# SimiTree

# A great place to work

Looking to boost retention and recruitment?
Start with these four strategies.

A continuing staffing shortage has home health and hospice agencies shuffling staff and getting creative, looking for new ways to continue seeing patients as a thinning number of available field staff poses daily challenges. "Many agencies are telling us they feel like they're drowning, trying to keep up with patient volume when they just don't have the resources they need right now," said SimiTree Principal J'non Griffin, who works with agencies to fill outsourcing needs.

"We're seeing increasing numbers of agencies turn to outsourcing to handle the workload – and not just for billing or coding," she said. "They're also looking at our live QA outsourcing services and other ways we can step in and take over some of the workload to help them."

Under pressure to stem the tide of vacancies, stakeholders are spending more, upping wages for both skilled and unskilled labor, and offering hefty hire-on or referral bonuses. Home health and hospice agencies are paying higher labor costs per visit quarter over quarter to deliver quality care and retain skilled nursing staff, according to figures from the SimiTree Financial Monitor, SimiTree's industry-leading data analytics and benchmarking tool.

But there's a growing realization within the industry that it may take more than fatter paychecks to hold onto dedicated employees.

### Beyond salary and benefits

"Salary and benefits are important, no doubt. We work with organizations very carefully to make certain they're offering competitive and enticing packages. But employees are also looking for something beyond salary and benefits," said SimiTree Managing Principal Eric Scharber, who heads talent solutions.

"Employees also want a great place to work," Scharber said. "And while there are numerous components that go into making an organization somewhere employees consider a great place to work, there are a handful of important factors that show up at the top of survey after survey. In a nutshell, employees want to be appreciated, they want opportunities to continue learning, and they want to know that there's room to grow within the organization," Scharber said.

### Surveys reveal surprising numbers

A staggering 94% of employees polled said they would stay in their current jobs if the company offered professional development opportunities, according to the 2018 Linked In Workplace Learning Report.

Similar studies have highlighted the importance of regular employee recognition and appreciation. A joint study by the employee recognition platform Bonusly and Survey Monkey found that 63% of people who described themselves as "always" or "usually" recognized at work are "very unlikely" to seek a new job in the next three to six months. A recent Gallup poll echoed that finding, indicating that that a sobering 66% of employees would quit their job if they felt unappreciated.

### What can your agency do?

Armed with those survey results, agencies need to pay careful attention to recruiting and retention efforts designed to feed more than an employee's bank account. The talent solutions and healthcare consulting experts at SimiTree have compiled four key strategies designed to address areas beyond salary and benefits:

- Provide ongoing professional development opportunities
- Evaluate workflow and make changes to prevent burnout
- Recognize and appreciate employees
- Offer career advancement opportunities

Although presented here as retention strategies, SimiTree consultants say these elements will improve recruiting efforts as well.

## 1 | RETENTION STRATEGY
### Provide professional development opportunities.

Is your agency offering employees frequent chances for continued professional development?

Ongoing learning is more than a way to ensure your team stays current on regulations and best practices. It may also offer a way to make certain team members stay put in a turbulent staffing market.

Managers polled by Linked In were 3.5 times more likely to be happy with their roles and 3.3 times more likely to want to stay for another two years in an environment where learning is encouraged and opportunities are provided, according to the 2018 Linked In Workplace Learning Report.

While staffing shortages make it more challenging than ever to find time for learning on the job, it may be one of the most important aspects of holding onto employees, SimiTree consultants say.

 "Learning is much more likely to happen when time for it is prioritized, blocked out on the calendar, and it's part of an agency culture where learning is valued," said Laura Wilson, SimiTree Managing Director of Operations Consulting.

It's important to provide training in job-related skills, but don't neglect "soft skills" such as communication and problem-solving. Classes in effective leadership

> **Managers in jobs where learning opportunities are provided are 3.3 times more likely to stay in that job for another two years.**
> Source: LinkedIn 2018 Workplace Learning Report

techniques are critical for managers, who are often promoted to leadership positions with inadequate or no training in how to manage the people they're leading.

Managing teams of clinicians working remotely brings its own set of challenges. Time spent on virtual management techniques can pay off in overall morale as well as increased productivity.

SimiTree consultants advise agencies to track the impact of learning opportunities with employee surveys. "It's always a great idea to measure the impact of your efforts to continue monitoring employee engagement and make certain you're on track with the improvements your team needs," Scharber said.

