

2023

THE PANDEMIC'S CONSEQUENCES

Survey of Registered Nurses

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INTRODUCTION

For three decades as a nurse and nurse leader, including more than four years as Chief Clinical Officer at AMN Healthcare, I have been honored to be a member of the nation's largest profession and incredibly grateful for all my colleagues' contributions and impact. Nurses are the primary point of care and support for hundreds of millions of patients and the human foundation of our entire healthcare system. The impact of nurses on the health of our nation is profound; what happens to nurses is critical for all healthcare and all patients.

The 2023 Survey of Registered Nurses by AMN Healthcare shows what my nursing colleagues and I have known for several years: A crisis in nursing is upon us. This extremity reverberates not only in the profession but throughout our nation's healthcare system.

Conducted since 2009, the AMN Healthcare Survey of Registered Nurses has consistently shown that nurses cherish their profession. But our biennial survey also consistently warned that the combination of growing nurse shortages due to increasing retirements of Baby Boomer nurses, a dearth in education and training for their replacements, and the rising utilization of healthcare services by a rapidly aging population would eventually lead to a workforce-related healthcare crisis. We called it a "perfect storm" of approaching causes and circumstances.



The 2023 RN Survey data reveals the depth of the problems faced in nursing today and concludes with solutions that need to be engaged throughout our industry and our society. Collaborative action is now needed by all sectors of the healthcare industry to identify and engage solutions. The health of our nation is tied directly to the health of the nursing workforce.

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Then, COVID-19 hit. The pandemic caused a sudden spike in patient demand, overwhelmed many hospitals, and caused great harm to the wellbeing and mental health of many nurses, including a wave of moral injury – the psychological and spiritual pain when nurses find themselves in situations that conflict with their values or beliefs. This can drive nurses away from their jobs and profession. The 2023 Survey of Registered Nurses reveals a sudden decline in nurses' personal and professional views toward nursing since the last RN survey in 2021 – in the middle of the pandemic. The survey polled more than 18,000 RNs nationally about career and job satisfaction, mental health and wellbeing, and nurse shortages, and compared responses based on demographic, historical and other data criteria.

The data on this decline are striking. After remaining stable at 80-85% for more than a decade, career satisfaction among nurses dropped 10 percentage points from 2021. Nurses' satisfaction with quality of care they provided declined 12 points. Feeling emotionally drained rose 15 points. Worry that their job is affecting their health increased 19 points. The percentage of nurses likely to encourage others to become a nurse dropped 14 points.

Particularly concerning is that younger nurses' responses in the 2023 RN Survey were more negative than older nurses regarding satisfaction and mental health and wellbeing. This fact is reflected in other recent surveys as well: younger nurses are struggling more and may need more help related to their emotional health compared to their more experienced colleagues.



Within the hospital industry, CEOs agree that workforce challenges are the biggest issue they face. Ninety percent of CEOs said nursing shortages are their most pressing workforce challenge. A principal factor may be the shift of nurse employment away from hospitals to outpatient settings and various administrative roles during the pandemic. Only 15% of hospital-employed nurses in the 2023 RN Survey planned to continue working in their current position in the next year. The other 85% are considering a new place of nursing employment, working as travel nurses, part-time or per diem; taking a job outside of direct patient care; returning to school; or leaving nursing altogether.

In the midst of the pandemic, we nurses were widely lauded as heroes in the media and public acclaim, which buoyed our spirits and pride during the worst national public health crisis in our lifetimes. But as pandemic conditions waned, the accolades subsided and the focus on nurse wellbeing waivered. Many have been left facing the consequences of the pandemic without adequate support that they deserve and need.

Data from the 2023 RN Survey points the way toward solutions to the current situation. Comparisons show that positives are interrelated – reduction in stress and utilization of mental health and wellbeing services result in better career and job satisfaction. Greater career and job satisfaction is linked to improved retention. Less stress and greater career satisfaction result in greater likelihood to encourage others to become nurses, supporting the pipeline for the future. Higher educational attainment is also linked to greater career and job satisfaction.

This can provide the guidance necessary for a multisectoral focus by healthcare organizations, professional organizations, government, philanthropic health organizations, nurses themselves, and others to help drive forward the positives and create improvements in the personal and professional lives of nurses. Reduction of stress on nurses must be the goal.

Long-term systemic changes also are needed, especially engaging the enduring structural challenges of care delivery in the US healthcare system, such as:

- **Universal adoption of advanced workforce planning and analytics to best leverage our nation's nursing supply**
- **The lack of utilization of technology to extend the reach of the healthcare staff, such as through virtual care teams and robotic care team members**
- **Improvements in population health that can reduce healthcare utilization**
- **Targeting health disparities to reduce barriers to better health for populations**
- **Greater flexibility in the healthcare workforce to ensure better coverage of patient demand and volume**
- **Reducing regulatory barriers to top-of-competency practice and new emerging roles**
- **Expanding the capacity of nursing programs through increased faculty and student support**

Nurses must flourish as the North Star of healthcare. From our current workforce crisis, we need to develop a unified, collaborative effort, led by nurses ourselves and supported by our allies in multiple sectors of society, to reduce stress and moral injury for nurses through systemic, professional and personal changes. Uplifting nurses needs to become a national call to action.

METHODOLOGY

The survey polled more than 800,000 Registered Nurses in the United States from Jan. 5 to Jan. 18, 2023, and received 18,226 completed questionnaires used in this report, of which 11,918 were from staff nurses with the remainder being travel nurses, per diem and other. The margin of error is 1% at a 99% confidence level, and the response rate is 2.5%. In the following charts, the sample size is 18,226 (75% Full time. 25% Part time) unless listed otherwise. Percentages in the report may not total 100% due to rounding or to comparisons of independent samples.

Are you currently employed and working as a nurse?

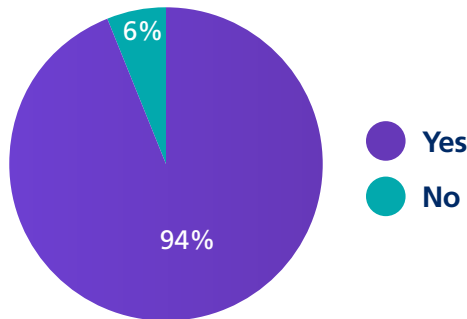


Figure 1

Generation -- In what year were you born?

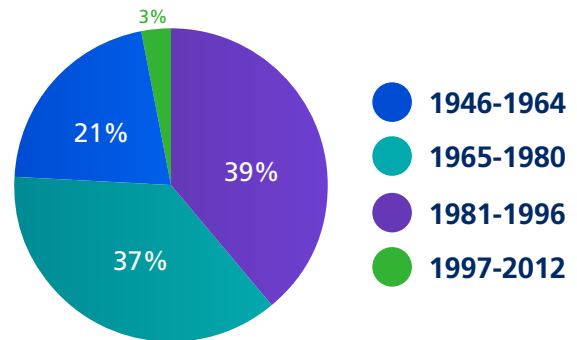


Figure 2

What is your highest degree in nursing?

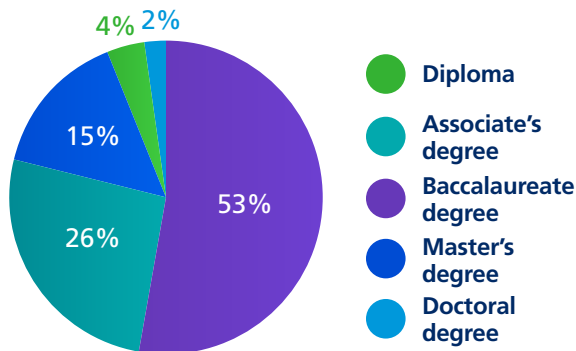


Figure 3

In what region of the United States do you currently work?

