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Ontario's Web-based Employment Portal for Nursing Graduates: Best Practices

The purpose of the Nursing Graduate Guarantee (NNG) was to ease the transition of new graduates into full-time employment by funding six-month supernumerary (above staff complement) full-time nursing positions for all 2007 nursing graduates (MOHLTC, 2007). An evaluation of the NGG is reported in *Employment of Nursing Graduates: Evaluation of a Provincial Policy Strategy (2008)* (<http://www.nhsru.com/reports.html>). This fact sheet presents the feedback from nursing graduates and employers which was synthesized to identify best practices in using web-based employment portals.

Background

The NGG uses the HealthForceOntario Nursing Graduate Portal to link new nursing graduates with potential employers through an online application and matching process. Both nursing students and employers must register on this employment portal to participate in the initiative. Feedback was based on their experience of using the employment portal. Best practices include recommendations to improve the efficiency, design and functioning of employment portals which could potentially enhance the effectiveness of future multi-year government investments.

Methodology

The experience of nurse graduates and employers using the 2007 HFO-NGG employment portal was evaluated using two questionnaires; one for nurse graduates and another for employers. Questionnaires were sent to 2,761 nurse graduates and 296 employers registered on the portal. Open ended survey questions were included to solicit specific feedback from nurse graduates and employers on improvements for future use of the portal, including: ease of use, utility, design and effectiveness. Data collection took place between December 2007 and March 2008, and collected data was cleaned and refined prior to analysis. The survey response rate for nurse graduates and employers was 64.5% and 78.0%, respectively. Data analysis was performed using SPSS 16.0.

Findings

In their response to the survey questionnaires, nurse graduates and employers suggested best practices in the areas of training and instructions on the use of the portal; efficiency in identifying and tracking applications; adaptability of posting process to all sectors and clinical areas and flexibility in job search functions. Table 1 outlines the top 10 best practices suggested.

TABLE 1: TOP 10 BEST PRACTICES SUGGESTED BY 2007 NURSE GRADUATE AND EMPLOYER HFO-NGG EMPLOYMENT PORTAL USERS

SERIAL	BEST PRACTICES	NOTES
1.	Designing an easy log in process and an intuitive and effective user friendly layout	Pilot test website and improve on an ongoing basis according to users' feedback. Ensure visibility of link to portal and smoothness of log in process.
2.	Assigning a single and unique ID number for each registrant	Multiple IDs (registration ID, matching ID, etc.) confuse users and slow the process.
3.	Building flexibility in job search functions	Ability to search by employer group, date of posting, region, city, area of responsibility, practice unit, area of specialization, etc.
4.	Fine tuning messages communicated to portal registrants	Ensure the relevance of emails, windows and pop ups viewed by registrants. Changes to portal processes are to be communicated promptly.
5.	Building an efficient tracking process	Allow registrants to check the status of their applications throughout the process
6.	Devising a communication strategy between portal administrators and users to enhance awareness about the portal use and processes.	Including educational sessions and printed/electronic information on registering, posting resumes/jobs & applying for jobs. Post eligibility criteria, confirmation letters, contracts, etc.
7.	Designing an effective and intuitive resume builder	Allow the attachment of own resume Ensure a confirmation of receipt is issued to applicant when CV is received by employer
8.	Ensuring prompt update of posted jobs	Employers are to update postings to ensure accuracy of information and promptly remove postings that are filled or are expired.
9.	Devising an outreach strategy to ensure diversification of job postings across all graduate types, employer types & geographic areas	Dedicate special attention to under-served and rural areas. Optimize the number and type of postings to the number and type of graduates
10.	Design an efficient and secure electronic process	Including electronically completed funding letters and electronic agreements

The evaluation of the Ontario HFO-NGG employment portal identifies best practices for improvement in the design, functioning and effectiveness of similar multi year government initiatives.

Prepared by: Alameddine, M., Baumann, A., Idriss, D. and Hunsberger, M. (June, 2008)

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