

Rethinking Career Pathways and Advancement in Health Care

As employers continue to demand skilled workers in health care, it is critical that workforce development partners shift their focus away from simply facilitating access to entry-level jobs, and toward thinking more holistically about career advancement and long-term job quality.

The Institute on Assets and Social Policy (IASP) at Brandeis University's study, Career Advancement and Quality Jobs in Health Care, is reconceptualizing the idea of career advancement. Conducted in partnership with the Health Career_x Academy at WorkPlace, Inc., their findings challenge workforce systems, training providers, and employers to think beyond linear career pathways and consider other factors that constitute advancement, leading to better outcomes and higher job quality for entry-level healthcare workers. While the traditional model uses only one indicator of career advancement – change in job title accompanied by increase in wage – the study suggests that any improvement in job quality could be considered advancement if it improves the worker's well-being in some way.

Traditional View of Advancement



Challenging the Traditional View



The workforce development system traditionally has assumed that if job seekers get to the first rung of the career ladder, then they will advance up that ladder on their own. Real-life experience, however, does not reflect this assumption. In fact, people make multiple zigzagging moves on their career paths.

About HPOGUP: This research is funded in part through the Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) Program. HPOG funds demonstration projects that provide training and education to low-income individuals for occupations in the healthcare field that pay well and are expected to experience labor shortages or be in high demand. The HPOG University Partnership Research Grants (HPOGUP), part of the comprehensive evaluation of the HPOG Program, fund studies conducted by university researchers partnering with one or more HPOG program to answer specific questions about how to improve HPOG services within local contexts.

Career advancement includes changes in:



Hours

Moving from part-time to full-time, from per diem to permanent, from inconsistent to consistent schedules, and to a schedule that works best with people's lives.



Pay

Increases in hourly wage or in hours worked; both contribute to pay increases.



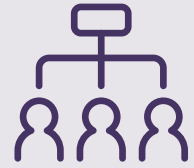
Benefits

Moving to a job or workplace with benefits, such as paid time off and affordable employer-based health insurance.



Commute Time

Finding a job closer to home, which reduces transportation costs and allows for more time with family.



Responsibility and Self-Fulfillment

Moves that create a more satisfying work experience, such as jobs that offer more responsibilities or the ability to specialize.

These can all be achieved without a change in job title.

What does advancement mean to workers?

The research team conducted interviews with program participants to gain a greater understanding of what advancement along a career path looks like to them. Below are some of their responses, distilled into key words and phrases.

Steady Hours *Provide for Family* *Building Savings* *Pay Raise* *Promotion* *Schedule Accommodation* *Family Time*

More Responsibility

Benefits *More Options* *Steady Wage* *Learning Skills*

Certifications

Conclusion

By instructing participants in making strategic career moves post-entry, programs can give entry-level workers the tools they need to navigate toward a job with the qualities and security that meet their needs.

For more information on the study of Career Advancement and Quality Jobs in Health Care, please contact Sara Chaganti at schagant@brandeis.edu.