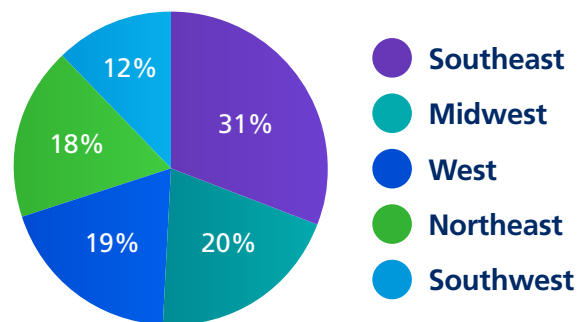


Figure 4

What is your current employment setting? (select all that apply)

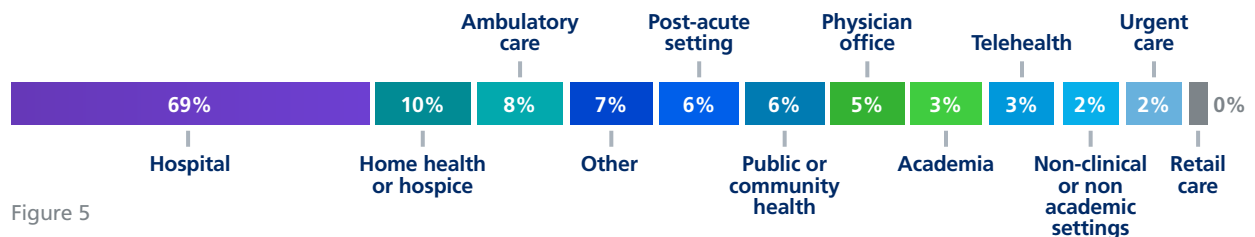


Figure 5

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Great Resignation is a pandemic-related phenomenon that began in 2021 when the rate of job quitting reached unprecedented highs, according to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, which has stated that “quit rates are too high to be explained solely by labor market tightening.” The 2023 RN Survey shows that the Great Resignation is occurring in the healthcare industry, too. The movement of nurses away from hospital employment may be the most damaging healthcare workplace impact of the pandemic.

- Only 15% of nurses employed in hospitals say they will “continue working as I am” in one year. 36% of hospital nurses say they will continue working as nurses but seek a new place of employment
- For nurses in all employment settings, 40% said they will “continue working as I am” in one year. That represents a 5-percentage-point drop since 2021 in the middle of the pandemic
- 30% of nurses say they are likely to leave their career due to the pandemic, up 7 points since 2021
- 18% of nurses say it is likely they will retire from nursing due to the pandemic

Career satisfaction and related factors declined significantly since the 2021 RN Survey conducted in the middle of the pandemic.

- Nurse career satisfaction has been at 80-85% for a decade; in 2023, it dropped to 71%
- Likelihood of encouraging others to become a nurse is down 14 points from 2021
- Only one-third of nurses say they have ideal time to spend with patients, a 10-point decrease from 2021 at 43%
- The percentage of nurses who are satisfied with the quality of care they provide at their current job decreased 11 points from 2021, from 75% to 64% in 2023
- Compared to older nurses, younger nurses are significantly less satisfied with their careers and jobs and are less likely to encourage others to become nurses

Mental health and wellbeing problems for nurses have dramatically increased since the middle of the pandemic in 2021.

- Four of five nurses say they experience a great deal or a lot of stress, up 16 points from 2021. Worry that their job is affecting their health is up 19 points. Often feeling emotionally drained rose 15 points
- 65% of nurses participate in activities or access resources to address their mental health and wellbeing at least once a week, and 40% at least two-to-three times a week – a slight decline from 2021. Thirty-five percent of nurses never address mental health and wellbeing, approximately the same as 2021

Nurses signal dire warnings on nurse shortages.

- Nearly 9 in 10 nurses say the nursing shortage is worse than 5 years ago – a 37-point increase from 2019
- 94% of respondents agree there is a severe or moderate shortage of nurses in their area, with half of nurses saying the shortage is severe
- 80% of nurses expect the shortage to get much worse or somewhat worse in the next five years, with half of nurses saying the shortage will get much worse

Positive responses by RNs are interconnected:

Nurses who...

... have higher career and job satisfaction are less likely to quit their jobs.

... say employer mental health programs are effective have higher career and job satisfaction.

... address their mental health and well-being have higher career and job satisfaction.

... have ideal time to spend with their patients have higher career and job satisfaction.

... report less stress are more likely to recommend nursing to others.



FINDINGS: CAREER & JOB SATISFACTION

As a profession, nurses traditionally have held very high career satisfaction rates. But during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, many research reports have shown a drop in satisfaction rates, including a significant decline reflected in the 2023 Survey of Registered Nurses.

How satisfied are you with your choice of nursing as a career?

Registered nurses who said they were extremely satisfied or somewhat satisfied with their choice of nursing as a career totaled 71% in 2023, a 10-point decrease from 2021. Nurse career satisfaction rates had remained steady at 81-85% in four biennial surveys prior to 2023.

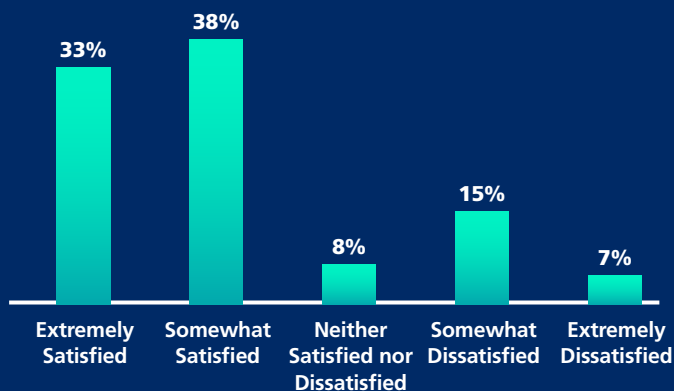


Figure 6

| YEAR | Extremely Satisfied | Somewhat Satisfied |
|------|---------------------|--------------------|
| 2015 | 47% | 38% |
| 2017 | 43% | 40% |
| 2019 | 46% | 35% |
| 2021 | 48% | 33% |
| 2023 | 33% | 38% |

Figure 7

Comparison data showed that nurses with more than five years of experience had higher career satisfactions levels (72%) than nurses with less than five years of experience (64%). Younger generations are less satisfied with their nursing careers (Baby Boomer 78%, Gen X 73%, Millennials 63%, Gen Z 62%). Nurses eligible to retire now are more satisfied (84%) than those who are not (68%).

Nurses who are satisfied with their career show greater job retention – 73% will continue to work at same facility in next 12 months compared to 62% for all nurses. The likelihood of nurses who are dissatisfied with their careers continuing to work at the same facility in one year is 32%. Nurses who address mental health issues at least four times a week have greater career satisfaction (69%) than those who do not address their mental health often (47%).

How likely are you to encourage others to become a nurse?

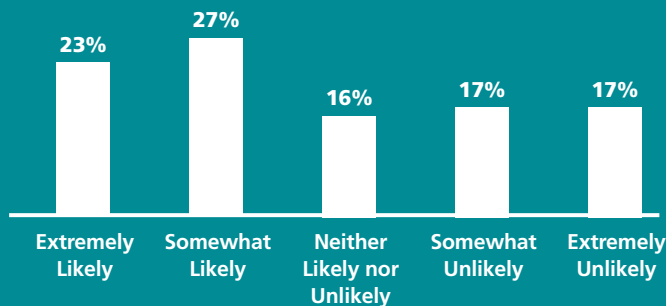


Figure 8

| YEAR | Extremely Likely | Somewhat Likely |
|------|------------------|-----------------|
| 2021 | 33% | 31% |
| 2023 | 23% | 27% |

Figure 9

Only one-half of the nurses are likely to encourage others to become a nurse, a 14-point decrease from 2021 at 64%. In the 2019 RN Survey, 70% of nurses strongly agreed or somewhat agreed with the statement “I would encourage others to become a nurse.” Younger generations are less likely to recommend a nursing career (Baby Boomer 62%, Gen X 51%, Millennials 43%, Gen Z 42%).

The likelihood of recommending nursing is linked with career satisfaction, higher education and work stress. Sixty-seven percent of nurses satisfied with their careers are likely to recommend nursing, compared to half of all nurses and only 6% of nurses who are not satisfied with their careers. Nurses with higher degrees are more likely to recommend others to become a nurse (bachelor’s degree and below 47%, master’s degree and above 62%). Nurses with less stress at work are more likely to recommend nursing (77%) compared to nurses with more work stress (37%).

How satisfied are you with your current job?

