



The State of Clinical Support Staff

Research insights on support staff burnout, its impact on patient care and trends in patient communication

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Introduction



Clinical support staff (CS staff) are the backbone of the U.S. healthcare system. They are tireless workers who are in the trenches every day, continuously communicating and coordinating with patients – from scheduling appointments to facilitating test results – ensuring providers can focus on delivering high-quality care.

The first two years of the pandemic pushed CS staff to their limits. Disruptions to in-person care, mandatory new regulatory requirements and the stress created by ineffective patient communication, all exacerbated by the pandemic, led to epic levels of CS staff burnout.

In the summer of 2021, Artera (formerly WELL Health) conducted its first in-depth study measuring CS staff burnout levels, examining what negative effects burnout was causing, and sought to understand the role of patient communication in relation to staff burnout.

Released in October 2021, the study uncovered that CS staff were overwhelmed and frustrated by spending hours each day manually communicating with patients via phone. In fact, 88% reported moderate to extreme burnout.

In the year since, as we approach the three-year mark of the pandemic's onset, much has changed in the healthcare system, including a surge in digital innovation.

Curious to see how these trends affected CS staff, Artera conducted a new study of 300+ CS staffers at healthcare providers who are responsible for communicating with patients. The 2022 study discovered burnout is still high yet on the decline. While levels are nowhere near acceptable, Artera found that fewer CS staff are at their breaking point as digital patient communication technology is being adopted.

The study also explored new areas, including how digital patient communications is seen as an important tool to reach underserved populations and increase access to care overall.

Key Findings



Burnout remains high, though lower than pandemic peak

70% experience moderate to severe burnout, **32%** of whom rate it as high to severe

Down from 2021 report (88% reported moderate to severe burnout, 56% of whom rated as high to severe)



Adoption of digital patient communication tools continues to increase

48% text, email and digitally message patients more frequently than early days of pandemic



The report surveyed more than 300 CS staff who are responsible for communicating with patients, which can include nurses, physicians assistants, front desk/reception and other medical professionals communicating directly with patients.



Burnout impacts patient care

41% reported their burnout being noticed by a patient

33% said their burnout negatively impacted patient care quality

43% reported 1+ instance where ineffective patient communication negatively impacted patient health



Clinical support staff believe digital patient communication can improve outcomes and access

78% believe it increases access to healthcare

67% think it helps address disparities for underserved patients

64% said it allows patients to engage more in their own health



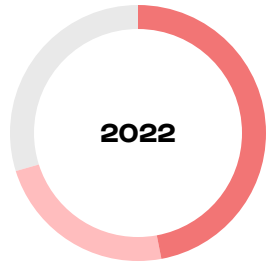


Clinical Support Staff Today

A look at clinical support staff burnout levels and the factors driving it



Burnout, Stress and Frustration Among Clinical Support Staff Remains High — Though Lower than Pandemic Peak



70%
of clinical support staff
report experiencing
moderate to severe
burnout

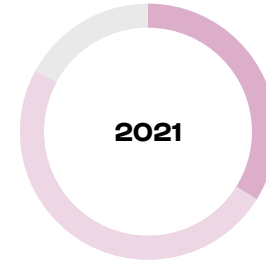
32%
of whom rate it as high
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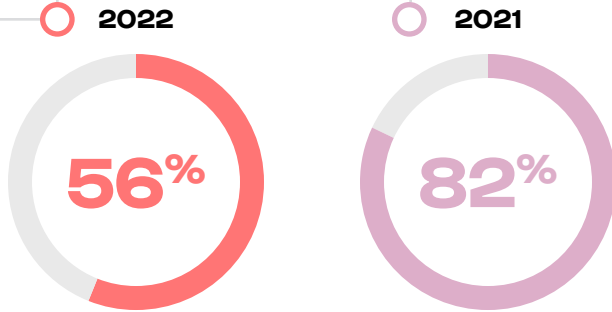
While these numbers are high, they do represent a modest decrease from the 2021 report that found

88%
experienced moderate
to severe burnout

56%
of whom rated it as high
to severe



Patient Communication Process Still Cited as a Cause of Burnout, But to a Lesser Degree than 2021



% of clinical support staff who cited patient communication as cause of their burnout

56% of clinical support staff attribute the patient communication process as a direct cause of their burnout.

This number is down from the 2021 report, where **82%** blamed patient communication processes for their burnout.



85% reported phone-based communication as their primary method of patient communication

“

With so many overworked healthcare workers noting that the communications process has contributed to their burnout, it's imperative that providers streamline and improve that process for staff while still focusing on delivering exceptional patient experiences.