### Simitree helps agencies offer the professional development opportunities employees demand.

○ **CLINICAL MANAGEMENT TRAINING.** SimiTree's Learning Solutions educational series offers engaging virtual classroom sessions with industry-leading experts. Our renowned clinical management training delivers a deeper understanding of leadership roles, regulatory requirements and guidance for compliance. The in-depth series is ideal for clinical supervisors, managers and leaders seeking a broad overview of the role, including operations, financial management and staff development as well as regulatory guidance.

○ **OASIS ACCURACY.** Empower clinicians with a full understanding of OASIS-E, the most intensive remake of home health's comprehensive assessment instrument since its inception. OASIS-based measures will be important under nationwide Value-Based Purchasing, and will continue to determine reimbursement under PDGM.

○ **FLEXIBLE, CUSTOMIZABLE TRAINING OPTIONS.** Have a particular topic in mind? SimiTree's knowledgeable trainers break down key topics to support home health and hospice teams with the knowledge required for success in heavily regulated fields of care. Our training sessions are offered live and on-site or remotely. We provide ready-made and customized training options.

**Let's get started! Contact us here**

## 2 | RETENTION STRATEGY
### Assess workflow to address burnout.

Recognizing and addressing staff burnout factors is an important part of an agency's retention efforts, SimiTree consultants say — and that starts with taking the time to learn why team members are feeling overwhelmed and apathetic.

"Every agency is different regarding what the staff wants, and what's causing burnout," said SimiTree Clinical Consulting Director Charles Breznicky.

SimiTree consultants recommend an anonymous employee survey to identify issues that might not be apparent to agency leaders.

"And be prepared to follow up on the results," Wilson cautioned. "Otherwise, the employee survey will just create more ill will."

### Other recommendations:

o **Evaluate discharge policy.** Is the agency basing discharge on the individual needs of patients or simply following standard lengths of service? Earlier discharges may help address both staffing issues and burnout. "We sometimes see hospices serving an Alzheimer's patient for years, although that patient is still eating and gaining weight and not declining," said SimiTree Clinical Consulting Senior Manager Maureen Kelleher. "When hospice nurses are not doing what they trained for, providing hospice care, burnout can occur."

o **Re-examine mileage and scheduling.** Road-weary clinicians are paying much higher costs at the gas pump these days and may be reluctant to drive extra miles. SimiTree consultants recommend making scheduling adaptations for more fuel conscious visiting patterns. Teach clinicians to plan visits with as little mileage as possible, including consideration for time of day, traffic patterns, geographic location of patients and routes used to access patients.

o **Loosen requirements for office appearances.** Are your clinicians still driving to the office each day? Shorten their day and save on mileage by allowing them to skip checking in at the office before the first visit of the day. Look at alternative ways to provide necessary supplies, from drop shipping to setting up designated days and times for pickup of necessary items. "You can set up meeting points for assigned office staff to deliver needed items such as SOC packets, car stock, therapy supplies and more," said Lisa Brochey, one of SimiTree's interim managers who fill in to help agencies during times of transition. "Set up the meeting point so that it's on their way to or from work."

o **Require a second confirmation call.** To avoid costly and time-consuming trips for clinicians, most agencies rely on a confirmation call to the patient the night before a scheduled visit. It may be helpful for clinicians to add a second, "I'm headed your way!" call to the patient before the clinician begins the drive. Curtailing unnecessary travel time can make a big difference in a busy clinician's schedule.

o **Offer flex time.** The pandemic changed working habits to make flexible working arrangements a mainstream expectation. While healthcare workers may not enjoy the same flexibility in scheduling as employees in other fields, SimiTree consultants say it's important to try and offer some flexibility. Could a clinician start work later to drive her children to school? Could a clinician end his day early one day a week to take his daughter to gymnastics? Could clinicians be guaranteed a certain, limited amount of flex time each week?

o **Use telehealth to full advantage.** Virtual visits can't be billed to Medicare, must be included in the patient's plan of care, and can't be used in place of regular home visits. But there are many benefits. Agencies see lower mileage costs, more interaction with the patient, improved patient outcomes and satisfaction – even a morale boost among clinicians who get a little taste of the work-at-home club. "While workers in other industries were

working at home during the pandemic, our clinicians didn't have that same luxury," Wilson said. "Why not allow them a day a week to work from home, conducting virtual visits? It's both a retention strategy and a means of cost-saving. By adding telehealth visits to the plan of care, the clinician can 'visit' the patient in less time and continue interventions toward goals."

## Fielding office staff

As the staffing shortage wears on, some agency leaders are making tough decisions to deploy office staff in the field, at least temporarily, to relieve some of the burden on field clinicians.