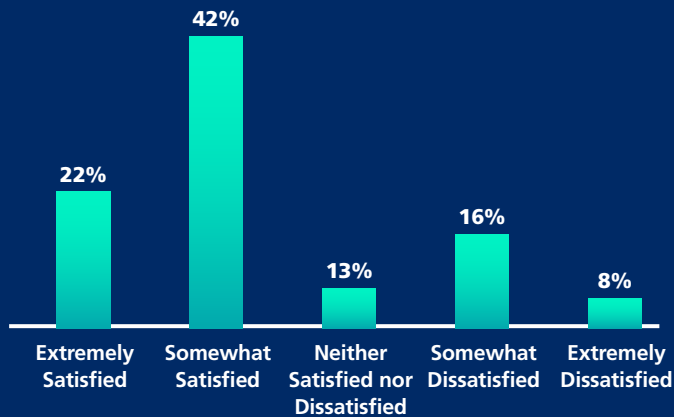


Figure 10 | (n=18,226)

| YEAR | Extremely Satisfied | Somewhat Satisfied |
|------|---------------------|--------------------|
| 2015 | 23% | 40% |
| 2017 | 21% | 39% |
| 2019 | 23% | 42% |
| 2021 | 26% | 41% |
| 2023 | 22% | 42% |

Figure 11

Job satisfaction declined 3 points since 2021, with 64% of nurses saying they are satisfied with their current job. Younger generations are less satisfied with their current job (Baby Boomer 71%, Gen X 64%, Millennial 60%, Gen Z 62%).

How much time do you feel that you have to spend with your patients?

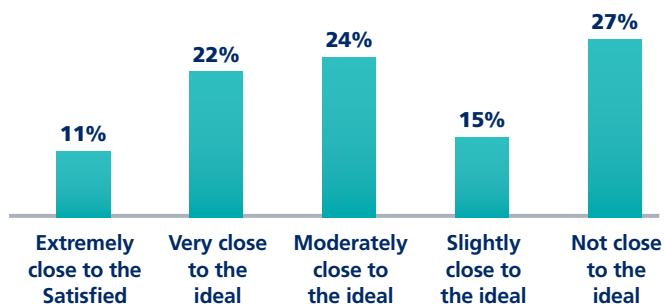


Figure 12

| YEAR | Extremely close to the ideal | Very close to the ideal |
|------|------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 2021 | 14% | 29% |
| 2023 | 11% | 22% |

Figure 13

Only one-third of nurses think they have ideal time to spend with patients (33%), a 10-point decrease from 2021 (43%). Belief that nurses have ideal time to spend with their patients is correlated to higher career and job satisfaction.

How satisfied are you with the quality of care you are able to provide in your current job as a nurse?

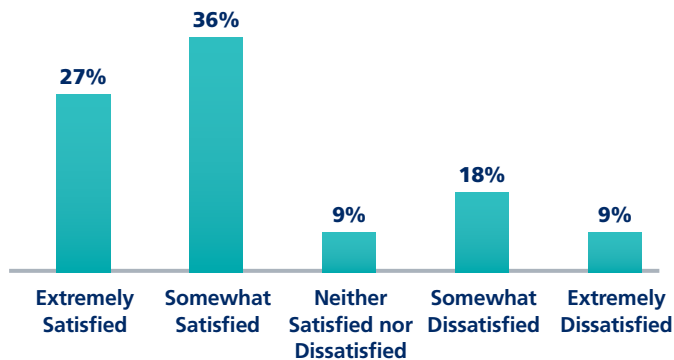


Figure 14

| YEAR | Extremely Satisfied | Somewhat Satisfied |
|------|---------------------|--------------------|
| 2019 | 36% | 39% |
| 2021 | 36% | 39% |
| 2023 | 27% | 36% |

Figure 15

The percentage of nurses who say they are satisfied with the quality of care they provide at their current job decreased 12 points to 63% from 75% in 2021. Younger generations are less satisfied with the quality of care they provide compared to their generational counterparts (Baby Boomer 74%, Gen X 64%, Millennial 58%, Gen Z 59%). Nurses who respond positively about ideal time with patients and quality of care they provide also have higher career and job satisfaction and are more likely to encourage others to become a nurse.

What is the likelihood you will be working for your current employer one year from now?

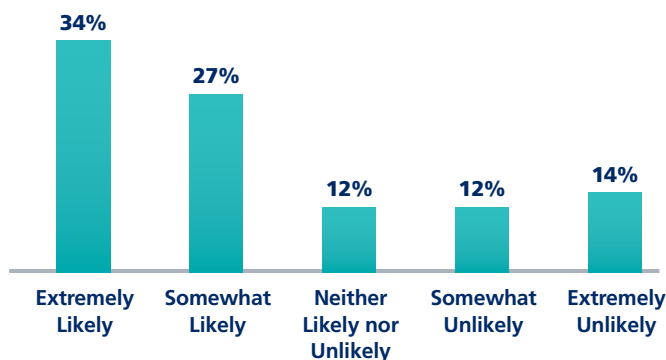


Figure 16

| YEAR | Extremely Likely | Somewhat Likely |
|------|------------------|-----------------|
| 2019 | 40% | 24% |
| 2021 | 37% | 29% |
| 2023 | 34% | 27% |

Figure 17

Sixty-one percent of nurses will continue to work for their current employer a year from now – a five-point drop compared to 2021 (66%) and a 3-point drop from 2019 (64%). Nurses with more than five years of experience are more likely to be working for current employers a year from now (63%) compared to nurses with less than five years of experience (55%). Nurses with higher career and job satisfaction are more likely to be working for current employers in one year.

What are your plans to change your work status in the coming year?

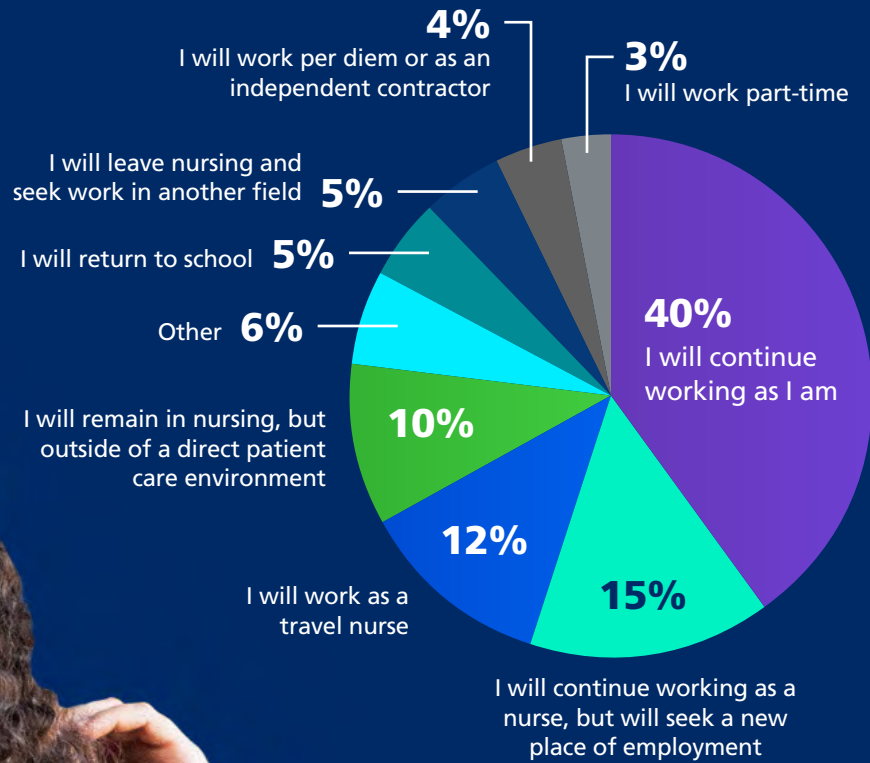


Figure 18 | (n=17,471)

| | 2019 | 2021 | 2023 |
|--|------|------|------|
| I will continue working as I am | 44% | 45% | 40% |
| I will continue working as a nurse but will seek a new place of employment | 15% | 19% | 15% |
| I will work as a travel nurse | 8% | 13% | 12% |
| I will leave nursing and seek work in another field | 2% | 2% | 5% |
| I will work part-time | 3% | 3% | 3% |
| I will work per diem or as an independent contractor | 3% | 3% | 4% |
| I will remain in nursing, but outside of a direct patient care environment | 10% | 5% | 10% |
| I will return to school | 8% | 6% | 5% |
| Other | 7% | 5% | 6% |

Figure 19

For nurses who are not retiring in a year, 40% will continue working as they are now, a decrease of 5 points (45%) compared to in 2021. Twelve percent say they will work as travel nurses, approximately the same as in 2021 and a 4-point increase since 2019.

For nurses employed at hospitals, only 15% agreed with the statement “I will continue working as I am” in the next year, significantly lower than for all nurses in the survey. Thirty-six percent of hospital nurses said they would continue working as nurses but will seek a new place of employment.

Hospital Nurse: Plan to Change Work Status in the Coming Year if Not Retiring in a Year



Figure 20 | (n=12,235)



How likely are you to leave the field of nursing for another occupation as a result of the pandemic?