Meg Aranow
SVP, Platform Evangelist, Artera

Use of Digital Patient Communication Tools Is on the Rise

48%

of clinical support staff reported texting, emailing and digitally messaging with patients more frequently than they did in the early days of the pandemic.



“

Our digital patient communications tool saved us hundreds of hours of staff time while enabling us to quickly respond to our patients using communication that is conversational and friendly. We can reduce the time our teams spend on administrative tasks and allow them to invest their time into the high-touch caring for patients – and connect back to what may have originally inspired them to go into healthcare.

Karen Handy

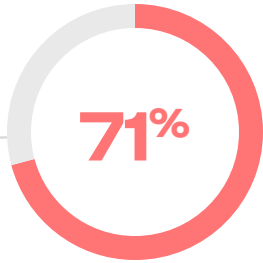
Vice President of Operations, Sansum Clinic
Artera Customer

INSIGHT



While clinical support staff burnout remains high, it is lower than 2021 levels. One change since 2021 is the greater adoption of digital patient communication technology, including bidirectional SMS messaging which automates routine communications between patients and providers.

Phone-Based Patient Communication Continues to Be a Source of Frustration for Clinical Support Staff



of clinical support staff reported phone-based patient communication as a source of frustration.

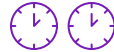


How much time per day do you estimate you are on the phone communicating with patients?



32%

🕒 = 1 hour



32%



17%



20%

🕒
68% spend two hours or more every day on patient communication, with **1 in 5** reporting a whopping **4 or more** hours per day.



The tightening of the job market over this past year has amplified our staffing challenges and increased staff stress. We have relied heavily on our digital patient communications tool to manage predictable patient communications to reduce frontdesk staff workload, anxiety and stress. Without a digital patient communications tool we would not have had the manpower to manage all of the 1:1 patient communication that was required to deliver high-quality care to our patients this past year.

Lindsay Cortina
Vice President, Sansum Clinic
Artera Customer

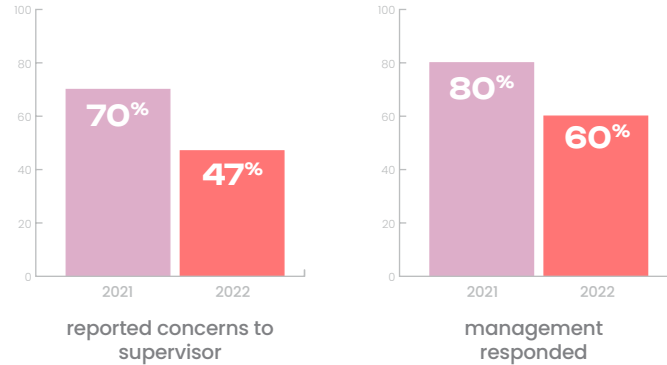
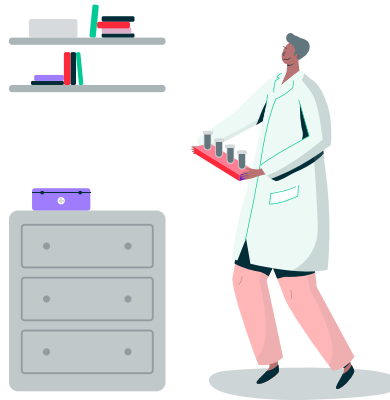


Responding to Clinical Support Staff Burnout

Clinical support staff who experienced burnout were more vocal about their concerns with their supervisor during the peak of the pandemic, than those experiencing burnout today. Also, clinical support staff reported their managers were more active in responding to their concerns in 2021 than today.



It is estimated that there will be a shortage of **3 million** health workers in the next **3 years**, specifically in lower-wage roles (Mercer).



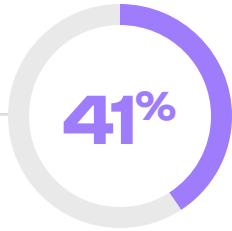


Patient Outlook

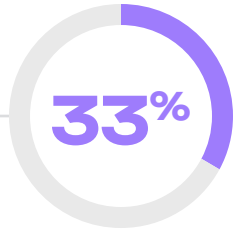
How clinical support staff burnout impacts patient care



Clinical Support Staff Burnout Deteriorates Care Quality

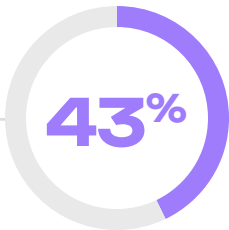


of clinical support staff reported their burnout being noticed by a patient.



of clinical support staff said burnout has negatively impacted quality of patient care.

