

# The Ongoing Challenge: Catching and Keeping Quality Talent

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As baby boomers retire, the labor shortage for technical professionals will continue to challenge health care organizations around the world. As a result, demands have increased on recruiters to locate top health care talent.

Biomedical equipment technicians (BMETs) are recognized professionals in the health care technology team, providing a high level of expertise in clinical equipment and sharing the responsibility of patient safety. BMETs must understand the implications of equipment application and interaction with patient care. They require advanced knowledge and skills that can directly impact the health of a patient.

The current demand for BMETs and medical imaging technicians far exceeds the supply. This career field has grown over the past two decades and has become one of the specialty disciplines in health care that demands tailored education and training.

## Understanding the Problem

Recognizing the professionally trained BMET with appropriate compensation is a crucial part of the successful hiring and retention equation. The main reason candidates are turning to recruiters to help them with “confidential searches” is because some employers are not recognizing the value of their top employees.

Two other major reasons that candidates seek an employment change are: (1) the overload that is being placed on them because of the shortage and cost of hiring additional staff, and (2) promises of professional

training, bonuses, additional raises, and conference attendance—all, or some of which, do not come to fruition.

Employers need to address these issues before they lose talented and experienced staff. Benefits such as attendance at professional conferences and enrollment in manufacturer training courses will give an employee something to work toward; at the same time, the employer benefits from a loyal, hard-working, and better trained employee. These benefits can be tied into competency ratings and incentives as well as employee contracts.

When new employees are needed, hiring authorities cannot afford to delay the hiring process by holding the resumes of qualified candidates until they “have time” to contact the individuals. Many candidates have walked away from prospective companies because hiring authorities took too long to respond to them or did not demonstrate the urgent desire to fill a vacant position. If it takes more than a week to respond to a candidate, hiring authorities may find that the candidate has already moved on to another company.

One challenge for any hiring authority is where to find these qualified biomedical equipment technicians. Advertising in local newspapers and on the Internet typically can become expensive and resource intensive and results in a flood of nonqualified electronics or electro-mechanical technicians that not only wastes time but also frustrates the hiring managers and human resource professionals.

## What Works

First and foremost, employers need to do everything to retain good employees with appropriate pay and benefits, as well as reasonable working hours and expectations. Most employees do not mind working extra hours and taking on the additional workload during staff shortages, especially if the employees understand that help is on the way. However, when the employees become tired or burned out due to the additional hours and workload,

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management must help unload some of that burden by hiring temporary staff until vacant positions can be filled with the quality talent needed.

Temporary or contract staffing can be provided by many firms. In addition to easing staffing shortages, temporary staffing can provide time to evaluate a potential candidate without having to hire the candidate immediately. Temporary staffing is also a great way to fill the gaps of employee shortages during vacations or extended illness leave, and to catch up on backlog of work requirements (such as preventive maintenance, inventory, or functional requirements for JCAHO).

While historically not at the top of the pay range for technical positions, salaries have increased for professionally trained and experienced BMETs and medical imaging technicians over the past few years due to the classic economic law of supply and demand. Employers need to continually evaluate market trends and keep up with the appropriate pay and benefits to retain qualified staff, and they need to understand that competitors may be moving quickly and offering more wages and benefits to entice candidates.

Hiring authorities can ease their recruiting burdens by utilizing appropriate resources. One way to recruit potential employees is through local biomedical equipment associations and trade publications such as the *AAMI News*, *Biomedical Instrumentation & Technology* journal, and the *24x7* magazine. Keep in mind, however, that there may be a delay of several months to get these advertisements out to the readers of these publications.

Professional recruiting agencies are also available on both a contingency and retained fee basis. Recruiters can save time in screening and qualifying candidates for technical specialty positions, and organizations benefit by significantly easing the burden of the already overloaded human resource staff. Fees for these health care technical recruiters run between 20% to 25% of a candidate's first-year annual salary. Recruiters may be found in any of the resources previously mentioned or through recruiting networks such as Top Echelon ([www.topechelon.com](http://www.topechelon.com)) who have a pool of specialty recruiters within their group.

When recruiting for BMETs, the hiring authority—whether in-house or out—should look closely at individuals who received their training from an accredited biotechnology program, especially those technicians with hands-on training or internship experience. Some bioengineering programs include hands-on training or

an internship at a local hospital as part of their program.

By participating in an internship or co-op program, hospitals can free career employees to tackle advanced responsibilities. The program also provides a great source for meeting short-term, skilled-employee needs, while identifying and training potential employees.

Even in this tight labor market, recruitment and retention of professionally trained BMETs and medical imaging technicians can be painless and successful. ■