


RX FOR RNS: THE STATE OF THE NURSING WORKFORCE

A new survey gives healthcare HR leaders critical insight into what attracts and retains nurses.





Nurses are one of healthcare's scarcest and most coveted resources. Around the country, there are many more jobs than candidates, with future shortages estimated to reach **as high as seven figures.**

The threat saddles healthcare employers with a difficult problem - how to appeal to a talent population that has endless options for work. And a new survey offers answers, specifically about what drives nurses to choose – and stay with – their employer. *The State of the Nursing Workforce*, conducted by American Nurse Today and commissioned by **Bright Horizons®**, gets to the heart of the nursing challenge. Answers from more than 1,300 respondents show clear trends – about workloads, education, career aspirations, and how important culture is to the job.

For healthcare HR leaders, the responses should be both heartening and instructive, showing a roadmap for elevating their brands and appealing to the talent they need.

WHAT CONCERNS NURSES – STRESS & BURNOUT

The survey gives a clear picture of what motivates and challenges nurses. To be sure, the modern healthcare system is asking more than ever of these bedside employees, making stress and burnout chief issues of concern. What's driving it?

Growing Responsibilities, Accelerating Pace

Patient care is only one part of a nurse's job. As one former Chief Nursing Officer told us, "IV pumps and monitors are getting so sophisticated, nurses are worried for their own competencies." Indeed, many nurses expressed concern about the job of keeping up with technology (robotics, A.I., remote patient monitoring, for example), and the effect on workloads that are already their top source of stress.

- ▶ **88% say** technology advancements required them to learn new skills faster than in previous years.
- ▶ **64% report** that their workload has increased in the last 12 months.

The High Cost of Stress

The stress of those workloads have day-to-day repercussions for both nurses and patient health.

- ▶ **65%** say stress increases nurse turnover
- ▶ **58%** say it reduces engagement
- ▶ **52%** say it impacts patient care

It can also jeopardize careers.

- ▶ **67% of nurses** teeter toward burnout at least once a month
- ▶ Young nurses are **twice as likely** as older nurses to experience burnout at least once a month



WHAT ATTRACTS NURSES – EDUCATION SUPPORT

Yet the challenges haven't dampened nurses' desires for growth. Employers might believe nurses are looking to dial back their responsibilities, but in fact just the opposite is true, with the majority of nurses fully invested in learning.

- ▶ **62%** are currently continuing their education – or would consider it in the future

Uncompromising on Education

They're not only eager to advance their education, they're prioritizing it in job choices.

- ▶ **83%** say tuition reimbursement is a key element in considering a new job – higher than sign-on bonuses
- ▶ **1-in-4 young nurses** would only accept a job that offered it

Focused on Futures

Why the focus on learning? Clues can be found in the fact that more advanced clinical positions were identified as the top career path. Such roles offer higher pay and more predictable schedules – answers to two primary sources of nurse stress: financial well-being and schedule conflicts (specifically between work and child care).

- ▶ **66%** cite one or more financial issues as top stressors
- ▶ **96%** call flexible scheduling a priority in considering a new job

Willing to Pledge Allegiance

The retention benefits of education are clear. Nurses are so attracted to learning, they're willing to commit to employers who make it possible.

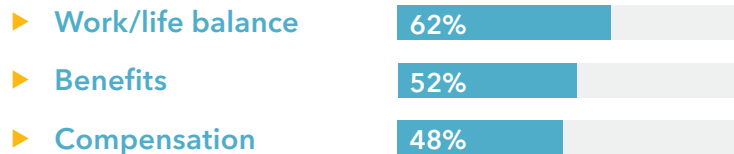
65% would stay for 5 years if their employer would pay for their next degree or certification



WHAT RETAINS NURSES – WORK/LIFE FIT

Financial security may be a key ambition, but money doesn't drive job decisions. In fact, nurses ranked work/life balance as the top factor in job choices by a significant margin.

Factors rated "very important" in nurses' current job choices:

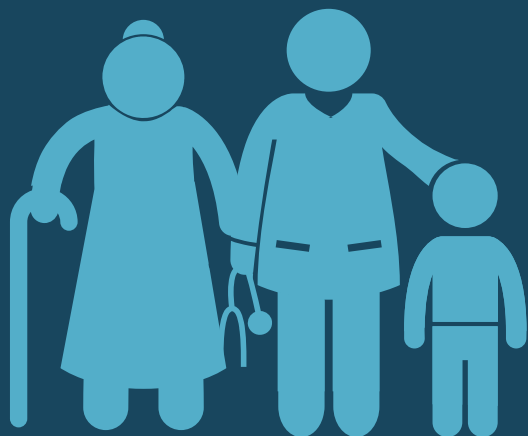


"Nurses, particularly young nurses, are not willing to jump to a new job for a dollar an hour more," says the former Chief Nursing Officer. "If there's child care [on- or near-site] or something related to work/life balance, that will offset a competitor's increase in hourly rate."

