

## Hope Street Group's health career pathways initiative: a case study of the West Michigan region

*By James W. Guest, PhD; Senior Consultant, Hope Street Group*

### Abstract

This case study provides an overview of how the West Michigan region of Hope Street Group's national Health Career Pathways initiative has leveraged the expertise of lead employer Mercy Health to build evidence-based career pathways with workforce and education partners. The case study is based on interviews with key individuals from Mercy Health, Metrics Reporting, and the author's own field work in the region as a consultant for Hope Street Group. Mercy Health's Evidence-Based Selection Process (EBSP) leverages data-driven methods and analysis to measurably tie the full range of knowledge, skills, and abilities of prospective employees to job performance. Data on occupational and behavioral competencies was then shared with community partners to create evidence-based career pathways. Each employer, education, and workforce partner has professionals dedicated to this effort. In the first five years, Mercy Health has reduced first-year turnover from a 25.30% baseline to 19.50%; increased hiring diversity from 18.4% non-white to 38.0%; and increased workforce diversity across the hospital system from 13.4% non-white to 20.0%. A registered Apprenticeship for Medical Assisting has provided a total of 89 apprentices to three different West Michigan hospital systems. The discussion identifies training needs for regions that wish to replicate the outcomes achieved by Mercy Health and their community partners, and sketches four stages of regional development: (1) Organizing the Sector (2) Developing Career Pathways (3) Improving the Pathway with Evidence-Based Competencies and (4) Expanding Evidence-Based Career Pathways.

### Introduction

The mission of the Hope Street Group (HSG) is to ensure every American has access to economic opportunity. HSG believes the key driver for economic opportunity for individuals is a career path. Their flagship initiative, Sync Our Signals,<sup>1</sup> optimizes the signaling between employers, education and individuals concerning the skills and behavioral competencies measurably related to job performance. As part of this initiative, HSG manages the Health Career Pathways Network, a collection of leading healthcare employers working collaboratively to drive system change for the U.S. healthcare workforce by developing evidence-based ways to identify, educate and hire talent.

A career pathway is an integrated collection of programs and services intended to develop an individual's core academic, technical, and employability skills, and to provide him or her with continuous education, training, and placement in high-demand, high-opportunity jobs. More than a dozen federal departments signed a joint letter on career pathways in 2016 supporting demand-driven career pathways.<sup>2</sup> This letter is aligned with the Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act of 2014, "legislation that is designed to strengthen and improve our nation's public workforce system and help get Americans...into high-quality jobs and careers and help employers hire and retain skilled workers."<sup>3</sup>

The Health Career Pathway framework was developed to meet the needs of various organizations pursuing these goals, including lead employers, workforce agencies, education

partners, and community based organizations. The following case study generally describes evidence-based career pathways by looking at how Mercy Health leveraged their expertise with evidence-based selection to build evidence-based career pathways with workforce and education partners in West Michigan. The discussion suggests that building a sector strategy centered on these pathways could proceed in four stages.

### **Case Presentation**

Mercy Health West Michigan is a founding member of the Health Career Pathways Network, launched at the White House in 2016. Mercy Health, a regional ministry of Trinity Health, is a multi-campus healthcare provider with 700 hospital beds and over 8,600 employees. The system uses a range of practices to hire and engage employees including evidence-based hiring practices designed to build a diverse and qualified talent pipeline. Mercy Health is guided by the understanding that excellent patient care requires talented workers with the right skills tailored to their responsibilities. To that end, Mercy Health engaged in a major process redesign effort for talent acquisition to identify and hire new colleagues. The Evidence-Based Selection Process (EBSP) they developed and implemented leverages data-driven methods and analysis that measurably tie the full range of knowledge, skills, and abilities of prospective employees to job performance.<sup>4</sup>

In 2010, Mercy Health worked with Metrics Reporting to perform a comprehensive job analysis and detail the most important occupational and behavioral competencies for 22 O\*NET-aligned, data-rich job families. The O\*NET (Occupational Information Network) is a free online database developed by the U.S. Department of Labor that provides occupational information to help students, jobseekers, businesses, and workforce development professionals understand the world of work in the United States.<sup>5</sup> These 22 job families cover over 95 percent of all healthcare jobs. The resulting data on skills were used to refine a list of high-quality credentials associated with each job family, while validated cognitive assessments and behavioral assessments were selected to measure competencies related to job performance possessed by job applicants. All applicant data is collected using a compensatory system to assure that the process is fair and objective, reducing the ability of bias to affect an outcome. This has resulted in increased workforce diversity and improved retention over the first five years since implementation in 2012. The reliability and validity of the selection process is confirmed through Mercy Health's annual job performance evaluations.