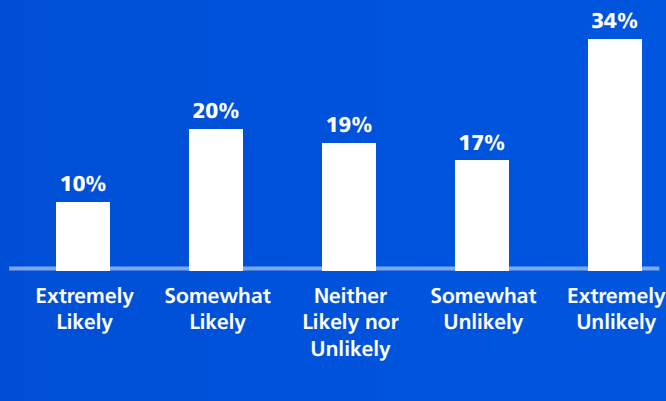


Figure 21

| YEAR | Extremely Likely | Somewhat Likely |
|------|------------------|-----------------|
| 2021 | 7% | 16% |
| 2023 | 10% | 20% |

Figure 22

Nearly one-third of nurses say they are likely to leave nursing due to the pandemic (30%), compared to 23% in the middle of pandemic in 2021. Nurses with less than five years of experience are more likely to quit due to the pandemic (37%) than nurses with more than five years of experience (29%). Younger generations are more likely to leave their career due to the pandemic (Baby Boomer 18%, Gen X 27%, Millennial 38%, Gen Z 39%).

How soon do you plan on retiring?

(Among nurses eligible to retire)

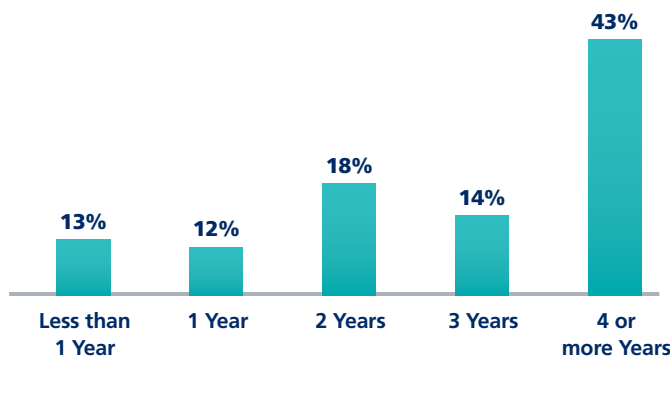


Figure 23

| YEAR | Less than 1 Year | 1 Year |
|------|------------------|--------|
| 2021 | 12% | 11% |
| 2023 | 13% | 12% |

Figure 24

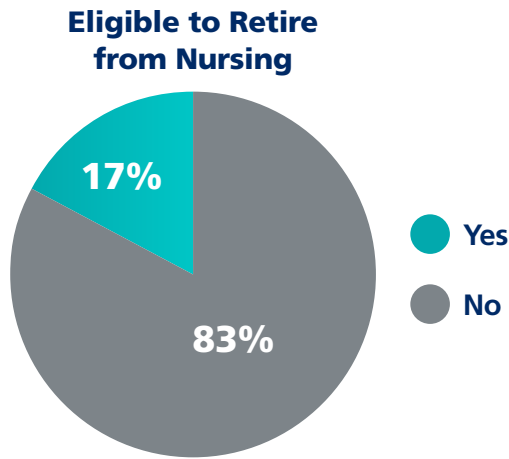


Figure 25 | (n=18,226)

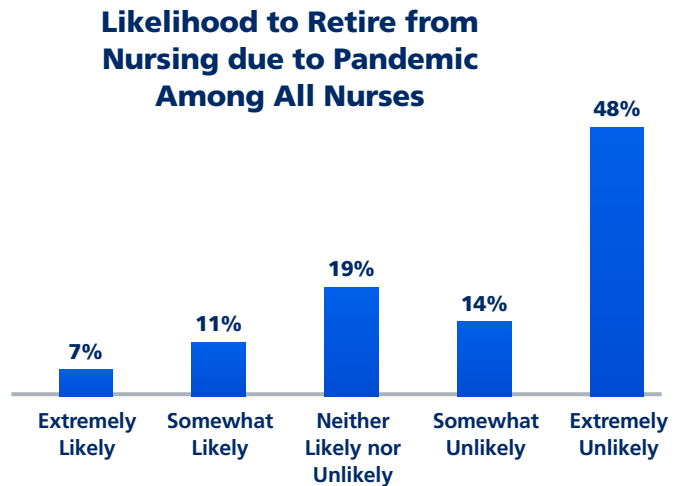


Figure 26 | (n=18,195)

Seventeen percent of nurses say they are eligible to retire from nursing. One-quarter of nurses who are eligible to retire plan to do so in one year or less.

More than half of nurses eligible to retire will do so three or more years from now (57%). Nearly one in 5 nurses say that they will retire from nursing due to the pandemic (18%).



FINDINGS: MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING

How would you rate the level of stress you have experienced in your job while working as a nurse?

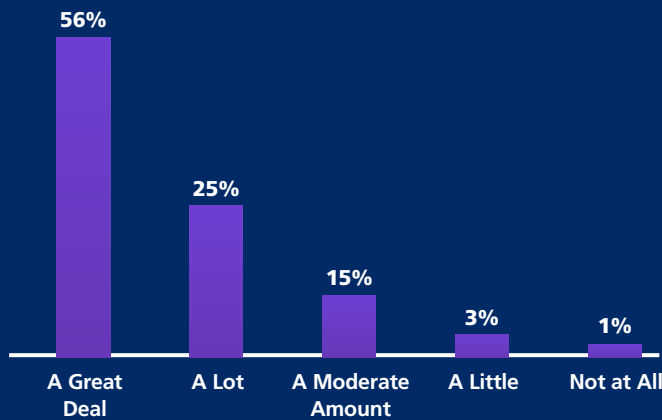


Figure 27 | (n=18,170)

| | 2021 | 2023 |
|-------------------|------|------|
| A Great Deal | 38% | 56% |
| A Lot | 27% | 25% |
| A Moderate Amount | 22% | 15% |
| A Little | 10% | 3% |
| Not at All | 3% | 1% |

Figure 28

Four in five nurses (81%) experience a great deal or a lot of stress in their job, an increase of 16 points from 2021 (65%). All generations experience significant stress in their jobs, with younger generations experiencing more (Baby Boomer 73%, Gen X 81%, Millennial 85%, Gen Z 87%).

Nurses who are satisfied with their nursing career feel less stress (76%) compared to those who are not satisfied with their career (94%).



Effects on Nurse Mental Health and Well-being



I often feel emotionally drained.

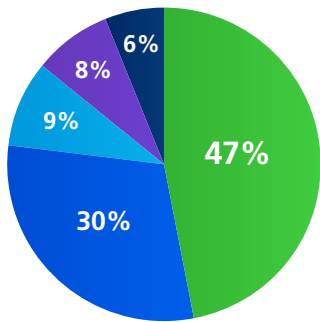


Figure 29 (n=17,840)

I worry this job is affecting my health.

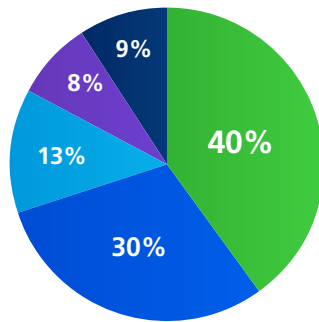


Figure 30 (n=17,854)

Most days I feel burned out.

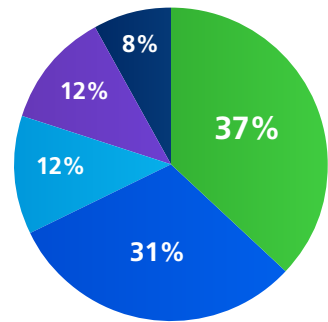


Figure 31 (n=17,865)

I feel misunderstood or unappreciated.

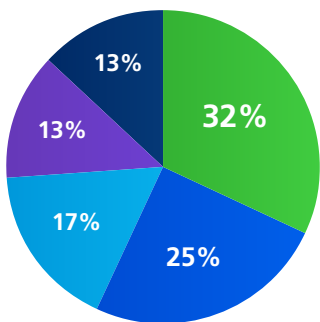


Figure 32 (n=17,839)

I feel that I am not getting what I want out of my job.

