

## Nurse Engagement and Retention Strategies

### Overview

Nurse engagement and retention are important considerations for nurse leaders as staff dissatisfaction can lead to nurses leaving their place of employment, or even the nursing profession. A survey to assess the impact of COVID-19 on nurses conducted by the American Nurses Foundation and the American Nurses Association [ANA] (2022) found that 52% of nurses were considering leaving their current position due primarily to insufficient staffing, the negative impact of work on health and well-being, and the inability to deliver quality care. In addition, 60% of acute care nurses reported feeling burned out, and 75% felt stressed, frustrated, and exhausted. Approximately 193,100 registered nurse positions are projected each year over the next decade due to the need to replace nurses who change jobs, exit the workforce, or retire (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2024). These startling figures demonstrate the need to prioritize nurse retention and develop ways to engage nurses in their current positions to prevent turnover.

### Definitions

#### **Nurse engagement**

- Nurses' commitment to and satisfaction with their jobs
- Must also consider the nurses' commitment to the organization and to the profession

#### **Nurse retention**

- Focus on prevention of turnover and keep nurses within their organization
- Beneficial to quality patient care and safety, higher patient satisfaction scores, and nurse safety

### Risk Factors (ANA, 2023; Schroyer et. al, 2020)

Factors that can contribute to a lack of nurse engagement and reduced nurse retention include:

- Lack of educational training, skills, and knowledge
- Absence of leadership support
- High acuity and stressful patient workloads
- Limited staffing availability/overtime
- Restricted job growth
- Diminished job satisfaction
- Disputes with management
- Unsupportive coworkers
- Low salary
- Aging workforce
- Toxic work environment or incivility

These negative factors can lead to:

- Staff turnover
- Overtime hours
- Prolonged unit vacancies
- Poor quality of patient care
- Low patient satisfaction

- Higher patient ratios
- Nurse burnout/distress
- High costs for new nurse orientation

Millennial nurses are particularly at risk for turnover. Although they tend to be engaged, they are more likely to move on to a new role due to available opportunities. Personal attention and feedback on their work can help improve or maintain engagement and retention of this generation of nurses.

### Steps and Strategies for Nursing Administrators

A literature review performed by Pressley and Garside (2023) found that there are protective factors that favor nurse retention. These are linked to job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Some of the job satisfaction qualities are working conditions, environment, safety, culture, flexible scheduling, and professional development. Organizational factors are split into professional dynamics and individual cultures. Leadership, teamwork, trust, and belonging are included in the professional dynamic category, while stress reduction, moral distress control, work-life balance, and empowerment are examples that exist in the individual organizational arm.

The following strategies should be considered to improve nurse engagement and retention:

- Reimagine nursing orientation programs
  - The orientation program is critical to developing positive employee attitudes and job satisfaction. Successful programs include approximately 13 weeks of orientation with an additional 2- to 3-week transition component (Kiel, 2020).
  - Focus on self-directed orientation courses in combination with clinical experiences, with less focus on classroom activities.
  - Don't release a new graduate before they are ready.
- Invest in nurse residency programs; benefits include (Knighten, 2022):
  - Reduced turnover in first 2 years
  - Increased competency and confidence in clinical decision-making
  - Improved professional commitment and satisfaction
  - Increased safety
  - Increased use of evidence-based practice
  - Stronger clinical leadership and critical thinking skills
  - Improved quality and safety
  - Improved patient experience
  - Integrated organizational culture and values into practice
- Provide mentorship programs and strong preceptors for new graduate nurses
  - Reduced orientation costs
  - Increased leadership and problem-solving skills
  - Increased morale and retention
- Practice and academia collaboration
  - Define competencies using the [AACN Essentials](#)
  - Develop practice/academic partnerships
    - Develop adjunct faculty and joint appointments for faculty in academia and practice settings
    - Increase the number of clinical sites
- Flexible work hours (e.g., 12-hour shifts)

- Develop workplace culture
  - Encourage continuing education
  - Support teamwork
  - Employ shared governance
  - Allow staff to verbalize grievances and report conflicts without fear of retribution
  - Adopt zero-tolerance policies on bullying and [workplace incivility](#)
  - Create a Just Culture by supporting and rewarding staff for reporting adverse events and providing safety-related information.
- Develop a healthy work environment
  - Utilize skillful communication
  - Encourage collaborative relationships
  - Institute staff recognition
  - Prioritize effective decision-making for the unit/department
  - Value leadership
  - Ensure appropriate staffing levels
  - Foster emotional intelligence
- Discuss continuing professional development and opportunities for growth within the organization
  - Career ladder program
  - Role transitioning
- Encourage further educational opportunities and advanced degrees
  - Provide a tuition assistance program for bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees
  - Consider covering the cost of specialty certification, including preparation courses and testing fees
  - Adopt flexible scheduling policies to accommodate nurses attending classes
- Bolster leadership
  - Provide educational opportunities for leadership to learn more about topics of engagement and retention
  - Increase leadership interactions with and support of staff
  - Make leadership visible and available to staff on the unit
- Conduct unit staff meetings to discuss any unit issues or concerns
- Implement resiliency-building tools
  - Provide the workforce with the basics, including food, breaks, and family/childcare.
  - Offer and encourage relaxation therapies, such as aromatherapy, deep breathing exercises, guided meditation, recharge rooms with massage chairs, and yoga.

## Education

Collaborating with other leaders and educating one another on ways to connect with staff, being present and supportive, and ensuring that staff find meaning and purpose in their role can enhance engagement and retention. It is important to display engaging behaviors, effective communication, and promote a healthy work environment for the staff. Provide guidance, support, and resources to help staff thrive, be engaged, and successful.

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