



Gig Economy Ripples From Across The Pond: An App For Healthcare Workers On Demand?

Insights

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Roughly 3,500 miles on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, the British government is contemplating an idea which will marry the national healthcare industry with the gig economy. Such an idea could send a ripple toward the United States if it bears success.

Jeremy Hunt, Her Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for Health, recently announced plans to introduce an on-demand app for England's National Health Service (NHS). The service is being billed as an "Uber-style" app that would allow those in charge of staffing at healthcare facilities to bring in nurses and other healthcare workers if they find themselves short-staffed or overly busy on a particular day.

With healthcare being such big business in the United States, it is not hard to see how an on-demand app for nurses and healthcare workers could gain traction if introduced domestically. For example, in Philadelphia, our nation's sixth-largest city and center of our nation's seventh-largest metropolitan area, three of the top five largest private employers are expansive hospital and healthcare systems. Each of these organizations employ thousands of nurses, not to mention the tens of thousands of nurses are employed throughout the region as a whole. In our ever-growing "on-demand" world here in the United States, it is not hard to envision employers embracing similar technologies to those being introduced in England. Our blog recently covered a similar trend beginning to bubble up in the hospitality industry.

Such a development in the U.S. healthcare industry would not be not entirely novel. Many hospitals across the country already utilize the services of *per diem* nurses. These individuals take temporary assignments with hospitals, and those assignments are, typically, provided through hospital staffing pools or specialized job agencies. Similarly, some hospitals employ "travel nurses." Travel nurses are, again, individuals hired for temporary work or to complete a limited assignment for a set period of time. The primary difference between these two types of "alternative" workers is that travel nurses are often parties to a contract and have guaranteed hours for a set number of weeks with a hospital or other facility.

But just because this type of labor already exists in the United States does not mean that a gig economy staffing app could not surface in the healthcare industry. After all, taxis had operated for decades in the personal transportation industry prior to the introduction of Uber and Lyft. A healthcare staffing app would at a minimum provide an alternative network or "pool" of qualified

healthcare staffing app would, at a minimum, provide an alternative network of – post – or qualified healthcare workers and an alternative “marketplace” for hospitals and facilities to link up with workers.

The legal concerns associated with other marketplace-matching apps, such as Uber and Lyft, would again be important to understand with respect to a healthcare workers’ app. Worker classification and misclassification issues, discrimination, harassment, and wage and benefits issues, for example, would be areas for healthcare employers to monitor. Several other concerns unique to the healthcare industry – such as licensing, privacy, safety, and certification issues – would also be implicated if a healthcare provider dipped its toe into the digital-matching world to meet its staffing needs. For now, however, until the current proposal becomes a reality, healthcare employers should keep an eye out for any gig economy ripples from across the pond.