

How Boomers Can Help Improve Health Care

Emerging Encore Career Opportunities In Health Care

AUTHORS

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SPONSORS

MetLife Foundation and Civic Ventures, a think tank on boomers, work and social purpose

METHODOLOGY

The research team established an advisory group of 15 experts in work force issues and the health care industry to identify new potential encore career opportunities. Encore careers combine personal fulfillment, social impact and continued income, enabling people to put their passion to work for the greater good. The advisory group included academics; representatives of philanthropic and nonprofit organizations; individuals with experience in providing direct services; and human resources experts. These professionals, and 23 of the colleagues they referred, generated a list of six emerging roles that fit criteria established for encore careers, including flexibility; relatively low barriers to entry in terms of education and training; and benefit to society.

KEY FINDINGS

- **Traditional job growth:** The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that there will be 3.2 million new jobs within existing health care job classifications between 2008 and 2018. New research by economist Barry Bluestone shows why older workers will be needed to close a projected labor shortage in these jobs.

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- **Growth in new jobs:** Health care reform and a movement toward consumer-centered care are expected to increase the employment potential for new health care careers that can keep people healthier and lower costs. Many of these jobs can be designed to appeal to boomers in search of encore careers, and filling them with older, experienced employees can benefit patient care.
- **Six emerging encore careers:** The panel of national experts has identified six emerging occupations that could use experienced older adults in encore careers to improve health outcomes and reduce spiraling health care costs. They are: community health worker; chronic illness coach; medications coach; patient navigator/advocate; home- and community-based service navigator/advocate; and home modification specialist.
- **Details:** The paper examines the context, purpose, tasks and qualifications for each of the six innovative jobs. For example, chronic illness coaches help diabetics comply with treatment plans and avoid costly and devastating complications. For those interested in being trained for such careers, Duke University offers an Integrative Health Coach certificate program for people with college degrees.
- **Profiles:** The paper includes three profiles – Linda Bowling, a community health worker at the Antelope Valley Black Infant Health Program in Lancaster, Calif.; Greg Bailey, a chronic illness coach who trains other chronic illness coaches for Partners in Care in Los Angeles; and Lynn Sprafka, a patient navigator who runs her own firm, HealthCare Navigators in Loveland, Ohio.

To download the full study, and get more information on three companion studies, go to www.encore.org/research.

QUOTABLE

- “Our nation needs an improved health care system that is cost effective, provides access to everyone and emphasizes both individual responsibility for personal health and institutional responsibility for top-quality care. Creative use of our nation’s talent can help achieve these goals.”
- “Each of the six roles identified in this study is based on a respect for the values and preferences of the patient; the sharing of important information that will help the patient make decisions; and the customization of the care or environment to best suit the patient’s needs. A more informed patient is a potentially healthier one who needs less medical care. The promise of cost savings is well worth further exploration of these and other vital encore careers.”
- “Employers and policymakers alike need to consider how the growth of encore careers presents an attractive, viable opportunity to fortify an overburdened health care system.”