Healthcare Workplace Economy
November 2011

Jobs Report Summary for the Healthcare Industry Based on the BLS Report with October 2011 data

In January 2009, President Barack Obama's economic team released a report regarding the anticipated projections of his $775 billion stimulus plan, which, at the time, was expected to reduce the nation's unemployment rate and create thousands of new jobs amidst a global economic recession. Forecasts of future unemployment rates were included among the stimulus plan predictions. Back then, the depth of the recession was not known and economic advisors believed the national unemployment rate would be approximately 6.5 percent in October 2011 and roughly 6 percent by the end of 2011.

Unfortunately, such forecasts have proven to be far too optimistic. So what are the actual figures – and will there be any noticeable improvement soon? According to the BLS's "The Employment Situation – October 2011," the national unemployment rate did drop from September to October, but only minutely so, from 9.1 percent to 9 percent, respectively. Additionally, revisions for both August and September 2011 showed larger growth than previously reported.

Although unemployment has lowered, many economists do not project a positive employment forecast anytime soon. The Federal Reserve recently predicted the unemployment rate will be at least 8.5 percent towards the end of 2012 proving that while growth is happening, it will certainly be a longer process than expected.

While unemployment did decline and the nation added 80,000 new jobs in October, the reality of the country's current economic situation can easily be recognized. Throughout October, 13.9 million

Sector changes observed in October

Employment by selected industries
(Changes from September - October 2011, in thousands)
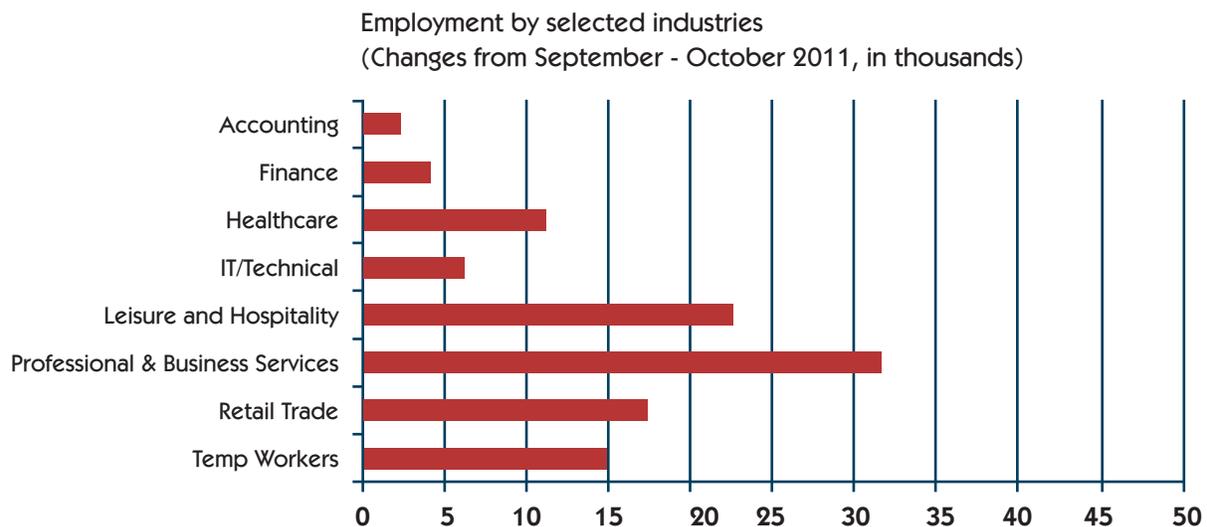
Source: BLS

Americans were still unemployed – and 42 percent of these individuals had been searching for work on a long-term basis, for at least 27 weeks.

As President Obama implements new methods for job creation, an array of questions remain. How will the United States economy react to crises that continue to transpire around the world, including Greece's bankruptcy and Thailand's devastating floods? Will retail stores hire enough employees during the holiday shopping season to lower the nation's unemployment rate? When will companies begin to hire at a regular pace again? Although the country's economic forecast remains unclear, hopefully such questions will be answered in a positive manner, sooner rather than later.

For the second consecutive month, employment increased within various industries throughout the United States, including healthcare, leisure and hospitality, and professional and business services.

According to the BLS's "The Employment Situation – October 2011," the following employment figures were documented:

- **Healthcare:** Hiring increased again within the healthcare industry with 12,000 jobs added throughout October. Since October 2010, the industry has created 313,000 new positions.

- **Construction:** Following September's positive jobs report, in which 27,000 jobs were added within the industry, construction employment decreased by approximately 20,000 in October.

- **Government:** For yet another month, governmental employment declined quite significantly in October – by nearly 24,000 positions.

- **Leisure and hospitality:** 22,000 new leisure and hospitality jobs were added during the month. Employment within the industry has increased by 344,000 since January 2010.

- **Manufacturing:** Employment decreased within the industry by approximately 13,000 positions.

- **Professional and business services:** Employment increased by 32,000 in October, as temporary help services and management and technical consulting services noticed extensive job growth.

- **Retail trade:** Job growth in the sector increased 17,800 jobs.

Soliant insights:

Ever since the nationwide recession began in 2007, American economists and citizens have searched for evidence that proves slow but steady fiscal growth is occurring. As a sign of economic progress, various success stories were documented in October as employment increased in numerous industries.

