

# REIMAGINE THE ROLE OF NURSES

## A PATH TO SUSTAINABLE HEALTHCARE

Thought Leadership



In recent years, the pivotal role nurses play within healthcare systems has become increasingly evident. Traditionally seen as the backbone of patient care, nurses are now recognized not only for their clinical skills but also for their ability to significantly influence healthcare delivery and outcomes. This has become particularly clear through the disruptions brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, which highlighted the critical need for a resilient, flexible, and sustainable nursing workforce.

To address challenges like turnover and workforce sustainability, healthcare systems will need to reimagine the nurse enterprise so that it is robust enough to meet present and future demands.

### The Current State of Nursing

The nursing profession has long been the scaffolding that supports the healthcare delivery system, ensuring community health and well-being. However, the pandemic exacerbated existing challenges related to workforce availability, capability, and sustainability. Nurse turnover spiked to alarming rates, with figures reaching as high as 22.5% and a significant portion of new nurses considering leaving the profession. This situation has prompted urgent calls for a comprehensive reevaluation of the nursing field.

In addition, healthcare organizations are struggling to attract and retain nurses. These problems stem from the challenges surrounding competitive compensation, limited career advancement opportunities, rate of technology adoption, and safety concerns. These factors collectively contribute to a turbulent work environment for nurses. The emphasis on nurse

well-being highlights the critical need for these systems to comprehensively address these issues to maintain a skilled and content nursing workforce in a rapidly changing healthcare sector.

Recent trends indicate some stabilization, with a decrease in premium labor costs and a less dire shortfall in the pipeline of new nurses than previously anticipated. This stabilization provides an opportunity for healthcare systems to focus on attracting and retaining top talent. It's essential to recognize that the competition for skilled nurses is intensifying, and only those systems that effectively leverage their workforce will thrive.

Nurses today face a range of internal and external challenges. There is a growing demand among consumers for personalized, accessible care, including options like virtual consultations and app-based services. These demands coincide with rising healthcare costs, which contribute to changing patterns of care utilization and increasing consumer dissatisfaction.

### Redefining the Value of Nursing

As we consider the future of the nursing workforce, several critical questions emerge. Firstly, how can we guarantee that our nursing staff aligns with our business strategies for growth, revenue, and quality? Secondly, what strategies can be put in place to cultivate a resilient and mission-ready workforce? These inquiries underscore the importance of strategic planning and proactive measures to ensure the nursing workforce meets the evolving needs of healthcare organizations.

It's time to shift the perception of nurses from cost factors to key drivers of value within healthcare enterprises. By ensuring exceptional clinical quality and consumer/patient satisfaction, nurses significantly impact revenue and margin in all payer models. They are also crucial in managing organizational expenses, such as supply and procedure utilization.

Arguably, the current model is far from perfect. Consumers—both people and employers—are seeking alternatives when available, as measurable quality outcomes continue to show opportunities for improvement. Increasing shifts in settings of care from retail, virtually, and the home are pushing for adapting the model. Studies show health systems that have adopted the Magnet Recognition Program® have seen [modest gains in improving satisfaction among nurses and consumers](#), as well as quality outcomes. Yet, this is measured by our current care model and with the increasing demand to get better results, there needs to be an update to the model and a talent strategy to match.

## Embracing New Models of Care

The shift towards more personalized, technology-driven care necessitates an update in nursing models to better align with current consumer demands and care settings. To adapt to the evolving healthcare landscape, it is vital to use comprehensive data sets that include HR, operational, clinical, and financial metrics. This approach allows for a balanced assessment that supports strategic decision-making without compromising the overall mission.

Leveraging technology to improve the work required, creates roadmaps that allow for top-of-license practice, and fosters interdisciplinary collaboration resulting in margin and quality improvements to optimize health systems' positioning in the market. Technology plays a critical role in this context, enabling more efficient workflows and interdisciplinary collaboration.

## Building a Future-Proof Nurse Enterprise

A model redesign and cultural readiness are part of the equation for success. Organizations can move to discovering the gaps and plotting the course for the new nurse enterprise. Addressing the systemic barriers to growth is crucial. Staff turnover is a traditional yet lagging indicator. Taking the opportunity to create an appealing employer-of-choice environment involves demonstrating a commitment to invest in nursing. Tailoring onboarding processes to match skills, experience, and a desire for interdisciplinary relationships, along with providing ongoing education, training, coaching, and professional development, can have immediate effects on stabilizing and growing the needed team. Additionally, incorporating intentional diversity and inclusion policies will improve both the workplace environment, as well as the engagement of all employees.

The path forward involves a holistic approach to redesigning, rebuilding, and reinforcing the nursing enterprise. Key aspects include:

- **Cultural Readiness:** Developing a culture that connects daily operations to the overarching mission is crucial. This involves embedding values that foster employee engagement and satisfaction.
- **Compensation and Benefits:** Aligning pay, benefits, and support structures with both business objectives and nurse expectations is essential. Innovative compensation models, such as performance-based pay, can help stabilize and motivate the workforce.
- **Resilience and Support:** Establishing robust support systems to address mental health and well-being is increasingly important. These systems should be accessible through multiple platforms to effectively meet nurses' needs.

The future of healthcare is inextricably linked to the effectiveness and resilience of the nursing workforce. By reimagining how nurses are integrated into the healthcare system, organizations can ensure that they not only deliver excellent patient care but also drive the strategic objectives of their organizations. This approach will secure the long-term success of health systems and foster healthier communities.

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