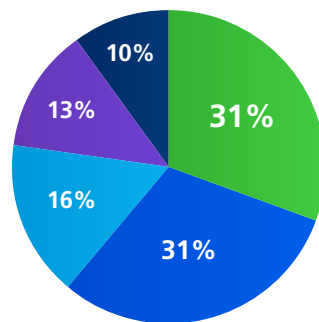


Figure 33 (n=17,861)

I often feel like resigning.

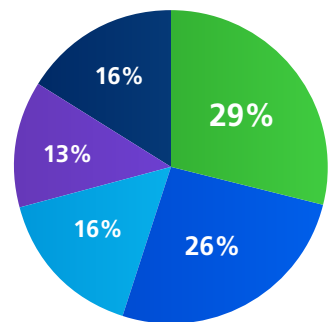


Figure 34 (n=17,851)

Mental health issues increased significantly in 2023 from the 2021 RN Survey. Nurses who strongly and somewhat agreed that they often feel emotionally drained rose 15 percentage points (62% to 77%), worry that their job is affecting their health rose 19 points (51% to 70%), feeling misunderstood or underappreciated at work rose 20 points (38% to 58%), and often feeling like quitting rose 16 points (39% to 55%).

How often are you participating in activities or accessing resources to address your mental health and well-being?

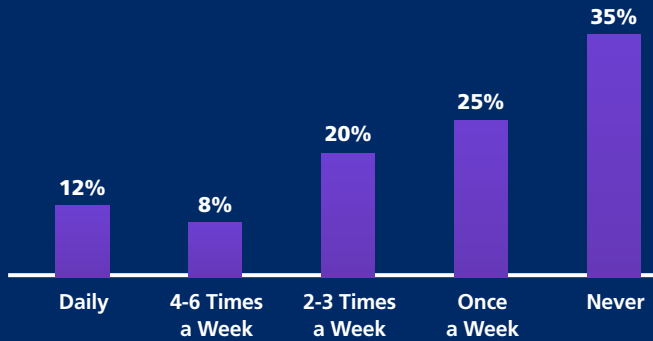


Figure 35 | (n=17,833) | 2023 RN Survey

| | 2021 | 2023 |
|------------------|------|------|
| Daily | 15% | 12% |
| 4-6 Time a Week | 9% | 8% |
| 2-3 Times a Week | 22% | 20% |
| Once a Week | 21% | 25% |
| Never | 34% | 35% |

Figure 36

One in five nurses (20%) address their mental health and wellbeing at least four times a week, a decrease in 4 points from 2021 (24%). More than one-third of nurses (35%) never address mental health and wellbeing issues.

The percentage of nurses who address mental health and wellbeing once a week rose slightly (25%) from 2021 (21%).



To what extent does your employer support a culture of wellness?

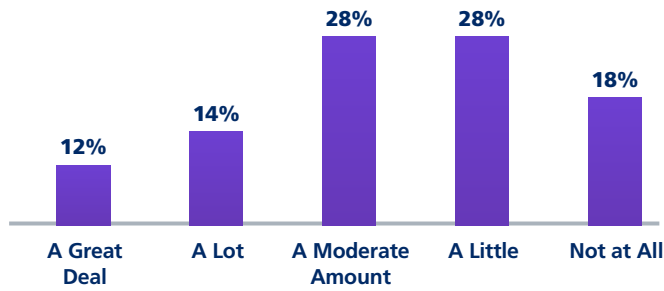


Figure 37

| | 2021 | 2023 |
|--------------|------|------|
| A Great Deal | 16% | 12% |
| A Lot | 18% | 14% |

Figure 38

Only one quarter of nurses (26%) say their employer supports a culture of wellness a great deal or a lot, down from 34% in 2021. Nearly one-half (46%) say their employer supports a culture of wellness a little or not at all.

Please rate the overall effectiveness of the employer-offered programs of which you have taken advantage for mental health support.

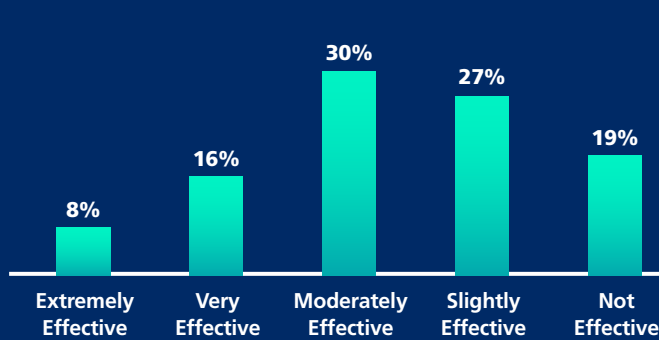


Figure 39

| | 2021 | 2023 |
|----------------------|------|------|
| Extremely Effective | 17% | 8% |
| Very Effective | 29% | 16% |
| Moderately Effective | 30% | 30% |
| Slightly Effective | 15% | 27% |
| Not Effective | 9% | 19% |

Figure 40

Only one in five nurses (20%) utilized mental health programs offered at work. For those participating in the programs, only a quarter (24%) think the programs are effective. This represents a significant drop from 2021, when nearly one-half of nurses (46%) said employer-offered mental health programs were effective.

Nurses who say employer mental health programs are effective have higher job satisfaction.

Utilizes Employer-Offered Mental Health Programs

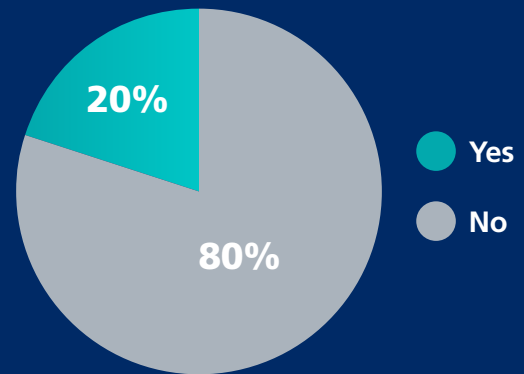


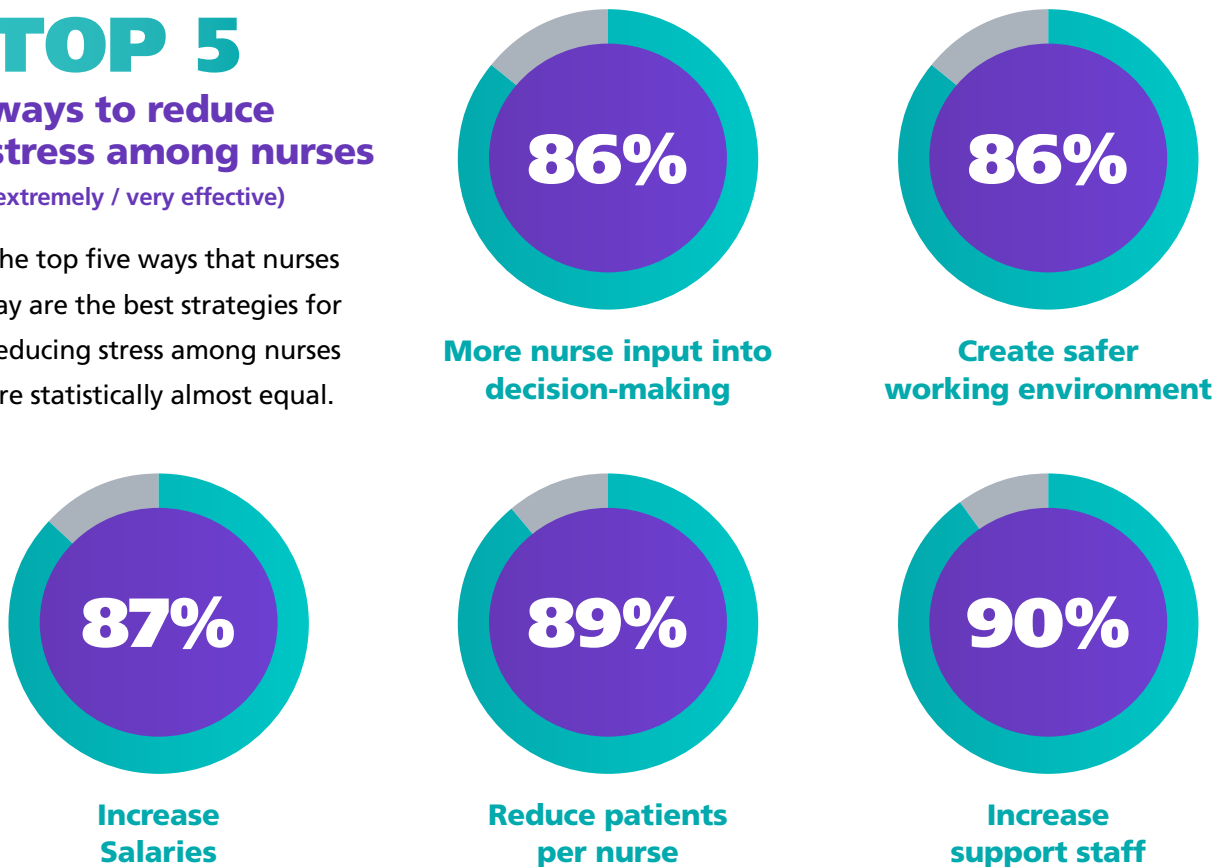
Figure 41 | (n=17,906)

Reducing Stress for Nurses

Figure 42

TOP 5 ways to reduce stress among nurses (extremely / very effective)

The top five ways that nurses say are the best strategies for reducing stress among nurses are statistically almost equal.