First, the nation's unemployment rate decreased for the first time since August, from 9.1 percent in September to 9 percent in October. Although such a decrease appears to be minute, any unemployment rate decline is certainly welcomed, especially during a year in which the rate has regularly been nine percent or higher.

Second, 80,000 jobs were created in October. Although 150,000 jobs need to be generated on a monthly basis just to offset the nation's population growth, considering the lack of job creation that has transpired in recent months, October's jobs report may signify that progress will be even more noticeable during the holiday hiring season. Also, compared to September, the amount of Americans marginally attached to the labor force decreased in October while the number of discouraged workers declined, in comparison to October 2010.

As hiring continues to increase within a variety of industries, including healthcare and professional and business services, perhaps the holiday hiring season will be a bright one after all, in terms of growth and productivity. The Obama administration, as well as millions of unemployed Americans, can only hope that growth vastly improves in the near future.

7 Best Practices for Hospitals Implementing Health Information Exchanges

Health information exchanges are important for meeting meaningful use standards, improving the coordination of care and potentially lowering costs. In fact, the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology listed achieving adoption and information exchange though the meaningful use of health IT as one of its top goals in the Federal Health Information Technology Strategic Plan: 2011- 2015. Glenn Keet, president of Axolotl, a company focused on the exchange and management of health information, recently shared seven best practices for hospitals implementing HIEs.

1. **Avoid hospital-centric approaches**
   Keet believes that hospitals should view their HIE as a clinical network for clinicians and the hospital rather than only a tool for the hospital to transmit data. For the HIE to be effective, both the hospital and physicians need to integrate the system into their workflows since physician practices' and ambulatory centers' workflows are significantly different from that of hospitals.

2. **Connect nearly 100 percent of area physicians**
   The hospital's HIE needs to try to connect all of the physicians in the area, not only the ones who have adopted electronic medical records. Full participation by the physician community enables them to interact with each other to improve the coordination of care and causes the entire HIE more valuable to everyone.

3. **Create a community index**
   Not only should HIEs include all area physicians, but also should be designed to include information for all patients in a community. Instead of limiting the HIE to the patients the hospital treats, the HIE should be open to all patients who receive care in the community; consequently, their inclusion will provide more robust data when analyzing the health of a population and can eventually allow patients to access their personal health records.

4. **Allow physicians to select their EMRs**
   Keet suggests that hospitals provide physicians with guidelines for what kind of EMRs the HIE will connect to instead of encouraging a particular system or requiring them to choose among several options. "More than 25 percent of EMRs get rejected in [physician] practices or fail in their implementation in practices; A lot of that blame will go to the hospital if the hospital was involved in the selection," Keet says. "It's a much better choice to allow the [physicians in a] practice to choose one themselves that meets the basic guidelines the hospital sets out." With this freedom, physicians will help the hospital work towards the goal of 100 percent physician participation in the HIE.

5. **Bolster the marketing department**
   One of the most important factors in the success of an HIE is awareness among physicians. Awareness will help ensure wide adoption of the HIE, which is essential for the system to be useful. Keet suggests getting to this awareness level by bolstering marketing departments and by combining the resources of other departments, such as the physician liaison, health information management and health IT departments, to promote HIE usage.

6. **Plan to use the HIE as a strategic tool**
   "Many hospitals look at an HIE as driven by the CIO or the information systems department as a tactical way of dealing with data movement and data access, but an HIE can be a much more strategic tool to be utilized in their region," Keet says. Hospitals may also be able to use HIEs to meet healthcare reform goals, as initiatives such as accountable care organizations aim to improve population health. Implementing a comprehensive HIE system will allow hospitals to more easily identify and treat the most vulnerable patients.

7. Lead with the C-suite

As HIEs are strategic tools, implementation efforts need to be driven by the C-suite, according to Keet. The CEO, CFO and CMIO should take the lead to ensure implementation meets the hospital's strategic goals. Keet believes that the CMIO lead data analytics and decision support applications that can be connected to the HIE. The CFO should assess the financial implications of HIE adoption and compliance issues. CEO leadership is particularly important for the success of the HIE because they can focus the hospital on using the HIE to connect to the community, which can raise the likelihood of physician participation and eventual patient participation in personal records.

IBM Launches Healthcare Analytics Software to Reduce Hospital Readmissions
Source: www.eweek.com

In late October, IBM introduced Content and Predictive Analytics for Healthcare, an application that provides content analytics like that of IBM's Watson, the supercomputer featured on "Jeopardy." The application was developed to help the health-care industry reduce hospital admissions. By pulling clinical data from large amounts of patient information, it can understand patient histories and predict future outcomes. According to IBM, the application is "ready for Watson," which means it lacks the supercomputer's question and answer capabilities, but uses a similar understanding of speech.

The Watson concept helps doctors know what questions to ask patients and the Content and Predictive Analytics application will be able to show trends and patterns in unstructured data. With the new software, doctors will be able to analyze the data and find patterns in healthcare information to ask better questions.

Seton Healthcare Family, a Texas health system, will be the first healthcare organization to use the software. By employing the application, Seton hopes to reduce readmissions, curb mortality rates and improve care through access to clinical and operational information in unstructured (physician notes, registration forms, discharge documents, etc.) data.

In addition to potential improvement in patient care, healthcare organizations will have a new means of reimbursement by using the analytics tool and will provide built-in support for medical terminology. Features of the software include searching, exploring, mining, monitoring and reporting.