

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

You're listening to Work in Progress. I'm Ramona Schindelheim, editor-in-chief of WorkingNation. Work in Progress explores the rapidly changing workplace through conversations with innovators, educators and decision makers, people with solutions to today's workforce challenges. Industry experts have been sounding the alarm about the staffing shortages in healthcare for decades, and that shortage is growing, particularly in nursing and allied healthcare. Joining me now to talk about the healthcare pipeline is Dr. Jill Buban and she's the general manager and vice president of EdAssist by Bright Horizons. Jill, welcome to the podcast. Good to talk to you again.

Dr. Jill Buban, EdAssist by Bright Horizons:

Thank you so much, Ramona. I'm happy to be here and excited to be speaking to you about this national crisis.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Truly a crisis and as part of the problem, the population is getting older. We see issues in staffing, in medical training, so people who actually can teach the folks that we need in those hospitals. We also see burnout, especially after COVID, that's been a very, very big issue. So a lot of jobs are going unfilled and according to this new research that EdAssist and The Josh Bersin Company put out, we think that the demand, particularly for nurses, is going to grow 13% year over year between now and 2025. What I want to talk to you about is how do we fix this? How do we fill this pipeline? And I know some of what you've been doing is talking to clients about what they're doing internally. So why don't you give me an example and we'll start there and then we can continue the conversation from there.

Dr. Jill Buban, EdAssist by Bright Horizons:

About 40% of our client base are from the healthcare industry, whether it be large hospital systems, healthcare systems, medical centers around the country. So we've been hearing this, working with them for years, really looking at how their education, student loan benefit is becoming a strategic differentiator for them to attract talent, retain their current talent, think about ways to come up with solutions through education to not only retain those talented nurses but retain just talented human beings that fit into their culture and maybe shift them to another, a job through a re-skilling opportunity. We're seeing a variety of ways to try to do this and get creative. And we oftentimes lean on some of our external partners in the higher ed ecosystem or the ed tech ecosystem to really think through these opportunities to determine if they're going to work.

From the EdAssist end, we're really seeing this as a strategic education benefit in general, and it's not only that nice to have anymore, it's really this differentiator that's not only going to provide the ability to upskill and re-skill, but it's going to get those position, high need positions filled. So if we put forward a program that says you can have 200 medical assistance in 14 months through this certification program, we need to try and guarantee there's going to be those 200 medical assistants in 14 months. So it's really, it's a change. It's definitely a change specifically in that healthcare space.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

That's really interesting that it's coming from the healthcare systems themselves because there are a lot of people maybe trained to be a nurse or a doctor or medical technician. They get a certification, but they may do it outside the system. So this is a pipeline that employers are creating themselves. Can you

give me an example maybe of a system and what kind of benefits they're offering? Because I think that would be interesting to people who are going hmm, I think I want to do this, but how do I do it?

Dr. Jill Buban, EdAssist by Bright Horizons:

I can think of one we've been working with most recently. So I think this package actually speaks to that re-skilling internally, but also that upskilling as well. We recently worked with OhioHealth to create a program that includes this no cost option. So meaning there's the opportunity for people to go back to school with no out-of-pocket costs. We select a group of institutions thoughtfully with them, many in their local area, and it just decreases that access and entryway. 38% of our healthcare clients offer that no cost, but OhioHealth just recently launched this. They also really focused on the education network in which they have. So I think a component we oftentimes don't think about is that it's not just the education benefit alone, it's not just the fact that it'll be free to the employee. It's not just the advising and flexible hours, all of these things around the degree.

It's also having local options. So with this benefit, we worked to be inclusive of many community colleges as well as many local institutions within Ohio. So there's an idea that they're giving back to the community by being inclusive of these institutions. But it also raises awareness, right? So those programs in these local community colleges and local colleges and universities, it raises awareness of OhioHealth opportunities. And while it could have been primarily to provide education internally to OhioHealth and maybe attract externally through some marketing, it's also like a buzz in these local communities that, oh, OhioHealth is here. They have these various openings. How can we use these local programs as an access point for prospective employees at OhioHealth? That's a really interesting one that we just did recently, and I love that, kind of giving back to the community and kind of community strong angle.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

So you're talking about recruiting internally to elevate, so making opportunities for advancement for the current employees. How are they being identified? Are they being identified internally already or are they recruiting and saying, Hey, come here, this is what we give you? Or is it a combination?