Ineffective Patient Communication Processes Negatively Impact Patient Health



of clinical support staff reported at least **one** instance where poor or ineffective patient communication processes negatively impacted a patient's health.



The wellbeing of clinical support staff has a cascading impact on healthcare. In many ways, they are the front lines of care, and they often are among the first to engage and set the tone for the rest of the care journey. Addressing their burnout is critical for provider success and delivering patient-centered care that results in better health outcomes.

Meg Aranow
SVP, Platform Evangelist,
Artera



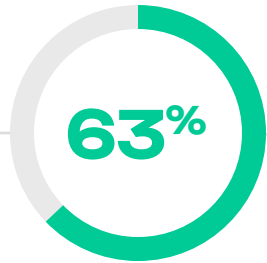


Patient Communications Today

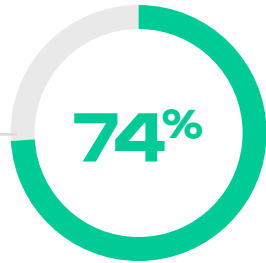
Current challenges and opportunities for how healthcare providers reach and engage their patient populations



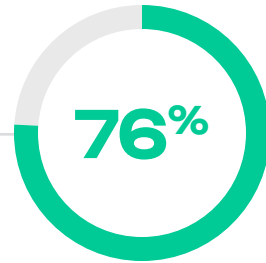
The Way Providers Communicate With Patients Continues to Be a Challenge, With Many Failing to Meet Patients on Their Terms



believe communicating with patients only via phone creates unnecessary barriers for patients from lower income levels, those from underserved populations, and patients who speak English as a second language.



say portions of their patient populations can't communicate during regular office hours. Among this group – approximately **one-third** estimate that **>50%** of their patients face difficulties communicating during office hours.



of clinical support staff report their healthcare organization struggles to communicate with some patients in their preferred language.



85% of survey respondents reported phone-based communication as their primary method of patient communication



Clinical Support Staff Believe Digital Patient Communication Can Improve Access and Outcomes



Clinical support staff believe digital patient communication:

Allows patients to engage more in their health

64%

Increases access to healthcare

78%

Helps address disparities for underserved patients

67%

Helps address social determinants of health for their patient populations

71%

85%

believe communicating with patients in their preferred language will improve healthcare access overall



Conclusion



“Health worker burnout is a serious threat to the nation’s health and economic security,” according to 21st Surgeon General of the United States, Vivek Murthy. Though progress has been made in mitigating this crisis, as demonstrated by the findings of this study, there remains room for significant improvement.

The report suggests one of the biggest factors in alleviating staff burnout is the use of digital patient communication which helps to ease staff workloads by automating the time consuming process, eliminating the need for phone calls and other repetitive tasks.

These findings are in line with the Surgeon General’s recommendations for key interventions to tackle burnout such as promoting safe workplaces, staff mental health, better wages and **reducing administrative burden**.

The time for bold change in the healthcare industry is now. We must take care of our workforce and leverage the latest technology to alleviate the burnout crisis, so that staff are freed up to focus on high-touch patient interactions.



The Respondents

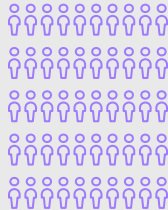


307 clinical support staff who are responsible for communicating with patients, which can include nurses, physicians assistants, front desk/reception and other medical professionals communicating directly with patients.

28%
up to 100



37%
up to 500




21%
up to 1,000



14%
1,000+



 = 100 patients

Methodology

The survey was conducted by PureSpectrum, an independent market research platform that gathers insights via online, nonprobability samples collected from panels in the PureSpectrum Marketplace. For more information on PureSpectrum's methodology, visit purespectrum.com.



About Artera

Artera is the SaaS digital health leader in patient communications and two-time **Best in KLAS winner in Patient Outreach**. Artera delivers a platform-level patient communications solution that integrates across a health system's tech stack (EHRs/EMRs, single-point solutions, apps, and more) to deliver patients a simple, cohesive communications experience while reducing workload for healthcare staff. By unifying disjointed communications and information into a single channel for patients (texting, email and/or IVR) Artera fuels healthcare providers to deliver healthier patients, more efficient staff and more profitable organizations. The Artera platform helps 500+ unique health systems facilitate 1.1 billion messages for 40+ million patients.

Founded in 2015, Artera (formerly WELL Health) is based in Santa Barbara, California and has been named on the 2021 Deloitte Technology Fast 500 and ranked on the Inc. 5000 list of fastest-growing private companies for three consecutive years.

For more information, visit www.artera.io.



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