Somalis in Healthcare: Attaining a Better Understanding of a Growing Population

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Goals of the Project

- Determine why Volunteers of America facilities were attracting Somali employees
- Gain a better understanding of the struggles faced by our Somali employees
- Determine barriers to entering and working in healthcare for Somalis
- Gain insight into effective ways to recruit, retain, and grow Somali employees
Brief History of Somalia

- Gained independence in 1960 when British N and Italian S unified
- Clan society and conflicts
- 1969 Mohammed Siad Barre, member of Darod clan elected president
- Forced to flee Mogadishu in 1991
- Somalia left with no recognized government
- War, famine, and displaced citizens
Coming to America

- Influx of immigration since the late 1980’s
- Coming from refugee camps
- Largest settlement in the Twin Cities, MN (42%)
  - OH, CA, NY, MA
- Draws to the Twin Cities area
- Security changes after 9/11
- Housing
- Legal system
Working in America

- Traditionally drawn to industries where speaking English isn’t required
- Unionization
Working in Healthcare

- Reasons for choosing healthcare professions
  - Utilitarian
  - Noble profession
Barriers to Working in Healthcare

- Touch
- Prayer
- Dress and appearance
- Pork
- Prejudice
- Education
- Language and communication
Supervisor Challenges

- Desire to be very accurate and compassionate
- Reluctant to delegate responsibilities
- Using critical thinking
- Not questioning authority of asking for clarification
Dos and Don’ts for Interacting with Somalis

- **Do:**
  - Open the interaction with small talk
  - Maintain eye contact
  - Rise to show respect

- **Don’t:**
  - Use Somali greetings unless you know how to use them correctly
  - Get into arguments or political disagreements
  - Show the bottom of your feet
  - Directly criticize
  - Ask personal questions

- Shaking hands – it depends
Recommendations for Recruiting

- Word of mouth
  - Mosques
  - Community Centers
  - Employee Referrals
- Somali Talking Yellow Pages
- Secondary sources:
  - Flyers, tv, radio
Recommendations for Retaining

- Good working relationships
  - Respect
  - Open-minded co-workers
- Fair compensation
Developing Somali Employees

- American dream
- Career advancement
- Have conversations about available resources
Future Outlook

- Different for individuals who moved here at a younger age or were born here
- Diversity education
Questions?
References