It's a risky proposition, since many RNs working in quality review or coding may be reluctant to return to field work, and agencies don't want to encourage additional resignations.

"But they may not have a choice," said SimiTree Principal J'non Griffin. "Prioritizing patient care may require sending RNs from the office to the field in some cases."

> Virtual visits reduce mileage costs, increase interaction with patients, improve outcomes and productivity, and allow clinicians a little taste of the work-from-home club.

Agencies need to be having hard conversations about how best to shift personnel around as necessary to meet patient care obligations, Griffin said. Requiring RNs who normally work in the office to make visits to patients just one or two days per week may help relieve some of the burden on field clinicians.

SimiTree operational consultants work with agencies to address workflow, identifying areas for improvement, and streamlining operations for higher productivity and maximum efficiency.

**Learn more here about our operational assessments.**

## Simitree can help your agency address burnout and create a more efficient workflow.

- **AN OPERATIONAL ASSESSMENT** can help your agency determine staffing needs, evaluate workflow and processes, and develop utilization plans that maximize efficiency.

- **NEED SOME TELEHEALTH POINTERS?** SimiTree works with agencies to demonstrate ROI, explain documentation requirements unique to virtual visits, and make sure the care team fully understands the most recent regulations.

- **OUTSOURCING PROVIDES RELIEF.** When your staff is overwhelmed with a backlog of pre-claim review submissions under the Review Choice Demonstration or struggling to keep up with QAPI monitoring and reporting, SimiTree's outsourcing services can help. Outsourcing removes the burden on your back office staff. SimiTree offers billing, coding, or the entire revenue cycle management. SimiTree also provides live QA services.

- **OUR EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT SURVEYS** will get to the root of what's causing burnout at your agency, identifying issues specific to your organization so that you can take steps to remedy the problems and retain your best employees. SimiTree evaluates the results and provides an in-depth summary of key findings with specific recommendations and industry insight.

**Let's get started! Contact us here.**

## 3 | RETENTION STRATEGY
### Recognize and appreciate your employees.

Does your agency have in place a means of regularly recognizing employees for a job well done? According to the results of a joint survey by Survey Monkey and the employee recognition platform Bonusly:

o  82% of employees polled consider recognition an important part of their happiness at work.

o  32% believe public recognition improves the way their colleagues interact with them.

o  63% of people frequently recognized at work consider themselves "very unlikely" to seek a new job in the next 3-6 months.

The results are clear; to keep employees, we need to get better about letting them know what they're doing well.

**SimiTree consultants offer these tips:**

o  **Establish public points of regular recognition.** Make gratitude for a job well done highly visible at your agency and make sure it happens regularly. Call out team members in staff meetings for excellent work. Post gold star awards and accomplishments on office bulletin boards, in company newsletters and on the agency's social media accounts. (There's a recruiting bonus when employee accomplishments are regularly posted on social media. It tells potential new employees checking out your site that your agency has a culture of recognition — and that's attractive!)

o  **Don't forget the personal touch.** A personal phone call or a brief one-on-one meeting is a great way to acknowledge good work. "And a handwritten note goes a long way," Wilson said. "Who doesn't want to read that again and again?"

o  **Avoid generic praise.** Instead of saying "Marie is doing a great job for us," say "Marie worked all weekend to catch up our backlog of pre-claim reviews."

o  **Reference the outcome of the employee's work.** It's human nature to want to feel good about the work we're doing. Receiving praise that reinforces the purpose behind our work and the contributions we are making can be a powerful incentive to continue working in a role. Healthcare employees in particular have an innate desire to help others. When recognize an employee, always strive to reference the outcome from the employee's good work. How did it have a positive impact on the company, on other employees or on patients?

> **82% of employees polled said they consider recognition an important part of their happiness at work.**
> Source:  Joint Survey Bonusly & Survey Monkey

> **"Words of appreciation and praise are still important to employees, and being recognized in front of co-workers is the cornerstone for building a work environment where employees feel valued."**
>
> — *Laura Wilson,*
> *SimiTree Managing Director,*
> *Operations Consulting*

## 4 | RETENTION STRATEGY

**Offer career advancement opportunities.**

No one wants to feel trapped in a job going nowhere, but some agencies seem to slam the door on prospects for their employees, offering no clear path to promotions, higher pay, or more challenging work. Employees in stagnant roles are high turnover risks.

To turn things around, SimiTree consultants recommend agencies focus on developing a few clear career paths for employees and communicate to employees exactly what is expected for advancement.

