

Parkway Hospitals All Out To Retain And Re-Employ Older Workers

Healthcare Group Named Model Company By SMMWU

Reports by
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It is difficult enough for the man-on-the-street to find jobs in this downturn. So what hope is there for an older worker who has reached retirement age and needs to continue working to support his family? At 62, even if he or she is in the pink of health, there will not be many takers, the jobs are crap, and the pay and benefits are pathetic.

That's what makes Parkway Hospitals Singapore Private Limited's efforts for the retention and re-employment of older workers so remarkable.

Recently endorsed by The Singapore Manual And Mercantile Workers' Union as a model company for the re-employment of older workers, the healthcare group which runs East Shore, Gleneagles and Mount Elizabeth Hospitals went out on a limb to protect older employees even when times were very bad for them.

Despite being forced to do minor retrenchments and wage cuts for management staff last year, the group signed a Memorandum of Understanding for the Re-Employment of Older Workers with SMMWU and introduced an enhanced retention and re-employment policy and attractive wage model. The whole re-employment package included customised training and upgrading schemes and holistic health and wellness programmes to ensure older workers continue to serve the company happily, healthily and contentedly.



Parkway's efforts have carried on to this year with the inauguration of the "Golden Years Service Awards" at its Long Service Award Ceremony on 28 May 2009 at Gleneagles Hospital Lecture Theatre, where 3, 6, 9 and 12-year post-retirement service awards were given out to 34 deserving employees.

Here is a highlight of the company's efforts to retain and re-employ older workers.

Enhanced Retention And Re-Employment Policy

Setting a new standard for the way older workers are re-employed, Parkway boasts specialised Pre-Retirement Planning that is done as early as one year before retirement to help ease the re-employee's transition to post-retirement, encourage continued productivity and enhance retirement security.

First, the pre-retirement counseling session will convey the company's guidelines for re-employment; promote the benefits of staying

employed and active, and foster a culture of flexibility, adaptability and lifelong learning. It also offers a second chance to employees who need to improve their performance in order to be offered re-employment.

Next, the re-employment consultation will explore opportunities for the retiring employee; outline the training required for re-deployment to a different job (if necessary), and provide holistic measures to enhance employability, such as skill acquisition or adjustment to new salary and job scope.

Customised Training And Upgrading Schemes

To gear senior workers into delivering better service within their current scopes, Parkway will be introducing customised Skills Programme for Upgrading and Resilience training courses in English and Basic Computer Skills. Thereafter, employees who excel in these areas may apply for job transfers within the company.

With a confidence and self esteem boost from the enhanced skills, older workers should also be able to achieve greater levels of job satisfaction.

The newly-acquired IT knowledge will also come in handy for senior staff when the company implements a new computerised HR management system in March 2010. Features such as e-appraisal, e-leave application and e-updates of personal particulars will make it a breeze for them to keep track of key matters relating to their employment for total peace of mind.

Attractive Wage Model

Re-employed seniors will continue to enjoy their pre-retirement salaries and benefits. This includes

“In Parkway, older workers are highly treasured. They have dedicated major portions of their lives to bring Parkway Hospitals to where it is today. To affirm their contributions to the company, we seek new ways to reward and recognise their hard work and commitment as well as take care of them. We will continue to work closely with our union, the SMMWU, to focus on life-long learning and career development for our employees. This is the way we care for our employees and reciprocate their commitment to the company.”

Ann Yong, Senior Vice President (People Resource) Parkway Group Healthcare Private Limited

“The very first Golden Years Service Awards were presented to employees who have chosen to contribute to Parkway after their retirement. We are extremely honoured that they have chosen to stay with Parkway and to share their wisdom and experience with our younger staff.”

Dr Lim Cheok Peng, Parkway Holdings Executive Vice Chairman

“Parkway Hospitals has gone the extra mile to recognise the contribution of its older employees with its inaugural “Golden Years Service Awards”. Here is one employer that does not just pay lip service to retain and retrain older workers, their people resources policy makes it clear that these workers are treated no differently when they are past 62 years. Although they are on yearly contract, their employment terms and benefits remain unchanged. We certainly commend them as a good example for other employers to follow.”

Law Swee Hong, SMMWU Deputy Secretary-General

the regular annual increment, variable bonus and even promotion.

In addition to maintaining their standard of living, attractive remunerations will also encourage a positive mindset and makes them strive to do even better in their job.

Dedicated Health And Wellness Programme

As a healthcare company, it is no surprise that the company has a dedicated Quality Work Life and Employee Engagement Team to look into the health and well-being of all staff. This is an excellent bonus for older re-employees, as they are kept in tip-top shape to enjoy better, more fulfilling work and personal lives.

For example, regular health screenings have been organised by the team since 2007 to encourage employees with health risks indicators, such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol and high body mass index to attend a "BodyHealth Programme" to fix the problems.

IT Is The Way To Go!

Mature Workers Get Edge From HSEU And NUH

By
Naseema Banu Maideen

A new high-tech tool is skilling-up mature workers in the Pharmacy Department at the National University Hospital. After years of mundane paper work requiring manual retrieval of information in stacks and stacks of files, it sure was a boost for workers to be equipped with their own Personal Digital Assistant to speed up work.



