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Good afternoon. Chairman Baucus, Ranking Member Grassley, and distinguished members of the Committee. On behalf of the 11,500 Bon Secours Virginia Health System employees, I thank you for this opportunity to share insights on how we attract and retain older workers as part of our 186-year-old health care ministry.

My name is Bonnie Shelor, and I lead the Human Resources organization for Bon Secours Virginia Health System as its Senior Vice President. Today, I will share:

- How and why our workforce is changing
- Why we value older workers
- How they contribute to our success and culture
- How we attract and retain them to create a culture of aging

Let me start by telling you about our organization. Bon Secours Virginia includes about 7,500 employees in Richmond and 4,000 employees in Hampton Roads. As a Catholic-based, nonprofit health care system, we are part of Maryland-based Bon Secours Health System Inc., which operates in seven states.

With four hospitals in Richmond, three in Hampton Roads, dozens of ambulatory care sites and multiple support service locations, we at Bon Secours Virginia take our mission of “providing good help to those in need” to heart. We annually provide health care services for nearly half of the Richmond’s citizens, and Hampton Roads continues to grow. We also have an active Care-A-Van community outreach mission to provide health care to some of our fellow Virginia residents in the greatest need.

The Sisters of Bon Secours, who started our health care ministry in Paris in 1824, remain a guiding force for our shared values, mission and vision. In fact, many of the Sisters are 50+ and continue to work with us until they are no longer physically able. They serve as leaders for our health care ministry well into their 80s and 90s providing strategic direction and guidance, including serving on our board of directors and leading the decision-making body. For us, workers of this age are common, and their vision, wisdom and contributions are celebrated.

In our Richmond health system, nearly 40 percent of employees are 50 or older; women account for 85 percent of our work and one-third are nurses. We often say that our organization is world-class because our employees are world-class. We value each employee, and recognize the significant contribution each makes. We believe the experience, wisdom and institutional knowledge of our older workers is invaluable and, in fact, helps to make us a more prosperous organization.

Let me share about one such employee – **Hattie Davis**.

Hattie has a sparkle and style that light up a room. For someone turning 89 in August, she doesn't look a day over 60. Hattie shines when she talks about her distinction as Bon Secours Richmond's oldest employee. She recently reflected on her life and her Bon Secours career as a private-duty nurse that continues today with her two-day-a-week job in Employee Wellness. She's also a regular volunteer in our of our hospital gift shops.

When asked about her career with the health system, Hattie said, *"I tried to retire in 1991. Soon after I retired, Employee Wellness called me to fill in for one day, and I've been here ever since."* She continued, *"I am proud to be a representative of older workers at Bon Secours Richmond. I am an example of how you can have a long career doing something you love in a place that loves you back."*

Across Bon Secours Virginia, we have many dedicated employees like Hattie – who keep me and my Human Resources team focused on creating a work environment that attracts, values and retains our 50+ workers. At Bon Secours Virginia, we are committed to a culture of aging – one that celebrates the value of seasoned workers. In fact, AARP has ranked us a “Best Employer for Workers over 50” since 2003, and we regularly share our insights both domestically and abroad at conferences and workshops.

We also offer a workplace of choice for our employees throughout their careers. Bon Secours Richmond has been on *Working Mother* magazine’s top 100 places for working mothers for a decade and in the top 10 twice, and this year Gallup name Bon Secours Richmond to its prestigious international listing of Great Places to Work.

These accolades benefit Bon Secours Virginia as we’re able to attract and retain a highly engaged and productive workforce – of all ages and stages of life – that benefits our patients. These patients grade us higher on patient satisfaction surveys and are more likely to recommend us to friends and family ensuring that we are successful in our mission and financially strong.

Our health care workforce is changing, and we want to address those changes. Our nation is currently facing a nursing shortage that will reach severe levels by 2015. The incoming generation of workers in America is six percent smaller than the generation that is retiring.

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.

Because we are providers of health care, we have been aware of the consequences of aging nurses for quite some time. The nation's largest class of nurses graduated in 1959. Assuming they were about 20 at the time, they are now approaching 70.

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

Research shows that nurses leave the profession before a typical retirement age for three main reasons:

1. **Changing interests.**
2. **Being called on to care for aging family members or grandchildren.**
3. **The work is too physically demanding in patient care.**

At Bon Secours Virginia, we've proactively addressed these issues, because we value older workers for bringing rich experiences and strong skill sets to the table. For us, not only are we going to hit a **nursing shortage**, but we will have a **knowledge shortage**.

We have multiple programs to encourage our older workers to keep working into their retirement and beyond. We offer several phased retirement options, which are a direct result of soliciting employee feedback.

Option No. 1 allows employees to cut back to part-time (working less than 24 hours per week) and continue to receive a pension check.

Option 2 allows employees older than 70 ½ to begin receiving their retirement check the following April, regardless of their employment status.

Option No. 3 allows an employee to retire and then be rehired at a later date while still collecting their retirement check.