Even at smaller agencies, where fewer available positions overall may limit upward mobility for employees, it's possible to entice employees to remain in current roles longer while developing the skill set needed for the next career move. Employees will often delay departure for the chance to sharpen their skills and land a choice position when they do leave.

While it may seem counterintuitive to devote resources to someone who will soon leave the agency, there are advantages. An agency with a reputation for an excellent training program and a history of sending employees to great positions will consistently attract the best candidates.

Here are a few suggestions for career advancement opportunities most agencies can easily provide.

o **Consider a regular leadership lunch.** As the Bonusly/Survey Monkey survey results demonstrated, visibility to senior leadership is important to many employees. Consider establishing a regular lunch program recognizing employees for outstanding work by giving them one-on-one time with high level executives. The lunch program will offer employees a chance to build connections and engage with those at the top. It's also a great way for leadership to stay in touch with the front line.

o **Offer a variety of mentoring programs.** SimiTree consultants say every agency should have a mentoring program to develop leaders from within.

An employee paired with an agency leader to develop new skills is much more likely to be an engaged employee. And don't overlook the benefits of allowing employees to advance into mentoring roles for new recruits. Employees who have worked for your agency a year or more have much to teach new hires, strengthening your orientation program. Mentoring can also increase the mentor's job satisfaction, as helping a colleague is rewarding.

o **Open event attendance to more employees.** Who at your agency is attending industry conferences and events? If only top managers travel to events, consider opening attendance to your top performers as a reward. Employees who are allowed to represent their company in public tend to be more invested in the company as well as more knowledgeable about the industry overall.

SimiTree consultants say coaching, direction, education, and consideration of the employee's career track are key drivers of a positive employee experience. When coupled with regular recognition of good work and positive reminders of the purpose behind the work being accomplished, these factors create a powerfully motivating work environment – making an agency "a great place to work" and a place that's hard to leave.

> Career development opportunities are key drivers of a positive employment experience.

### Simitree helps agencies with leadership development.

o SimiTree helps agencies develop strong internal leadership programs designed to nurture employees and create a culture that promotes growth and retention.

**Let's get started! Contact us here.**

### Eric Scharber
### Managing Principal, Talent Solutions

Managing Principal Eric Scharber leads home health and hospice talent acquisitions at SimiTree, overseeing executive search and non-executive recruiting services. He also heads recruitment process outsourcing, compensation analysis and employee satisfaction survey services. Well known in the industry, Scharber has developed an extensive network of contacts within this industry niche. He is passionate about of surpassing client expectations, helping organizations deploy better retention strategies and improve leadership development.

### J'non Griffin, RN, MHA, HCS-D, HCS-C, HCS-H, COS-C
### Principal, Coding & OASIS

SimiTree Principal J'non Griffin is a popular and engaging speaker whose expertise in ICD-10 coding, OASIS, and home health and hospice consulting ensures her demand on the conference circuit. A registered nurse with 30+ years of clinical and leadership experience, Griffin previously owned her own outsourced coding and consulting company, Home Health Solutions LLC. The company was named by Inc. magazine as one of the fastest growing companies in the nation in 2017, 2018 and 2019 before merging with Simione Healthcare Consultants in 2020. When Simione merged with BlackTree in 2021, Griffin took the helm of SimiTree's new coding division, working closely with Managing Principal Todd Montigney.

### Laura Wilson, RN, BSN, COS-C
### Managing Director, Operations Consulting

Since she began her career in home-based care in 1985, Laura Wilson has served in clinical leadership roles throughout the western United States, Minnesota, and Florida. She brings extensive expertise in multi-site operations, quality management, human resources, compliance, and business development to her role as SimiTree's Managing Director, Operations Consulting. Wilson is a popular lecturer at industry events on topics ranging from best practices under PDGM to effective use of telehealth.

### Charlie Breznicky Jr., RN, MSN, MBA, HCS-D
### Clinical Consulting Director

A registered nurse since 2004 with extensive experience in performance improvement and compliance, Breznicky enjoys the role of educator. He finds many opportunities in his role as a Clinical Consulting Director for SimiTree to help clients understand and adapt to complicated regulations with practical solutions that ensure efficient operations. Breznicky has held many home health roles, including Clinical Manager and Health Information Systems Manager. He holds dual master's degrees in Nursing Administration and Business Administration. He has expertise in QAPI and Value-Based Purchasing and has worked in the acute care setting as well as home health.

**SimiTree**