

Nurse Shortages and the Importance of Retention

Mackay et al. (2021) explains that one of the primary issues plaguing many healthcare organizations throughout the United States is Registered Nurse (R.N.) retention. The Rural Community Assistance Corporation (RCAC; 2022) explained that some of America's hardest-hit areas are the rural and access-challenged sections. These rural areas house some of the country's most significantly understaffed and underserviced organizations. Recruitment, retention, and turnover costs account for vast amounts of these organizations' expenses (Merhar, 2016; Nursing Solutions Inc., 2021).

R.N.s, like many workers, are looking for an ideal work-life balance and a place where they can grow personally and professionally. They examine all aspects of a position before they commit, things like health insurance, vacation benefits, wages, culture, nurse-to-patient ratios, and the brand image of the new organization (Heidari et al., 2017; Merhar, 2016). Due to common transparency practices, many of these factors have become public knowledge, and these statistics often include retention numbers. When turnover rates and retention issues plague an organization, future recruits step back and question what is going on at that facility. These problems hamper the organization's bottom line and internal culture, damaging its outside image and increasing recruitment and retention problems (Benjamin, 2019; Merhar, 2016).

According to the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN; 2019), the U. S. faces a continuous and drastic imbalance regarding R.N.s. This imminent shortage worsens each year and will soon reach an irreversible tipping point where there are insufficient nurses to care for an ever-increasing elderly population (AACN, 2019). As of 2022, it is estimated that the U. S. has a shortage exceeding one million nurses (American Nurses Association, 2021; U.S.: Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). Many nationwide facilities report vacancy rates higher than

8% (NSI Nursing Solutions, Inc., 2021). History shows that nurse shortages have been an ongoing issue for many generations, but nurse supplies in the past have always exceeded patient demand (Haddad et al., 2022).

However, that balance will diminish quickly with Baby Boomers now entering retirement. A Boomer's name comes from a play on words following World War II. As soldiers returned from the war, the world saw an enormous rise in births, a "boom" in population growth, hence the term Baby Boom (Song & Ferris, 2018). This generation comprises over 75 million members and almost 22% of the U. S. population (Song & Ferris, 2018). These individuals are the second-largest group of people on the planet, second only to the Millennials (World Economic Forum, 2022). Starting in 2012, nearly 10,000 Boomers began entering retirement each day. This pace will continue through 2032, and then those numbers will steadily drop until the last Boomer retires in 2046 (Song & Ferris, 2018).

It is up to healthcare organizations and their leadership teams to use strategies to manage retention issues. Continuous evaluation of leadership methods and involvement can be essential to meeting facility retention goals. Senior Administrators and mid-level leaders who promote and model their leadership style create a significant influence that helps form and sustain a culture where individuals are happy and want to remain.

Implementing measurement tools and metrics is essential for tracking the data needed to alter or build retention standards (Linuesa-Langreo et al., 2017). Leaders must be proactive and implement successful new and revised retention strategies to help improve nurse engagement and productivity. Doing so may decrease costs related to retention, aid work-life blend needs for new and existing R.N.s by maintaining adequate staff and creating a stronger relationship with the surrounding community (Tarro et al., 2020).

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