The Cost of Conflicts

Balance also factors heavily in retention; and the importance of providing it can be clearly measured in turnover.

- ▶ **8-in-10 nurses** know a colleague who has left due to work/life conflicts
- ▶ **7-in-10** say poor work/life balance will drive them to exit



Hungry for Support

Work/life fit is particularly important for nurses with caretaking responsibilities, who were **twice as likely** as others to miss or cancel a shift in the past six months.

- ▶ **1-in-2 nurses with young children** (under 6 years) cancelled shifts to care for their child
- ▶ **1-in-4 nurses with an adult dependent** canceled a shift for caretaking reasons

POSITIVE CULTURE: HEALTHCARE'S BEST PREVENTIVE MEDICINE

Education and work/life balance correlated closely with nurses' other priority – positive culture. Culture is their bedrock of a productive workplace, with **99% of nurses** reporting a strong correlation between a workplace's culture and the quality of patient care.

Culture Equals Support

Highly rated cultures were far more likely to offer extensive benefits programs.

Nurses who report working in great cultures are:

- ▶ **54% more likely** to say their employer offers flexible schedules.
- ▶ **111% more likely** to receive back-up child care.
- ▶ **43% more likely** to have access to a student loan repayment benefit.

Delivering Balance

Positive cultures also support the important element of work/life balance – the number one reason nurses chose their current jobs.

Nurses who agree that "My organization supports work/life balance":

- ▶ **Positive cultures: 73%**
- ▶ **Negative cultures: 18%**

Reducing Burnout

Equally illustrative, nurses in these cultures perform better and have significantly lower rates of burnout.

Compared to other nurses, nurses in positive cultures are:

- ▶ **5x less likely** to feel burnt out daily.
- ▶ **15% less likely** to say work causes them stress.

Effectively Defending Against Turnover

Culture also clearly correlates with retention. Nurses in positive cultures were dramatically less likely to have considered leaving their job.

Nurses who seriously considered quitting in the last six months:

- ▶ **Positive culture: 27%**
- ▶ **Negative culture: 76%**

ACTION PLANS FOR TALENT LEADERS, FROM CHROs TO NURSING EXECUTIVES

So what's the takeaway for healthcare's talent leaders? Nurses may have one of healthcare's toughest jobs, but they remain a uniquely passionate talent pool. Despite the hours, the challenges, and the workloads, the vast majority – 74% of respondents – said they would recommend the career to people just starting out.

But they have very firm ideas about the type of nursing environment that they want to work in, and the types of supports they expect their organizations to offer:

- ▶ **Financial and educational supports** to support growth into higher paid jobs with more predictable schedules
- ▶ **Positive cultures with work/life support** to counter burnout and mitigate work/life conflicts

The retention data should be particularly instructive. In 2018, turnover topped out at a 10-year high¹, meaning exits are a risk at every level, from young nurses rethinking careers in their first two years, to veteran nurses aggressively recruited by competitors. Yet data shows satisfied nurses are difficult to uproot. It means sticky cultures that retain today's young nurses not only deliver bedside employees who are willing and able to do the tough staff-nursing shifts now; they also solidify pipelines that grow today's up and comers into tomorrow's enthusiastic leaders.

About the Study

The Rx for RNs study was an internet-based survey of subscribers of American Nurse Today, the official journal of the American Nurses Association. The survey was commissioned by Bright Horizons and conducted by HealthCom Media from May 1, 2019 to May 19, 2019. The sample included 1,323 respondents, all of whom identified as practicing nurses, with a margin of error of 3%.

About Bright Horizons

Nearly 200 of the nation's top health systems trust Bright Horizons to address the unique challenges of healthcare workforces and help them deliver exceptional patient care. We offer on-site and near-site child care that meets clinical worker hours; back-up care to reduce absences; elder care, college advising and additional supports to foster well-being; and education benefits (tuition assistance, student loan repayment, and more) to strengthen talent pipelines and fill critical roles.

About the American Nurses Association

The American Nurses Association (ANA) is the premier organization representing the interests of the nation's 3.6 million registered nurses. ANA advances the nursing profession by fostering high standards of the nursing practice, promoting a safe and ethical work environment, bolstering the health and wellness of nurses, and advocating on health care issues that affect nurses and the public. ANA is at the forefront of improving the quality of health care for all. American Nurse Today is the official publication of the ANA and distributed to membership as an annual benefit.

1 "2019 National Health Care Retention & RN Staffing Report," NSI Nursing Solutions, Inc., 2019



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