An employee younger than age 65 who has retired must leave employment for three months before returning. Upon returning, the employee would continue to receive the same level of retirement and also would be eligible for **medical, dental and vision coverage and other valuable perks**, like **tuition reimbursement**, if he or she works a minimum of 16 hours per week.

Our comprehensive and generous benefits are attractive, flexible and creative. Grandchildren of our employees are eligible to attend our on-site Family Care Centers. Those caring for elderly family members can receive discounts on in-home nurses, respite care, hospice and home-medical equipment. We also allow employee caregivers to use paid time off to care for elderly parents or relatives. Abundant resources to help caregivers care for themselves are available through onsite Employee Wellness Services, which gives employees the resources, tools and knowledge to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

We offer the opportunity for employees to take a **health risk assessment** through Employee Wellness. As a result, among our older workers we consistently see improvements in areas such as Cancer, Fitness, Nutrition, Stress, Substance Abuse, Safety and Heart Health. This translates into innumerable cost savings – direct and avoidance costs. But more important, Employee Wellness becomes a retention tool, because we’re giving employees an opportunity to help themselves.

We have tailored options such as **telecommuting and job sharing** for personal flexibility.

Our mobility-lift teams help our older workers with the regular turning of bed-bound patients. Since the lift teams started, we’ve seen a steady drop in the number of injuries, a decrease in pain and a reduction in muscle fatigue among nurses.

Education and training play a major role in attracting and keeping older workers, as I shared earlier. To encourage engagement, to facilitate job growth or to retrain for lateral moves, we offer a variety of classes onsite and online: clinical, remedial, leadership and new-skills development, such as computer basics or Spanish. We also offer tuition reimbursement, and we make concessions for people pursuing studies to have on-the-job flexibility. We take life-long learning seriously.

Bon Secours Virginia invests in hiring of entry-level employees and then empowers them to seek supplemental education and develop new skills. By adopting benefits that bridge gaps among diverse employees (including a “minimum” wage 26 percent higher than what the Commonwealth of Virginia requires), the **Just-Wage initiative** is leading the health system’s efforts to “level the playing field,” for all of our workers.

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

When it comes to employee retention we have several other key initiatives. We are laying the foundation for a **civic engagement program**, where we introduce workers age 50+ to volunteering through paid volunteer hours as they advocate for and participate in community initiatives representing our organization.

We have an intergenerational initiative called “**GrandPartners**” that pairs employees’ children in our day care with elderly friends, employees or spouses of employees.

The CEO of Bon Secours Virginia Peter J. Bernard is a passionate supporter of our focus on older works. He routinely hosts luncheons for employees age 50+.

Typically, these events are more like 70+ and create a casual environment to discuss new developments, answer questions and hear concerns.

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. Employee feedback will drive future changes and enhancements.

We continue to learn from other organizations in the public and private sectors. I ask you to remember employees at Bon Secours Virginia – like our 88-year-old employee Hattie Davis – and many more who keep working well beyond the typical retirement years and help us pursue our mission of providing good help to those in need.

In closing, consider the words of Hattie, *“I am the oldest employee at Bon Secours Richmond. I’ve spent my entire career here and I don’t have any plans of stopping soon. As long as I am able, I will keep on working.”*

Thank you for your time. I welcome any questions.

TESTIMONY ADDENDUM FOR BONNIE P. SHELOR

Below are three examples of older employees at Bon Secours Virginia who continue to work and contribute to the mission of our health care ministry.

John Simpson, the former CEO for the Bon Secours Richmond Health System, still leads projects after retiring from his full-time leadership role in 2001. Today at age 74, he balances vacation trips with his grandchildren with trips to our new 16-acre ambulatory site slated to be built in Midlothian, Va. John serves as Divisional Consultant and Project Director working with architects, county officials and contractors. He relies on the same leadership skills he used in overseeing the development of two other Bon Secours hospitals.

Then, there is **Dr. Jay Buston**, who at 74 this year, is a staff physician on our Care-A-Van community outreach program, which provides health care services to those in greatest need. In 2008, the Prime Time Awards honored Dr. Buston as “Virginia’s Outstanding Older Worker.” At the same time, Bon Secours Richmond received the national Experience Works Prime Time Award and was one of its five “Outstanding Employers of Older Workers” in America. Given that each year the Care-A-Van sees more and more patients — with more than 12,000 patient visits in 2009 alone — Dr. Buston isn’t slowing down any time soon.

Recently, two of our Richmond hospitals transitioned to a state-of-the-art electronic medical record system. Upon hearing about the new EMR system, **Gloria Randolph**, one of our older nurses told a co-worker, *“I was thinking about retiring, but I’m going to stick around and see how this new system works out for us.”*

This nurse had little computer experience, but we provided her the skills, training, equipment and support that she needed to do her job. In fact, she became a Credentialed Trainer with the new system that soon will be in all of our Virginia facilities. Now she teaches others – often much younger – how to use it.