New Report Provides Nurse Retention Insights and Strategies

By Diana Mahoney

Adequate and appropriate staffing, supportive management, care quality, joy in work and workforce cohesion should be priority targets for nurse retention strategies, new research has shown.

The relative value nurses place on each of these considerations—and the relative influence each has on nurse retention—vary based on a number of considerations, including age, tenure and unit type, according to the findings of a mixed-methods study designed to identify trends in registered nurses’ intent to stay in their jobs in the short and longer terms.

The results, published in Press Ganey’s 2018 Nursing Special Report, titled “Optimizing the Nursing Workforce: Key Drivers of Intent to Stay for Newly Licensed and Experienced Nurses,” suggest that while there is no one-size-fits-all solution to improving nurse retention, the differential variables that affect nurse turnover can be influenced to improve workforce outcomes, which in turn affects the safety, quality and patient experience of care.

To investigate trends and predictors of RN intent to stay, which is widely recognized as a proxy for turnover, Press Ganey researchers analyzed the responses of nearly 250,000 registered nurses who participated in the 2017 NDNQI® RN Survey.

Among the significant differences in one- and three-year job plans across nurse age, tenure and unit type, the analyses indicate that nurses younger than 30 years old are more likely than those in all other age groups (except retirement-age nurses) to indicate they plan to leave their current position but remain in the hospital, or leave direct patient care but remain in nursing, over the next three years.

This finding, which is consistent with current trends of younger nurses transitioning earlier in their careers into different nursing roles, “highlights the importance of succession planning at all levels in conjunction with leadership development in order to meet young RNs’ need for career advancement while ensuring a sufficient flow of capable, qualified nurses to fill the ranks,” the authors write. “To this end, nurse leaders should develop succession planning strategies that include the ongoing identification, recruitment, retention, development, coaching and mentoring of potential nurse leaders, while also focusing on the recruitment and retention of bedside nurses.”

Nurses who indicated their intent to leave their position within one year often cited dissatisfaction with the work environment as a driving factor, while those planning to leave their job within three years frequently cited a change in nursing care as the motivation, with some variation by age and tenure.

Looking at predictors of intent to stay using a modified theoretical model, job satisfaction and joy in work were the strongest positive predictors across all nurses, followed by nurse manager support, career development, and praise and recognition. “Notably, all of these ranked higher than influence over schedule and staffing—a finding that is consistent with previous research indicating that the nurse work environment is a more influential driver of nurse outcomes than staffing considerations,” the authors write.

AT A GLANCE

Press Ganey’s 2018 Nursing Special Report, “Optimizing the Nursing Workforce: Key Drivers of Intent to Stay for Newly Licensed and Experienced Nurses,” identifies several predictors of job retention among RNs based on an analysis of nearly 250,000 registered nurses who participated in the 2017 NDNQI® RN Survey.

- Job satisfaction, finding joy in work, safe staffing, supportive management and work group cohesion are all associated with intent to stay, but the relative influence of each varies by nurse age, tenure and unit type.
- Newly licensed nurses value support and praise from managers, while their more tenured colleagues place higher value on care quality and control over scheduling.
Comparing the predictive strength of different variables, the researchers observed that praise and recognition, nurse manager support, certification, and joy in work were significant predictors for nurses who had been practicing for fewer than two years but not for nurses in practice for 20 years or more. In contrast, CNO leadership, influence over schedule, and quality of care were significant predictors for the long-tenured group but not for the novices.

The report also includes the findings of analyses designed to identify targets and strategies that best address the range of differential needs of newly licensed and experienced nurses. Based on responses from a cross section of nurses from units with the highest (100%) and lowest rates of intent to stay on the 2017 NDNQI RN Survey, the researchers observed some notable differences. In particular, in high-intent-to-stay units, fewer newly licensed nurses begin on the unit, but those that do are more likely to stay in their jobs than newly licensed nurses on low-intent-to-stay units. “Presumably, this is because these units also have more experienced nurses available to guide the newer nurses,” the authors write. “This highlights a critical HR/nurse manager consideration: maintaining a high level of sensitivity around the number of newly licensed nurses on a unit and ensuring that units have the appropriate mentoring and transition-to-practice resources to support them.”

To gain insight into optimal retention targets, researchers surveyed bedside nurses and nurse managers working in high-intent-to-stay units and conducted in-depth interviews with a subset of the survey respondents. From the perspective of nurse managers specifically, top priorities for retaining new and experienced nurses include workforce cohesion, staffing and scheduling. In addition, education and mentorship were perceived to be priority considerations for newly licensed nurses, while value/respect and shared decision making were perceived to be priorities for experienced nurses.

Based on the findings of the quantitative and qualitative analyses, the report lists best practices across five focus areas for creating and sustaining a stable, multigenerational nurse workforce. Examples include cultivating a team of high-performing nurse managers to provide the support that new and experienced nurses need to be successful; ensuring an appropriate mix of tenured and newly licensed RNs; fostering a workplace culture that nurtures and supports newly licensed nurses; and committing to staffing levels that protect patient and nurse safety.

Optimizing nurse recruitment and retention during a period when the demand for high-quality, high-performing RNs is outpacing the supply is one of the most pressing human resources challenges facing health systems today. “Nursing is at a critical crossroads,” according to Press Ganey Chief Nursing Officer Christy Dempsey. “Given the critical role that nurses play in fulfilling the patient promise of safe, high-quality, patient-centered care, leaders across the health care enterprise must recognize the diverse needs of a multigenerational workforce and develop recruitment strategies and a nurturing culture to attract, engage and retain the best nursing talent.”