Effectiveness to Reduce Stress for Nurses

Extremely Very Moderately Slightly Not at All

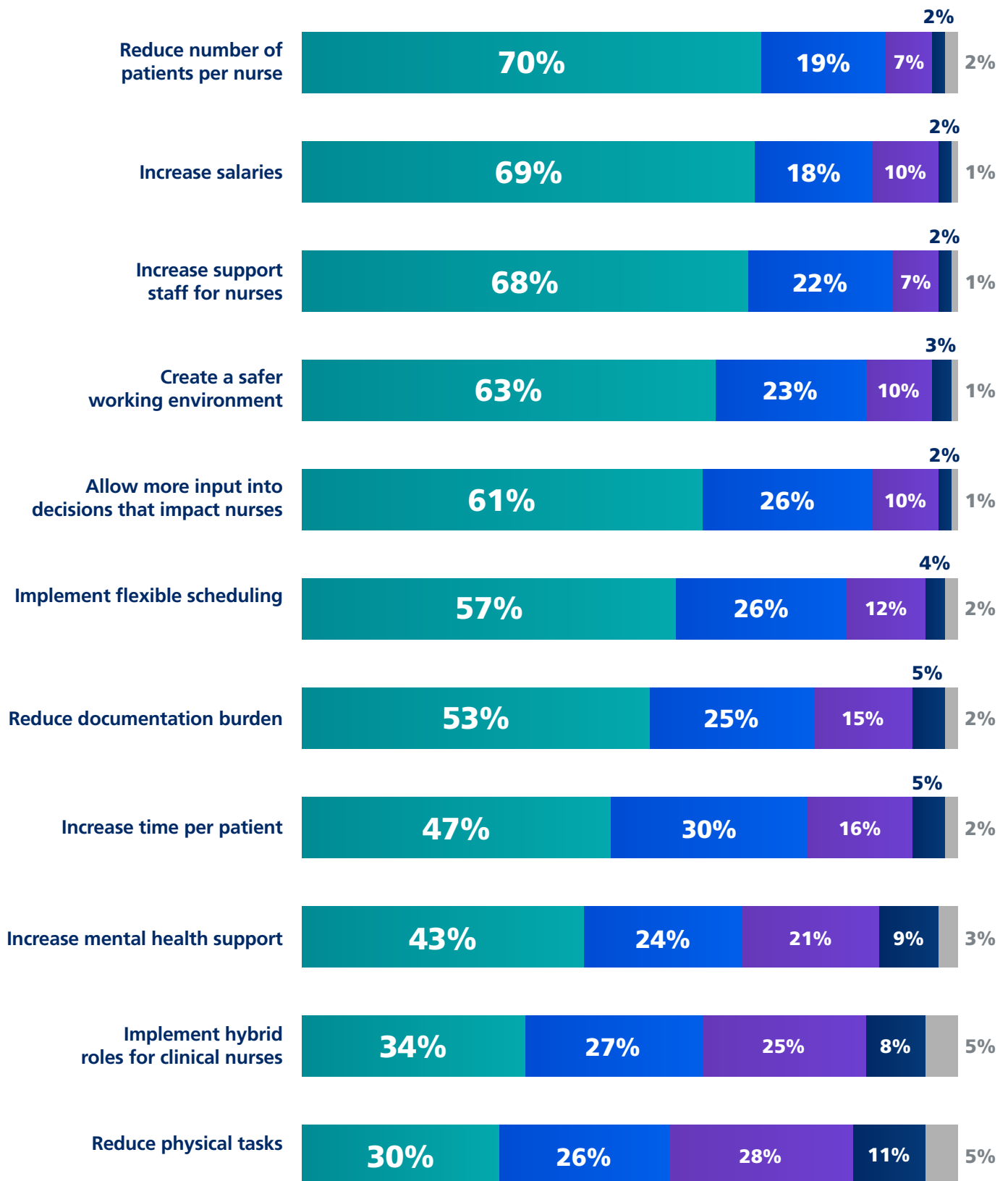


Figure 43

FINDINGS: NURSING SHORTAGES

Registered Nurses see a dramatically worsening nurse shortage in our country and in their own areas. Eighty-nine percent of RNs either strongly agree or somewhat agree that the shortage is worse than five years ago, and strongly agree comprises 75% of nurses. The percentage of nurses who agree that the nurse shortage is worse than five years ago has risen from 37% in 2015 to 89% in 2023.

In the 2023 RN Survey, 94% of respondents said that there was a severe or moderate shortage of nurses in their area, with half of nurses saying the shortage was severe. Eighty percent of nurses expect the shortage to get much worse or somewhat worse in the next five years, with half of nurses saying the shortage will get much worse.

Please answer whether you agree or disagree with these statements about the nurse shortage.

Agreement with Nursing Shortage Statements.

■ Extremely
 ■ Very
 ■ Moderately
 ■ Slightly
 ■ Not at All

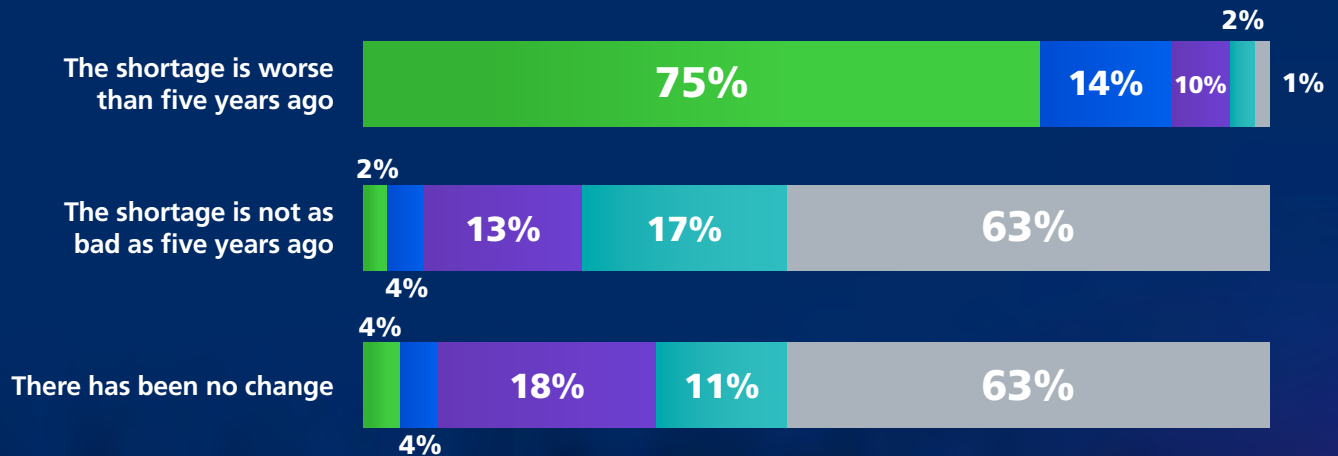


Figure 44



| | 2015 | 2017 | 2019 | 2023 |
|---|------|------|------|------|
| The shortage is worse than five years ago. | 37% | 48% | 52% | 89% |
| The shortage is not as bad as five years ago. | 34% | 22% | 17% | 6% |
| There has been no change. | 29% | 30% | 31% | 8% |

