

# what's working

translating DE&I  
across the globe



## Andrea Hendricks

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**L**istening is a crucial part of any company's diversity, equity and inclusion (DE&I) strategy, according to Andrea Hendricks, senior executive director and chief DE&I officer at Cerner Corporation.

From gathering employee input through surveys and associate resource groups to vetting a new program by consulting with a work council in another country, the health care technology company uses these methods to improve and expand its DE&I efforts in the United States and around the world.

"We want to represent people from all backgrounds. It's so important that we reflect the communities that we serve," Hendricks said.

Cerner is based in the Kansas City, Missouri metropolitan area and employs 26,000 people with a presence in more than 35 countries. Hendricks joined the company in 2018.

### The DE&I Journey

Cerner had an informal focus on DE&I from 2008 through 2018 but lacked an enterprise-wide program. That changed in 2018 when the company launched a more intentional DE&I strategy, Hendricks said.

Not only is it the right thing to do, but leaders have also recognized that having a culturally and ethnically diverse workforce will improve the company's ability to innovate and have a positive impact on revenue and return on investment, she explained.

In 2019, Cerner's then chief executive officer and chief human resources officer joined Hendricks in signing the national CEO Action signatory pledging the company's commitment to diversity and inclusion. That was followed by a deep commitment by the executive committee in 2020. It's a commitment that new President and CEO David Feinberg also intends to uphold.

"Increasing diversity and inclusion continues to be among the company's highest priorities," Hendricks said. "Support for diversity within Cerner is a key foundation of our culture."

### Gathering Employee Input, Generating Engagement

Associate business resource groups (ABRGs) are a major part of Cerner's DE&I efforts. These groups were formed in 2020 and create programming, provide input and foster a sense of community for associates. Cerner currently has eight ABRGs for associates and allies representing the following groups: women, LGBTQIA, Hispanic/Latino, Asian, veterans, African/Black, Indigenous and persons with disabilities. To date, more than 7,000 associates have joined an ABRG.

One example of the important feedback that associates provided occurred during the social civil unrest in the summer of 2020. Some associates shared that they'd like more counselors and service providers who represented their demographics and cultures. "Yes, we have counselors and EAP assistance, but many of them were not representative of various cultures. That was an opportunity for us, and we addressed it," Hendricks explained.

Surveys also help Cerner gauge its progress. "It's important that we stay transparent and understand what's worked, what's not and what new opportunities we need to consider," she said. The annual associate engagement survey now includes dedicated questions about DE&I. "It helps us understand and benchmark and gives us direction for good practices, programs and initiatives," Hendricks added.

### DE&I and Employee Benefits

In addition to implementing hiring, recruitment and career development programs for di-

verse workers, Cerner has taken a close look at its employee benefits to ensure that they are meeting the needs of all associates.

Current initiatives include the following.

- **Enhanced benefits for LGBTQIA associates:** The benefits team began laying the groundwork and working with vendors in 2009 to broaden benefits for LGBTQIA associates. Benefits now include health care coverage and fertility-related benefits for same-sex partners as well as coverage of surgical and nonsurgical transgender health services.
- **Weight loss and bariatric surgery program:** Cerner partners with a health care provider to improve health outcomes for candidates for bariatric surgery. The program includes health care navigation services, education and support to help associates succeed and maintain weight reduction.
- **Comprehensive benefits analysis:** Benefit leaders reviewed all benefits and providers to inventory existing programs. Recent enhanced offerings include the addition of child-care and elder-care referral services. In addition, Cerner pushed out resource highlights for trauma and racial bias. The company also plans to conduct focus groups with ABRG members to identify any additional gaps.

## Global DE&I Efforts

“Diversity, equity and inclusion is applicable no matter where you are,” Hendricks said. However, the areas of emphasis and level of progressiveness vary with the cultures and ethnicities in each country, she noted.

Cerner has found that to have the greatest impact, DE&I efforts must reflect the local environment. “We’re in more than 35 countries. Before launching a program, we seek guidance from our local work councils to ensure that they are on board and we have not presented any materials that conflict with cultural norms in that country,” Hendricks explained.

Examples of country-specific efforts include:

- **India:** Cerner has 5,000 associates in India. DE&I efforts focus on religious and gender diversity as well as

## Addressing Unconscious Bias

When the high-profile killings of George Floyd and other African Americans sparked social civil unrest in the U.S. during the summer of 2020, Cerner required its 16,000 U.S. associates to attend a four-hour program with the goal of creating dialogue and a safe place for associates to share their feelings.

Unconscious bias is one of the issues that has received heightened attention in the U.S. over the last 18 months, but it’s not a U.S.-specific problem, Hendricks explained. “Bias is bias, no matter if you live in India or you live in Canada. We are all humans, and we all have bias.”

In the fall of 2021, the company launched a program on unconscious bias, available for leaders and managers. During 2022, it will be available for all associates around the world and offered in multiple languages, with the goal of having all associates complete the training by the end of 2022.

These are just a few examples of the ongoing opportunities available for associates to learn more and have candid conversations about diversity. Over the past year, Cerner also offered executive diversity dialogue sessions, a diversity champions program, and women’s and multicultural forums.

persons with disabilities. “They’re very connected to faith; they’re very connected to trying to uplift women as they continue to transition more to the workforce,” Hendricks said. Cerner operates a Women in Action program with a focus on hiring and mentoring women as well as promoting them into leadership roles. Other examples of programs in India include a series of virtual career fairs with disability inclusion organizations, disability sensitization training sessions and other programs focused on hiring women.

- **United Kingdom:** Gender equality is a national platform. LGBTQIA and persons with disabilities are also major focuses.

- **Spain:** Cerner Spain partners with the Alares Foundation to support job training and placement for people with diverse intellectual abilities. Guidance and support in all matters related to disability and dependence are available to associates and their family members.

In addition, associates in every one of Cerner's locations may join an ABRG. Some countries are beginning to host their own ABRG events so that they can create programs in their own language and time zones. For example, during International Women's Day, membership of the Women in Action ABRG in Australia, India, the U.K. and the U.S. each held their own events. All were recorded for any associate to view on their own time. In addition, this occurs during International Pride and other cultural events.

## Defining Success

Beyond the recognition and awards that Cerner has received for its DE&I efforts, Hendricks defines success by looking at the degree to which DE&I has become entrenched in and embraced across the organization.

"As the DE&I organization, we act like a change agent that works through and with other people to lift diversity efforts across the organization and seamlessly embed them in the business units and the organizational strategy and structure. That's my ultimate success," Hendricks said. "The greatest outcome of diversity is that the associates feel they belong and the culture the organization has developed makes associates feel that once they're hired, they're part of the family."

