employees are not happy.

Perception Gaps
Recognition programs have proven to have a profoundly positive impact on employee engagement and patient satisfaction, as long as they are properly communicated and resonate with the staff. In some cases, however, healthcare leaders and their staff perceive the level of workplace recognition activity very differently, which can undermine even the best attempts to engage employees. Consider the findings from the Global Recognition Study, which found that while 43 percent of managers indicated they were satisfied with recognition in their facility, only 18 percent of
employees felt the same way.

Managers responded that 51 percent of employees had the opportunity to receive recognition, but only 34 percent of employees agreed that was true. Of the employee respondents only 24 percent said they frequently received recognition. Interestingly, the opportunity to receive recognition had a stronger correlation to satisfaction than actually receiving recognition, which bodes well for healthcare leaders who wish to improve engagement scores. Just implementing a recognition program should provide a boost to employee engagement levels even before the first award is given.

Managers Play a Key Role
Employees’ direct supervisors play a significant role in influencing employee job performance and engagement levels, but unfortunately, as we’ve seen, employees and managers are not always on the same page. This disconnect between employee and management perceptions is rooted in the hiring process and the on-going communication (or lack thereof) from managers, according to research from the Gallup Organization. Consider the findings that:

- Only one in five employees know what is expected of them at work
- 25 percent are extremely unclear about their job expectations
- One in three employees feel miscast in their roles
- Only 10 percent of employees receive progress feedback from management
- Half of employees get no feedback at all and don’t feel their managers care about them

These data points serve as a wake-up call for healthcare executives to invest the extra time in getting the right people into the right jobs from the start, rather than managing problems afterward. Once those employees are in the right roles, it is essential that managers consistently provide clear and constructive feedback and keep employees engaged.

Driving Engagement
While the broader concept of engagement can seem unwieldy for some managers at first, the five main drivers of engagement should be familiar and achievable goals for leaders. These include:

- Creating trust
- Focusing on employee opportunities and well-being
- Nurturing pride in the organization
- Improving communication and alignment
- Showing appreciation

The degree to which each of these drivers contributes to engagement varies. In the Global Recognition Study, “Showing appreciation” was found to be a secondary driver of engagement, but also acted as a driver of every one of the other drivers. This means that showing appreciation is the single most impactful action a leader can take to positively influence engagement.

The strength and effectiveness of each of the drivers varies from company to company, and is influenced by company culture, and the company’s ability to deliver the drivers at any...
The Performance Improvement Council (PIC), a professional organization of performance marketing executives is a special industry group of the Incentive Marketing Association (www.incentivemarketing.org), is collectively focused on helping companies optimize their investment in human capital through proven and innovative reward and recognition solutions. To learn more about the Performance Improvement Council, please visit http://www.thepicnow.org

recognizing and appreciating employees really is a matter of life and death.

Employee Retention Saves Lives

Engaged employees are loyal employees, and fostering a loyal workforce results in lower employee turnover and improved patient care. In fact, bringing employee turnover rates below 12 percent will decrease patients’ hospital stays by 1.2 days and lower mortality rates, according to The Studer Group, a world renowned health care consulting firm.

The conclusion is simple: where appreciation is present in the culture, employees feel there is more trust, better communication, more pride in the workplace, and a greater sense of opportunity and well-being.

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**PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT COUNCIL (PIC)**

A Strategic Industry Group within IMA

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