Figure 45

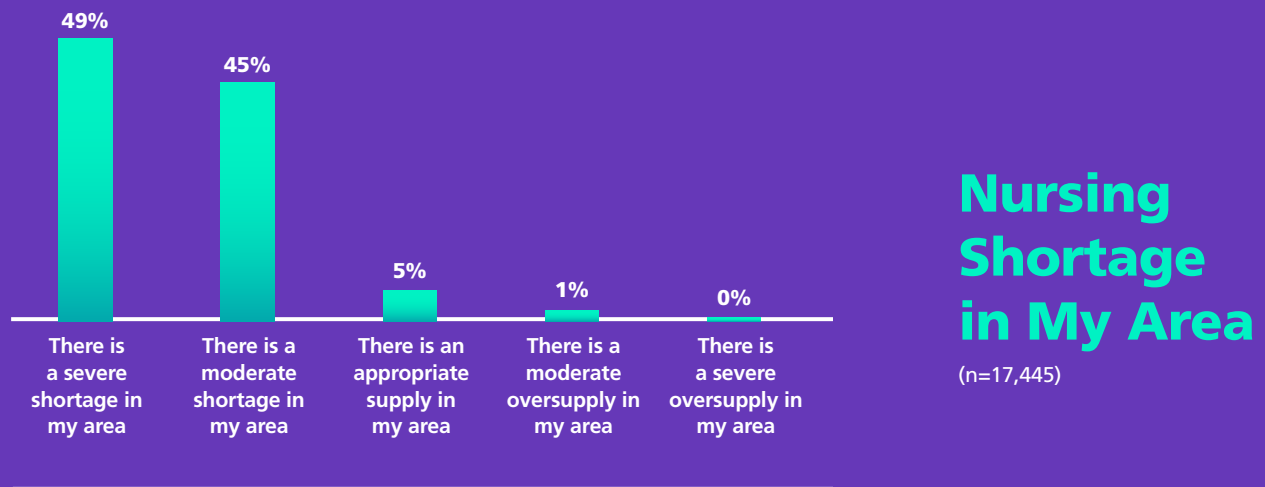


Figure 46

Nursing Shortage in Next 5 Years

(n=17,428)

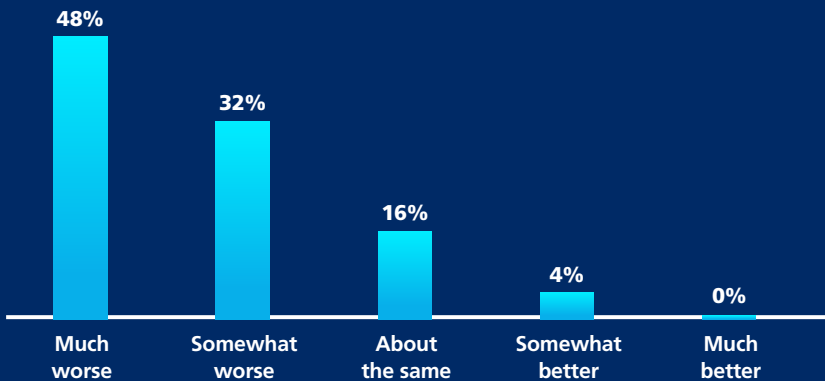


Figure 47

SOLUTIONS

Workforce Transformation: The Next Healthcare Reform



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In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, a long-brewing healthcare workforce crisis has descended upon our nation. Although nursing -- my chosen profession of the past three decades -- may be the most affected, this situation impacts all healthcare professions, all healthcare organizations, all healthcare workplace settings and the entire patient population. In other words -- almost everybody. The Great Resignation in healthcare, a precipitous decline in nurse career satisfaction, and the significant mental health impacts on nurses since the pandemic are clearly shown in the 2023 RN Survey.

Our data illuminates what my nursing colleagues have known and talked about for several years: growing problems caused by severe clinician shortages, difficult working conditions, poor job design, lack of supportive technology, lack of top of competency, restrictive practice, significant workplace violence, and the resulting moral injury that significantly impact the personal and professional lives of nurses and other healthcare professionals. This situation also threatens the quality of patient care, patient access to care and the financial stability of the industry.

Reversing this situation requires our immediate and shared attention through a collaboration of healthcare organizations; professional organizations; organizations representing patient groups; civil society such as the major health nonprofits, government agencies, elected officials; and nurses themselves.

Also needed is a systemic transformation in how we view and deploy the healthcare workforce. Rather than compartmentalizing nurses and other healthcare professionals by employment status or source, healthcare organizations need the flexibility to determine the most effective and efficient way to cover the work that needs to be done at the unit and enterprise levels. In an era where supply of healthcare professionals and demand from an aging patient population are in constant flux, flexibility is paramount. Precision staffing coverage that can change with supply and demand shifts can augment our healthcare system, providing better outcomes for all sectors in the industry.

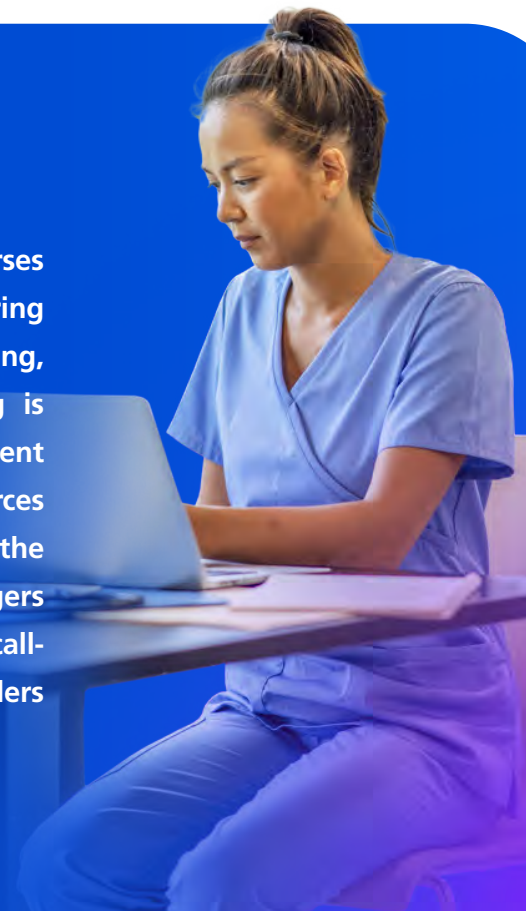
The severe workforce challenges in healthcare are now widely recognized in the industry and even in our society, and there is movement to address the issue – and that in itself is a positive and welcome change. In February, the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions held a hearing entitled “Examining Health Care Workforce Shortages: Where do we go from Here?” that included testimony from nurse leaders and other experts. We urge that legislation addressing the shortage will result from congressional attention to the healthcare workforce crisis.

Real Success Stories

Planning Flexibility into Daily Scheduling

A game-changing approach to scheduling for MED-SURG nurses was instituted at University of Rochester Medical Center during the pandemic with an “it takes a village” approach to staffing, utilizing a specialized staffing coordination office. Staffing is reviewed at two nurse leader huddles a day along with patient acuity; decisions are made about where to deploy nursing resources through a cross-trained flex team. This approach does not take the place of daily staffing and scheduling decisions by nurse managers but instead supports them when they cannot fill shifts or have call-ins. The coordination office is staffed by experienced nurse leaders who have gained the trust of their colleagues.

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In the healthcare industry, a recent survey by the American College of Healthcare Executives showed that “personnel shortages” are now the number one problem that executives face, after two decades of “financial challenges” as their top concern. Personnel shortages are closely linked to high-priority concerns of healthcare leaders, such as patient safety and experience, care quality, workforce mental health and wellbeing, patient access to care and physician-hospital relations.

What we still need are collaborative, comprehensive and transformative solutions, driven by broad-spectrum, strategic thinking and action within the healthcare industry. A decade ago, our country underwent transformative healthcare reform that changed the landscape for patient access to care and

adoption of electronic health records systems. Today, we need another transformation, this time focused on the workforce. Legislative initiatives will be important, but we also need a multisectoral healthcare workforce reform effort that shows tangible benefits for all sectors of the healthcare industry.

The need is for interventions that target individual and systemic changes. Data in 2023 RN Survey uncovered the fact that positive factors among nurses are interrelated. Effective mental health and wellbeing programs for nurses by employers are related to greater career satisfaction. Reducing stress is linked to greater career satisfaction, better workforce continuity and higher care quality. Greater career satisfaction leads to better job retention. Higher educational attainment leads to greater likelihood of recommending nursing to others as a career. None of these results are surprising. But their importance is that they provide an evidentiary roadmap for change: we need to pursue programs that reduce stress on nurses.