Mr Chua and his trusty PDA.

There are good reasons for these workers to feel proud. Within a week, Mr Chua Teck Siang, 59, who had minimal knowledge of Information Technology, picked up new PDA skills which make use of the Automatic Identification and Data Capture Technology system. Mr Chua and five other mature workers in the pharmacy store had half-a-day of formal IT training. This was followed by a week of on-the-job training.

This Job Re-Design Project for the New Materials Requisition Programme, a system implemented to computerise the goods receiving process in the pharmacy, was spearheaded by Healthcare Services Employees' Union Vice-President and Senior Executive of NUH Pharmacy K Thanalechimi. Funded by the Enhanced ADVANTAGE! Scheme which rolled out in November 2007, it will benefit all six workers above 40-years-old in the pharmacy store.

The mature workers have bade farewell to manual searching of hard copies of Purchase Orders and matching them against the invoices as the AIDC system does the search and also enables scanning of invoice document numbers. For goods with barcodes, all the storekeeper has to do is to simply scan the barcodes on the product to match against the Purchase Order description information stored in the PDA.

Said Mr Chua: "I can do the work faster now. In the past when it was done manually, I may pull out the wrong Purchase Order. I am also happy to have learnt more IT skills. It is less strain on the eyes as we do not have to run through Purchase Order numbers through piles of hard copy archives."

This means more efficiency and fewer mistakes in the pharmacy store. Productivity has increased by 20 per cent and the paperless process is also more environmentally friendly. Adding to costs savings for the hospital, this enhancement has also helped to boost the workers' morale.

"In strong partnership with HSEU, we are the first hospital to secure the funding under the Enhanced ADVANTAGE! Scheme. To us, the mature workers are assets with their wealth of experience and hence they can act as mentors to the new staff. The \$400,000 from the funding was indeed well spent. We are certainly looking forward to more partnerships with HSEU on active ageing initiatives," said Ms Clara Wee, Director of Human Resources at NUH.

NUH has also invested in another age-friendly project in the Pharmacy Department. Old manual trolleys are now shoved aside and replaced by motorised trolleys. The new trolleys come with navigation functions and a control lever. This renders the job less physically demanding and lowers risks of injuries. The department has a total of 70 workers and about 40 per cent are mature workers above 40 years old.

“This new system helps to make the older workers' job life more meaningful. Despite their age, they get to learn new skills related to IT. Tracking for the management is also easier as there is greater accountability for what the workers do.”

K Thanalechimi, Healthcare Services Employees' Union Vice-President

A Chance To Work

Mr Othman Abdul Ghani may be one of the oldest Operating Theater Porters you will see at Gleneagles Hospital, but he is by no means slow and clumsy. At 74, Mr Othman shows great passion and dedication in his work, and enjoys every single day of it. However, this would not have been possible if Parkway Hospitals Singapore Private Limited did not give him a chance.

Mr Othman worked his way up from the laundry department 32 years ago till he reached his current position in the operating theatre. And despite reaching the retirement age 12 years ago, the company continued to re-hire him year after year because they respected his work and love for the job.

And now, Mr Othman efforts have been rewarded with the 12-year Golden Years Service Award by the company in recognition of his dedicated service.

"I enjoy working very much. Parkway has been very understanding towards us older workers and has given us a lot of chances to perform and take on other job duties which we might not get a chance to do if we were to work elsewhere," said Mr Othman.



Better When Older

At 52, Madam Teresa Jodhi had low hopes when she went knocking on the doors of Parkway Hospitals Singapore Private Limited for a job as a midwife. However, the result proved otherwise. Not only was Madam Jodhi accepted as a midwife with Gleneagles Hospital, she has even been re-employed nearly 10 years past her retirement age.

Having to work at such an age was no easy feat for Madam Jodhi. It was a challenge for her to constantly keep up with the skills needed to assist the doctor as well as to carry out certain procedures that were changing with the times. Parkway understood the needs of their older workers, and helped Madam Jodhi and other workers upgrade themselves through training sessions and seminars for new job-related skills.

Today, at the ripe old age of 73, she has worked over 20 years with the company, and remains as dedicated and committed as the day she first started.

Parkway recently recognised her achievements with the 9-year Golden Years Service Award.

"I am very happy that Parkway has kept me for so long even though I am almost 10 years past my retirement age! They see the value in us older workers which many companies do not. For that I am very grateful to them," said Madam Jodhi.



The Future's So Bright

She is not yet a re-employed older worker at Parkway, but Madam Cara Lee Suat Hua, 51, is already looking forward to enjoying her golden years with the company.

Thanks to constant training and upgrading Parkway Hospitals Singapore Private Limited that has kept her engaged, and she has already served 30 years with pride and pleasure. Starting off as a clerk in the nursing administrative department, she was recently promoted to office manager in the Corporate Marketing Department.

With the re-employment efforts at Parkway, Madam Lee is confident of a bright future with them even after she reaches retirement age.

"Parkway treats their older workers very well even after they have reached retirement age. Responsibilities are still given to them, and they are still doing what they started off doing. They don't take away your duties just because you are old," said Madam Lee.