As important as selecting candidates with a good fit may be for employers, building a reliable talent pool is equally critical – Mercy Health fills 3100 positions per year. Mercy Health envisioned how the education and training providers could use the harmonized sets of occupational and behavioral competencies created through the comprehensive job analyses to improve and align competency models used by education and workforce partners in the region. Developing a regional talent pipeline quickly emerged as the only viable long-term solution to the critical hiring needs of employers.

Mercy Health again worked with community partners to create a Career Portfolio system to be used by local community colleges, workforce partners, and others to build their regional talent pipeline. Evidence-based measures such as psychometric assessment scores and structured interview preparation, as well as standard jobseeker practices such as resume development, form

the core of the Career Portfolio. For example, community partners have incorporated evidence-based practices into a career coaching model. The outcome of the model is an individual career pathway map in which jobseekers outline their career progression goals and the education and resources needed to advance along their career pathway. Establishing agreement on the required elements of the Career Portfolio allowed employers, educators, and training providers to align “signals” between themselves and individuals seeking jobs in healthcare.

## Management and Outcomes

Mercy Health has a Talent Acquisition team that runs EBSP and works closely with Hiring Managers. The outcomes in the first five years have been extraordinary. All of the approximately 3,100 positions per year that are filled go through EBSP. Over that time, as the market has grown tighter, Mercy Health data indicate they have reduced first-year turnover from a 25.30% baseline in 2010 to 19.50% in December 2017, improving against odds. Moreover, hiring diversity has increased from 18.4% non-white (which includes race and ethnicity) in 2010 to 38.0% in 2016. Workforce diversity across the hospital system has gone up from 13.4% non-white in 2010 to 20.0% in 2016. By comparison, the west Michigan region is 21.6% non-white. Mercy Health is therefore close to achieving workforce equity in their organization (see Figure 1).

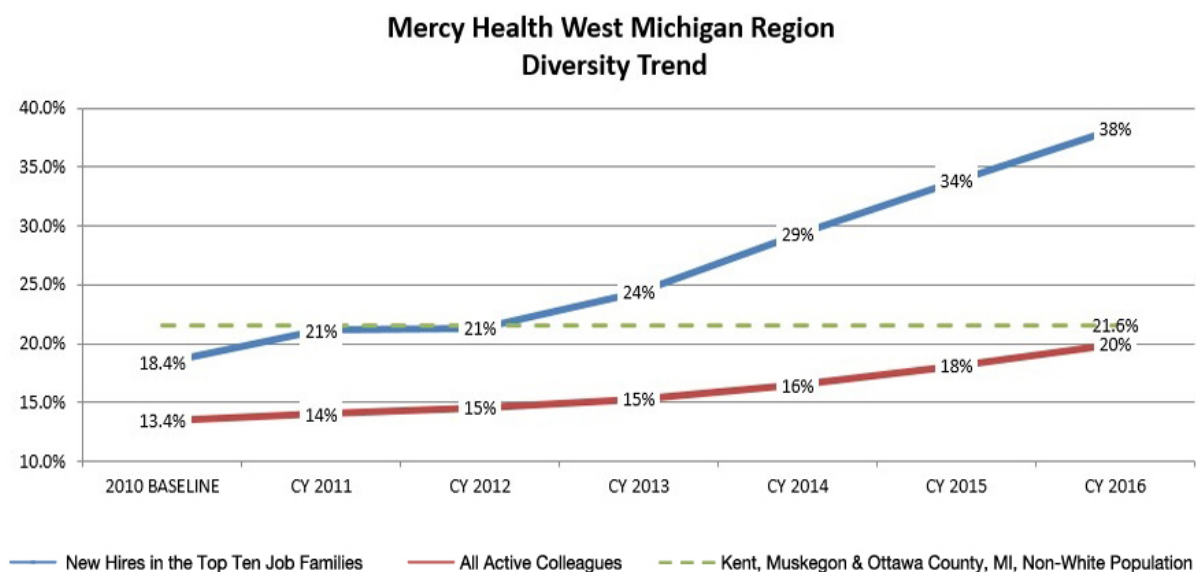


Figure 1: Mercy Health Diversity Trend since implementing the Evidence-Based Selection Process (data provided by Mercy Health)

Mercy Health also has members of the Talent Acquisition team dedicated to working with West Michigan Works!, the WIOA-aligned backbone agency of the Health Career Pathways initiative. West Michigan Works! has dedicated workforce professionals that organize community colleges and other partners in executing various career pathways in healthcare, including, most recently, registered Apprenticeships for Medical Assisting (MA). This evidence-based career pathway is filling critically needed vacancies, providing (in the first three cohorts) a total of 89 MA Apprentices to three different West Michigan hospital systems. In cohort one (2016), 23 of 24 Apprentices graduated, and the current retention rate with their employers is 96% (data provided by Metrics Reporting and West Michigan Works!).