Real Success Stories



Creating an Anti-Racist Workplace for Nurses

The Mount Sinai Health System launched a nursing diversity, equity and inclusion committee to create an anti-racist workplace environment through the developing and disseminating knowledge about individual and systemic racism within the nursing profession and the workplace. The committee is charged with advancing the core value of equity through the voice and actions of nurses at all levels of the healthcare system. Actions include enhanced learning, knowledge and accountability so all leaders participate fully in anti-racism efforts; increased hiring, promoting and retention of Black and other underrepresented minority staff; examining business structures through an anti-racist lens; and building a racial equity culture, including through financial investment in racial equity.

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The survey data also suggest how we can attain better outcomes beyond the personal and professional lives of nurses, too. Job turnover is a huge cost for healthcare organizations. Unfilled jobs decrease revenues when they affect the delivery of services. Lower job and career satisfaction among nurses can affect the quality of care and patient satisfaction. The need for job redesign within care delivery model redesign is clear, as well as where care will be delivered.

Helping individual nurses with the problems they face – especially the burden of stress driving them away from their jobs – is an immediate need. Many reliable sources propose effective responses; the best compendium of evidence-based solutions may be the National Academies' Future of Nursing 2020-2030, and particularly the chapter on Supporting the Health and Professional Well-Being of Nurses.

The proposed interventions to benefit the lives of individual nurses and to create systemic change to help all nurses are mostly contained in collaborative programs supported by healthcare organizations, professional organizations and national nonprofits. Effective nurse leaders are also an important catalyst for solving workforce challenges through their capacity to build positive workplace environments, implement evidence-based practices, create open dialogue, and advocate for their teams. Ultimately, this leads to improved retention and quality of care, while strengthening the financial health of organizations.

Real Success Stories

Federal Healthcare Workforce Investment Proposals

The proposed federal budget for FY 2024 includes a \$32 million investment in nursing education to increase the number of nurse faculty and preceptors. The budget also includes \$28 million for a new program to address workforce shortages, and \$25 million for a new program to support workplace wellness in hospitals, rural health clinics and community health centers. New funding is included to expand the National Health Services Corps, which provides loan repayment and scholarships to healthcare professionals who practice in underserved areas. The budget includes \$17 million for advanced practice nursing education to increase the number of certified nurse midwives, with a focus on rural and underserved communities.



Evidence from the 2023 RN Survey and from the field suggest that efforts to support the mental health and well-being of nurses are not widespread enough or are not being implemented and engaged to the extent in which they are needed. In fact, such programs may have declined since 2021, according to survey evidence, possibly being allowed to slide as pandemic conditions waned. Today, more than one third of nurses do not access mental health resources at all, while more than three quarters say they often feel emotionally drained. We need to redouble partnerships among professional organizations and healthcare organizations for individual and systemic interventions to help nurses. Every nurse needs to be reached, and we are not reaching them now.

Initiatives on a national scale are vital as well. Government regulatory changes and legislation that invests in the healthcare workforce will benefit nurses, the organizations that employ them, and ultimately the patient population. We need a large-scale effort to advance the adoption of technology that augments the healthcare workforce, similar to the Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health Act (HITECH) of 2009, which created incentives for universal adoption of electronic health record (EHR) systems among healthcare providers. Key to this is the tenet that healthcare technology can't be designed for healthcare professionals; it should be designed with them.

Real Success Stories



On-site and Off-site Wellness Program

To improve staff wellness and engagement and reduce burnout, University of California San Francisco launched the UCSF Mount Zion Wellness Program, consisting of on-site and off-site wellness activities. A dedicated on-site wellness space offered massage chairs, art, and music therapy, aromatherapy, treadmills, and self-care journals. It also offered live integrative health classes such as yoga, acupressure, breathing exercises and massage therapy. An all-inclusive off-site retreat sent nurses to a three-day energizing retreat focusing on health care staff healing from COVID-19 trauma. It also included speakers, meditation, exercise programs and healthy meals. A year-long pilot began in May 2022.

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Technology has significantly advanced since 2009. Software now can redirect nursing needs for efficient resource allocation and automate staffing and scheduling routines. Telehealth extends the reach of nurses and other healthcare professionals to patients, and remote monitoring devices can enhance patient-directed care, further freeing up nurse and other clinician time. Cloud-based credentialing, multimedia healthcare interpretation, automated management systems, and revenue cycle expertise can streamline the business side of the healthcare workforce. Adoption and utilization of healthcare workforce technology can enhance care quality and patient access to care and reduce burdens on nurses and other healthcare professionals. Ultimately, utilization of healthcare workforce technology can create greater efficiency for health organizations when designed with the end user.

Real Success Stories

Care Model Redesign for Staff Shortages

An alternative staffing model program at Memorial Hermann Healthcare sought to manage increasing volumes and a shrinking labor pool, problems faced by many healthcare organizations. A Kaizen brainstorming event was held, breaking down all care tasks required for care into licensed and skill-specific tasks. It identified that 40% of the work currently performed by RNs could be safely delegated to other team members. A team approach model utilizing licensed vocational nurses and ancillary support was piloted for six months. After the pilot was completed, positive results were seen in length of stay, severe maternal morbidity, nurse retention, and employee engagement.

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Other regulatory and legislative changes can help resolve the crisis as well. Investment to expand the new nurse pipeline is critical; more than 90,000 qualified applicants to nursing schools are turned away each year, mainly due to lack of sufficient faculty to educate them. Clinical training for nursing requires investment too. There's a paid mechanism through Medicare to support medical education, but not so in nursing.

Licensure restrictions must be eased; the current Nursing Licensure Compact includes most states, but not all states, and particularly, not California or New York. Universal intrastate licensure compacts for nurses and other professionals will ensure the free flow of clinicians to where they are needed most. Expediting the passage of international nurses to this country is another area where government action is necessary. Certain countries, including the Philippines and India, train a surplus of nurses with the expectation that they will work in other nations and send remittances back home. The number of visas for these highly trained and experienced nurses should be expanded and immigration processes streamlined following the code of ethics for recruitment.

Legislation and regulatory changes can also achieve other important measures; reductions in nurse documentation and other administrative tasks that take them away from the bedside and create stress could be incentivized. Chief nursing informatics officers in healthcare and their research and development counterparts at technology companies must collaborate to reduce the amount of documentation, automate documentation, implement augmented intelligence, actualize interoperability, and improve workflows to relieve the cognitive burden of nurses today.

Real Success Stories

Virtual Care Comes of Age in the Pandemic

Acute, regional shortages of nurses coupled with sudden spikes in patient demand at some hospitals during the pandemic led to a surge in virtual care practices for patients throughout the country. Facilities expanded their breadth of coverage for COVID-19 and other patient conditions through telehealth; many states temporarily suspended telehealth restrictions to allow hospitals to extend the reach of their staff and treat more patients. Virtual care includes a wide range of real-time communication with patients through video-conferencing and text, remote monitoring of patients with chronic conditions, utilization of off-site specialists to review imaging and provide diagnoses, and real-time translation capabilities. Atrium Health created a Virtual Nurse Observation Program in a progressive care unit that can round utilizing a bi-directional video-based program to complete many non-hands-on tasks.

In the depth of the current healthcare workforce challenges, I remain hopeful that meaningful change can happen. The recognition by industry and government of the true extent of the problem signals a possible willingness to take meaningful action. The enthusiasm for programs during the pandemic to address nurse mental health and wellbeing suggests that these efforts can be renewed and redoubled. The temporary removal of barriers to telehealth, state licensure, and advanced practice autonomy during the pandemic shows that unnecessary regulatory roadblocks can be dismantled. The adoption of workforce technologies, albeit slow, in the healthcare industry demonstrates that further technology transformation can happen. A more adaptable healthcare workforce may already be emerging, as the pandemic clearly showed the imperative for flexibility to get nurses where they were needed most. All of this can help to achieve the goals of healthcare – better care, better outcomes, lowered costs and bringing joy back to patient care.

The key is collaborative action and a unified front by healthcare industry stakeholders. Yes, that is a big ask, but the stakes have never been this high, and the current crisis will certainly worsen if no action is taken.

“In the midst of every crisis lies great opportunity,” said Albert Einstein. This is the opportunity for the next transformation in healthcare.



I grew up in a healthcare family, the daughter of an operating room nurse and a dentist. What I learned is that people are the most important asset in everything we do, especially in healthcare. For the sake of all patients, healthcare organizations and nurses themselves, we must find a way to better support the capabilities, aspirations, wellbeing and safety of nurses everywhere. And we need a healthcare workforce that's both stable and agile – stable to provide patients the highest quality care and agile to cover the rapidly changing demands of patient care today.

Cary Grace
President & Chief Executive Officer
AMN Healthcare

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