

**Testimony of Laurie Barr, SPHR  
Before  
The Special Committee on Aging  
United States Senate  
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**Best Practices in Retention of Older Workers**

Good morning Chairman Smith, Senator Kohl and distinguished members of the Committee. My name is Laurie Barr and I am the Assistant Director of Human Resources for Oregon Health & Science University. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before this committee to discuss OHSU's best practices for retaining older workers.

Oregon Health & Science University is the state's only health and research university, and only academic health center. We have four distinct missions of patient care, teaching, research and community outreach. As one of the state's largest employers, our workforce is comprised of more than 11,000 employees.

OHSU is proud of its commitment to a diversified workforce, including diversity in age. We recognize that the wisdom and experience older generation workers bring to our organization is invaluable. As an institution of learning, we rely on our long-term employees to provide historical insight and information to many other workers at OHSU, and they benefit greatly from the wealth of experience our older workers possess.

There are three best practices that I would like to highlight today:

**1. Flexible Work Arrangements**

The size of our workforce, combined with a wide variety of jobs and required skill sets, allow for flexible work arrangements that smaller organizations may not be able to accommodate. There are many job opportunities at OHSU that are part-time or on-call, allowing for a variety of work schedules that meet individual needs.

In addition, some older OHSU workers ready to move into the retirement stage of their lives may have the opportunity to ease into it. We have quite a few long-term employees that have gradually cut back schedules over the course of several years. This slow transition benefits both the employee and the employer by keeping experienced workers on staff and allowing them to move toward retirement more gradually than in many organizations.

As you know, our country is experiencing a shortage in many healthcare occupations, and OHSU is no exception. Therefore, it is critical that we retain our healthcare workers. Many health care jobs are very physically demanding, which for an older worker, can be problematic. At OHSU, there are other options in those situations. An older nurse, for example, who may not be able to continue to keep up with the physical demands of inpatient nursing may have other full or part time opportunities at OHSU to continue using his or her nursing skills. That

could mean moving to a slightly less demanding outpatient nursing position or something in nursing education, telephone triage, case management or quality review, for example.

As an employer, allowing for flexible work arrangements means better retention of older workers.

## **2. Generous Retirement Plan**

A substantial benefit for older workers at OHSU is our generous retirement plan. OHSU contributes up to 12% of an employee's annual income into a retirement plan, upon eligibility. OHSU offers two retirement plan options – a defined benefit plan and a defined contribution plan. For the University Pension Plan, which is a defined contribution plan, once workers reach the age of 50, they become 100% vested in retirement contributions regardless of their length of service. OHSU also offers two voluntary savings programs to help employees supplement their retirement plan and social security benefits.

These benefits are not only powerful recruitment tools in attracting new, older workers to OHSU, they serve us in our retention efforts as well. A stable, substantial pension provides these employees with an additional sense of financial security as they move closer to their retirement years.

## **3. Shared Knowledge of Older Workers**

Almost 30% of OHSU's current workforce is comprised of workers age 50 or older. I am particularly pleased to report to you that currently eleven of our employees are over the age of 80, and two of those are more than 90 years old. Most of these individuals are working on a part-time basis, although three of them, believe it or not, are still working full-time. This demonstrates a huge commitment to their work and to OHSU. Nine of these eleven individuals serve in Professor or Adjunct Professor positions and several of them continue to do research. Well past traditional retirement age, these individuals continue to share their knowledge with future doctors, nurses and scientists. OHSU is proud to have them as continuing, productive members of our workforce.

## **Conclusion**

As a society, we must be more creative about accommodating older workers, especially as the baby boom generation begins to think about retirement. More employers need to step forward and take proactive steps to assist older workers in the workplace. Retirement isn't what it used to be and, as an employer, OHSU recognizes this. We value the contributions, experience and wisdom of our older workers. We truly hope that in the future more and more employees will continue to work past their normal retirement date. It's good for us and good for them.

Thank you for inviting us to testify today.