Hope Street Group consultants work closely with Metrics Reporting in the Grand Rapids region and are closely involved with the development of the sector strategy. Three key pieces of the work – organizing community stakeholders, developing evidence-based career pathways, and using job analysis to define occupational and behavioral competencies related to job performance – have been translated into guidebooks that form the basis of workshops HSG delivers in other HCPN regions.

## **Discussion**

Key components necessary for other organizations and regions to replicate the outcomes experienced by Mercy Health and their partners in west Michigan are discussed below. There is a need to train individuals to facilitate a sector strategy, train career coaches, and train job analysts in order to duplicate successful outcomes. Those trained individuals can then pursue a four step process to implement evidence-based career pathways.

1. **Organizing the sector.** In this stage, regions align stakeholders in the sector around a specific set of job families, agree to a Collective Impact plan, and designate a backbone organization to guide the work. The primary outcomes of Stage One for HCPN regions are participation in a Stakeholder Workshop and a draft written plan for the region based on that workshop.
2. **Developing Career Pathways.** Regions design and work to implement demand-driven career pathways in their target job families. Outcomes: Early in this stage, regions hold a Career Navigation System Workshop and agree to a regional approach to some or all of the following elements: intake processes, career coaching, support services, learning, credentials, or career portfolios. At the end of this stage, regions have implemented functioning career pathway pilots that incorporate career coaching and portfolios.
3. **Improving the Pathway with Evidence-Based Competencies.** Regions with operational pilots advance individuals through demand-driven, evidence-based career pathways with elements of evidence-based career coaching and/or career portfolios. They may be exploring job analysis and competency validation. Outcomes: regions have implemented fully functioning evidence-based career pathways programs; have incorporated further evidence-based practices into their talent supply chains based on professional job analysis; have put in place infrastructure for sustaining the pathway; and are collecting data for validation studies of the relevant credentials and competencies.
4. **Expanding Evidence-based Career Pathways.** Regions at this stage have implemented multiple demand-driven, evidence-based career pathways that deliver substantial quantities of high quality, diverse talent to employers using evidence-based career coaching and evidence-based career portfolios. Job analysis and data collection for validation studies are used to identify and validate competencies.

As Shana Welch (Regional Director, Talent Acquisition, Mercy Health) noted, "evidence-based career pathways help us hire and develop colleagues that share the values of Trinity Health and that embrace the diversity of the communities we serve." Through efforts such as Sync Our

Signals and the Health Career Pathways Network, current and future regional sector workforce strategies will continue to support employers as we work together to implement demand-driven, evidence-based career pathways.

### **Acknowledgements**

Thanks to Shana Welch (Regional Director, Talent Acquisition, Mercy Health), Bill Guest (CEO, Metrics Reporting) and Martin Scaglione (CEO, Hope Street Group).

### **References**

1. Hope Street Group. *Sync Our Signals*. Accessed March 8, 2018: <http://hopestreetgroup.org/impact/jobs/sync-our-signals/>
2. Hastings, Sara (2016). *Career Pathways Joint Letter 2016*. Accessed March 8, 2018: [https://careerpathways.workforcegps.org/resources/2016/04/27/12/12/Career\\_Pathways\\_Joint\\_Letter\\_2016](https://careerpathways.workforcegps.org/resources/2016/04/27/12/12/Career_Pathways_Joint_Letter_2016)
3. Department of Labor -Employment and Training Agency. *The Workforce Opportunity and Innovation Act*. Accessed March 8, 2018: <https://www.doleta.gov/wioa>
4. Guest, James W. (2017). *Using Evidence to Drive Hiring and Investment: How Mercy Health West Michigan is Making the Case for Investing in Frontline Workers' Skills and Careers*. Washington D.C.: National Fund for Workforce Solutions (CareerSTAT). Accessed March 8, 2018: <https://nationalfund.org/learning-evaluation/publications/mercy-health/>
5. O\*NET Online. Accessed March 8, 2018: <https://www.onetonline.org>

**Suggested Citation:** Guest, J. Hope Street Groups's health career pathways initiative: a case study of the West Michigan region. *Journal of Interprofessional Workforce Research and Development*. Volume 1:Issue 1, 2018.