Dr. Jill Buban, EdAssist by Bright Horizons:

I think it's oftentimes a combination. It's looking at what populations might we have that we could have an upskilling or lateral move. So take say facilities, cafeteria workers, do we have good talent in that area, good culture fit that may be interested in an allied position track or like a medical assistant or a nursing track. So how can we set up this pipeline and then fill those easier to fill frontline positions, but really thinking of our current needs and one to two to three year needs in the healthcare field. There's also an opportunity we've seen start to grow by offering high school learning opportunities. So we work with career online high school. Many folks within a hospital system, as I mentioned, the frontline worker population may not have a high school degree and oftentimes aren't just going to raise their hand and say, would love to be a part of this population, but don't even have my high school degree.

So by thinking about expanding those types of offerings, simply a high school degree, you're opening up your talent pool to be much broader. Someone receives a diploma in eight to 14 months, and then they can track into some high need areas. And obviously they're building confidence while they're going back to school and thinking, wow, I can do this and I had other aspirations in life and I'm in this track now, but now my employer has given me this opportunity to be a worker in the healthcare field in another profession. So it can be very multifaceted. That's what we're hoping, and those are the types of programs we're trying to build. I think it's also important too, to think about the current number of

people in nursing programs, that there are still young people graduating high school that want to become nurses and are entering that field and how we work with local universities to try to attract that talent and create those pipelines.

But also thinking about those learners are coming out of college with significant student debt. So another trend we're seeing within our healthcare systems is offering student loan repayment to both part-time and full-time employees. So that's obviously, I think we oftentimes are thinking of this frontline worker who doesn't have a bachelor's degree or some type of allied health certification where there's also this large population or untapped population of people graduating this year, next year, the following year that could be really attracted to a healthcare system if their student loan was repaid as opposed to offering some type of education benefit.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

And how does EdAssist assist this? How do you work with the companies? Because you mentioned that a good, I think you said 40% of your clientele are healthcare systems. Are you the middleman in this? Do you find the training program? Explain that.

Dr. Jill Buban, EdAssist by Bright Horizons:

I call that the fun part. That's actually what attracted me to this position. So we have a team of consultants and specialists in learning. We work really hard to think about what those opportunities are that our clients need. So along with our client relations team, listening to the clients, where are their pain points, what would make the most difference? And then identifying those quality learning providers, so both in the post-secondary space at colleges and universities and community colleges, and then of course through other short form learning opportunities. So one way in which we've done that or started to think about that, we've created a suite of career pathways. We're approaching 10 in the healthcare industry specifically, and those are in the highest need, highest demand areas. And we've gone through and vetted national institutions as well as national non-credit based learning. So people in the healthcare industry or thinking about the healthcare industry can easily think about what their trajectory could be, what that path could be.

They can jump on and off these pathways depending on where there are. It's the nurse that's burnt out and maybe it could be a healthcare administrator, loves their position in a certain system but is burnt out. So how do they upskill into a different step on a pathway? So we've seen a lot of success and interest in adopting those. But beyond that, it's really thinking about the needs of that employee, where they're located, what they're trying to do, and having lots of conversations with, as I mentioned, both credit bearing and non-credit bearing providers and understanding how they can fit these needs. In this past year, we created something called the Workforce Education Network and really looked at quite a few studies both from Third Way, McKinsey, those were some of the top ones. And then looking at what kind of student supports these working learners need and have created this group of schools that can really focus on these working learners.

And in doing that, we thought about how we can really work collaboratively with these institutions to think about what our clients need. I've had conversations like University of Maryland Global Campus is a wonderful example, and saying, we really need some allied health certificates and UMGC is creating this phenomenal skills-based learning marketplace that is inclusive of how allied health now. So it's really thinking through how we can collectively look at solving the problems of our healthcare clients and other populations as well with these institutions and kind of people in the ed tech space. So I spend a lot of time vetting and talking to our partners. It's also, I'll just give one other plug. Western Governors University is one of our, is exclusive partner to us. They do something, they'd probably laugh if I call it

this, but it's like a nurse in a box and they can go nationwide to hospital systems and bring their programs to those populations.

So super flexible, work around a client's need and be able to train nurses in the profession. So I think that's really cool to think about because oftentimes when we work with clients, it's thinking about we need this program. We hear there's a shortage of faculty, we can't do this. And so that's where we come in and say, well, did you know X University or X training can actually do this for you? So it's thinking outside of the box and being creative with the opportunities that still maintain quality and as much as we can ensure that those people in the learning opportunities are going to be successful and be able to contribute back to our clients' needs.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

And while 40% of your clients are in the healthcare industry, this idea of affordable education opportunities is probably key to, I would say the majority of industries now. What other industries are you working with?

