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**United States Senate Special Committee on Aging**

Room 562, Dirksen Senate Office Building

Hearing: Work in Retirement: Career Reinvention and the New Retirement Workscape  
2:15 p.m. - Wednesday, June 24, 2015

Good afternoon. Chairman Collins, Ranking Member McCaskill, and distinguished members of the Special Committee on Aging. On behalf of the more than 13,000 employees of Bon Secours Virginia Health System, I thank you for this opportunity to share insights on how we attract and retain older workers as part of our health care ministry.

My name is Jim Godwin, and I am the Vice President of Human Resources for Bon Secours Virginia. Today, I will share:

- an overview of our workforce,
- why we value the experience, knowledge and expertise of older workers, and
- how they contribute to our success and culture.

As a Catholic, nonprofit health care system, Bon Secours Virginia is part of Maryland-based Bon Secours Health System Inc., with some 22,000 employees in six states.

Bon Secours Virginia has 8,400 employees in Richmond and 5,000 employees in Hampton Roads. With five hospitals in the Richmond area, three in Hampton Roads, and dozens of ambulatory care sites and support services, we take our mission of “providing good help to those in need” to heart.

The Sisters of Bon Secours, who started our ministry in Paris in 1824, remain a guiding force for our shared values, mission and vision. Many of the Sisters are over 60

and continue serving as leaders well into their 80s and 90s, providing strategic direction and guidance. For us, workers of this age are common, and we celebrate their vision, wisdom and contributions.

In our Virginia health system, 35 percent of employees are 50 or older and 11 percent are in their 60s. We have 126 employees in their 70s and a remarkable 12 in their 80s. Some 82 percent of our workforce is female, and more than one-third are nurses.

We value each employee and his or her unique qualities and life experiences. We believe our older workers' wisdom and institutional knowledge are invaluable.

Let me tell you about some of our long-time employees:

I'll start with **Nettie Coleman**, who turns 81 this year. She has worked with us for an amazing 58 years so far. She tried retirement for a few months, but her respect and passion for her work drew her back. After nearly six decades, Nettie still works part time in pre-placement, conducting physicals, drawing blood and helping new employees.

Our oldest employee is **Virginia Abbott**. She is 89 and celebrates 29 years of service this year. Outside of her incredible work stamina, what's so amazing about Virginia's story is that she didn't even come to work for us until she was 60.

Currently, we have five employees with 49 years of service. Clearly, work is the new foundation of youth for these distinguished employees.

We also have many employees launching "**Encore Careers.**" A former high school administrator and a professional firefighter recently graduated from our Bon Secours Memorial College of Nursing. Both of these men are 50+, and are enjoying second careers in our health system. Another recent graduate was 62 years old.

Bon Secours Virginia is committed to our culture that attracts, values, retains and celebrates our 50+ workers. In fact, AARP has ranked us a "Best Employer for Workers over 50" since 2003.

We've been on *Working Mother* magazine's top 100 places for working mothers for 16 years and in the top 10 twice. Gallup has named Bon Secours Health System to its prestigious international listing of Great Workplaces annually since 2011.

These accolades benefit Bon Secours Virginia as an organization, because we're able to attract and retain a highly engaged and productive workforce – of all ages and life stages. This directly benefits our patients, who have better care experiences and rate us higher on patient satisfaction surveys.

Let me share how experienced nurses benefit patient care.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation reports that RNs are, on average, spending more time in the workforce — about 2.5 more years than did their peers back in the 1980s and 1990s. That's a good thing for Bon Secours Virginia.

As nurses age, they report higher levels of career and job satisfaction. Some 80 to 85 percent of nurses report being satisfied with their careers – much higher than other professions.

That means that as more Baby Boomer nurses age, they're more likely to be satisfied and more likely to keep working. That kind of experience and knowledge is invaluable when it comes to patient care and safety.

However, working in a hospital setting can be hard on nurses due to the physical challenges. That's why we have mobility-lift teams to help our older workers with the regular turning of bed-bound patients. We've seen a drop in injuries and a reduction in muscle fatigue among older nurses.

Our health care workforce is changing, and we're working hard to address those changes. America continues to face a nursing shortage. Finding the right nurses for the right jobs at the right time is increasingly difficult.

We're going to need to keep our health care employees satisfied with their careers, because the demand for health care is growing. The Affordable Care Act ensures that more people have access to health insurance. People over 65 tend to consume two to four times more health care than younger folks, and a growing population with chronic conditions adds to the demand for care.

At the same time, people are living longer, healthier lives. And the majority of U.S. workers are interested in delaying retirement. With these factors in play, there is no better time to reach out to older workers.

By offering initiatives such as phased retirement, flexible work schedules and intergenerational programming, Bon Secours Virginia has been successful in retaining its valuable older workers. In fact, we have about 100 Virginia employees who receive both a retirement check and a paycheck from us. Also, anyone working 16 hours or more for us is eligible for our benefits.

Employers committed to a culture of aging must proactively address why older workers leave. We've found that flexibility addresses nearly all of them. Preventing attrition through flexibility involves creative thinking and a willingness to try new approaches.

Our comprehensive and generous benefits are attractive, flexible and creative as we help support employees and their families. For example, grandchildren of our employees are eligible to attend our on-site Family Care Centers. Our older workers utilize our award-winning Employee Wellness Services to maintain healthy and active lifestyles. Life-long education and training help us attract and keep older workers, so we offer classes to encourage engagement, to facilitate job growth and to retrain for lateral moves.

Our CEO Peter J. Bernard regularly hears from our older workers over special lunches. In our journey to attract and retain older workers, we have made significant progress by constantly improving programs and policies through creative and innovative approaches.

In closing, I ask you to remember employees at Bon Secours Virginia – like our 89-year-old Virginia Abbott – and others who keep working far beyond the typical retirement years and help us pursue our mission of providing good help to those in need.

Thank you for this opportunity to share our story. I welcome any questions.