Dr. Jill Buban, EdAssist by Bright Horizons:

We've at about 35% increase in this no cost. So out of almost 250 clients, we've seen an uptick of 35% adding this type of program this year. Another 13% is in financial industries. Another 12 is aerospace and defense. We have a real growing number of clients in the franchise business. McDonald's is a wonderful client we signed this year. Obviously the no cost model and being inclusive of community colleges as well as large online colleges is important to their model. And it's interesting, I think at least I do or used to, we oftentimes think of financial services. Oh, a Citibank, another client or a Bank of America may not have this need for a frontline worker, but if you think of your interactions, they're all customer service agents, they're tellers, they're working day in and day out on varied schedules. So that ease of access into a program with no financial constraints on the employee is so important.

And so I think that's really why we're seeing the growth in adoption. And from the client's perspective, they're very interested in increasing participation in these types of programs with vetted quality providers so that they can continue to see growth. So when we talk about pathways, while we have the suite for healthcare, we also have a suite that focuses on high need general areas for any sector. So thinking about cybersecurity, multiple IT, data analytics. So for these companies, if they can look at their frontline, they would love to be able to move, whether a teller or customer service agent up into a data analyst role and do that through one of these no cost options.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

The data seems to bear out that it's less expensive for a company to move someone up than it is to go out and recruit somebody for that role, so.

Dr. Jill Buban, EdAssist by Bright Horizons:

Yeah, I could just comment on that quickly, Ramona. It's something I've been seeing over the past few months too, and how we talk about our different clients' needs. Some of them look at retention. I think quote, unquote the old school model is, oh, the golden handshake at 30 years or a 20-year anniversary. And more and more it's thinking, if I can retain an employee for even two years while they're going through a community college experience or a 15-month certificate, that's a win. And I'm not trying to refill these positions. Of course, it's dependent on the sector, but when you think of retention, if it's two

years at a community college or four to six years at a university, if you can retain that employee that long, that's a definite win for many of our clients.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Yeah. Especially if the employees already working in the industry that they want to move up in. They have a foot in a door too. So it's really beneficial for them.

Dr. Jill Buban, EdAssist by Bright Horizons:

Absolutely. Where it used to be, if I offer this benefit, am I going to retain them kind of for life? And I think for many sectors, there's a new thought pattern, and it's also around the different stages of a person's career. There's that frontline, the middle level manager, the senior level manager. While we focus so much on the frontline worker, both in healthcare and in other industries interestingly, over the past three years, we actually have 40% of the 400,000 learners we serve are in graduate degrees or graduate programs. So 40, I mean, that's sizable, right? So and it hasn't really moved in the past three years. So there's still folks that to the point of, well, that student loan's a great opportunity, pay off the bachelor's degree and we want to move on to get a master's degree or a graduate certificate or a doctoral degree.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

The other thing, and you brought it up a little bit earlier in the conversation, increasing and supporting diversity in an industry. For people who may have not had that opportunity on their own to go to a post-secondary school or get the high school diploma, this seems to be a great opportunity that employers are offering the workers.

Dr. Jill Buban, EdAssist by Bright Horizons:

Absolutely. And so for so many of our clients, when we go back to that theme of being community based, they can lift up their communities or surrounding cities, rural areas and increase access to education. Their absolute focus, and one of their priorities is that diversity, equity, and inclusion. And so thinking about how can I provide access to education, which we know is the great equalizer, and how can we provide supports so that these employees are successful in their education journey? And that's where those schools come in. That's where we have advising services and coaching services as well. So it's not only providing the financial benefit of the education, but providing best opportunities so that first generation learners can be successful in the education environment.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

So if you had to look in your crystal ball for 2023, do you think this education benefit, where do you see it? Is it going to grow?

Dr. Jill Buban, EdAssist by Bright Horizons:

It's a great question. I mean, in my crystal ball, I think that so many of the careers continue to be recession proof. There's such a high need area. So I do think that we're going to continue to see growth and participation of these programs, growth in the use of them as a differentiator to attract, even if it's niche areas. Definitely for healthcare and some of the other sectors, there's just still such a large hiring need. So the more that we can work with our clients to understand even the areas that it doesn't have to be a degree based. It can be a bootcamp, it can be a certificate, it can be a certification.

So the more we can talk about ways in which they can fill their high need areas, not only of today, but getting back to that discussion around the high need areas of tomorrow. When you continue to focus on automation, how do you re-skill good employees into other high-need area jobs? So continuing with those types of conversations, I do see that it'll maintain, if not grow. There's just so many opportunities through the education and knowing that there's millions of adults without a degree, why not support them in getting that while they're working?

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Jill, thank you very much for spending some time with me talking about this very important subject.

Dr. Jill Buban, EdAssist by Bright Horizons:

Thank you so much, Ramona. This was a pleasure and a great way to wrap up 22 and head into 23.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Totally agree. I've been speaking with Dr. Jill Buban, the general manager, vice president of EdAssist by Bright Horizons. I'm Ramona Schindelheim editor-in-chief of WorkingNation. Thank you very much for listening and have a happy New Year.