Improve Nurse Retention, Save Lives

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A significant amount of research has been conducted to evaluate the effect of nurse retention on the success of healthcare organizations and their stakeholders. Despite current studies, nurse retention is a problematic issue. It is getting worse with more and more nurses leaving the workforce through retirement (Kentucky Hospital Association, 2023) and burnout (Kentucky Hospital Association, n.d.), coupled with declining enrollment of nursing students (American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2023) and an increased longevity of people that are needing more and more medical intervention (The University of Rhode Island, 2019).

The Problem

The US nursing workforce decreased by 3.3% over the two-year period between 2021 and 2022, according to a study by the National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN, 2023). This is occurring at a time when baby boomers, who represent almost one-third of the US population, have started turning 65 and need significantly more medical intervention/supervision (The University of Rhode Island, 2019, p. 2). A substantial financial impact is also associated with the retention of nurses, given that the expense of nursing turnover can dramatically reduce hospital profits (NSI Nursing Solutions, 2023).

The general problem of low staffing leads to increased work demands falling on remaining nurses, which causes emotional exhaustion in actively working nurses, resulting in more nurses burning out and leaving the position or profession (Nurse CE Central, 2021). Some of the long-term effects of the nursing shortage include (a) increased patient mortality, (b) escalation of nurse burnout, (c) an upsurge in hospitals with inadequate nursing personnel, (d) a decline in quality patient care, and (e) medical facilities that offer "crisis" pay (Avant Healthcare, 2021).

Driving Research Question

This study aimed to determine the present status of retention tactics at the partner organization and compare it to research findings. An effective change management strategy will use the findings in a way that is best suitable for the partner organization by bridging the gap between the intended and current states. The study was guided by the following research question:

> What innovative and nurse-centered solutions should the partner organization take within the next year to improve below-average year-over-year full-time and part-time nurse retention, enabling the organization to reduce operating expenses while augmenting its organizational culture to fulfill its mission of delivering compassionate and patient-centered care?

Methodology

A qualitative research methodology was selected to answer the driving research question, and a customized performance improvement model was employed. The gap analysis was integrated with the McKinsey 7-S framework, TOWS matrix, and human performance technology (HPT) model to assess and investigate different perspectives comprehensively. The researcher utilized interviews as the chosen data collection procedure, with the research participants selected from the partner organization being tenured nurse

leaders from different nursing specialties. Gap analysis was identified as the research analysis tool since it is observed that at a health system level, like the partner organization, such a tool can be used effectively to identify gaps in care, allowing a more focused approach to improve care delivery (Golden et al., 2017).

Analysis

The gap analysis concluded with the identification of seven possible gaps between the partner organization's actual state and desired state based on secondary research on best practices for nurse retention, which were assigned an overall risk score derived from the McKinsey 7-S framework. Those solutions were arranged from best to worst based on the overall score, ranging from standardization of nurse recruiting efforts across the entire partner organization having the highest score to utilizing nurse attrition data to identify, prioritize, and support at-risk nurses having the lowest score, respectively.

The risks connected to the solutions were also evaluated and prioritized to ensure that the change management formulated based on the selected solution would effectively and efficiently improve the central issue of nurse retention at the partner organization. Five potential risks were identified, with insufficient communication, oppostions to change, and insufficient assistance being ranked the highest in the risk assessment matrix.

Recommended Solution

Following a thorough evaluation of each answer from different perspectives, the researcher chose the best test solution for the partner organization:

> Standardize nurse recruiting efforts across the entire healthcare system by allowing alignment in nurse recruitment practices at its various operational sites to reduce operational risk and enhance ongoing and future nurse recruitment efforts.

The selected multivariant solution would allow the organization to formulate standardized practices for nurse recruitment, such as setting up an enterprise-wide nurse vacancy dashboard for nurse leaders from each site to review, which will include the number of nursing candidates being interviewed, accepted and declined, or transferred to another nursing unit at the same or different location for interviews. An enterprise-wide nurse recruiting and retention steering committee will also be established to talk about best practices for nurse educators to encourage nursing students to start in a lower acute unit setting, such as mixed acuity versus more acute nurse settings (e.g., ICUs, which have the highest nurse vacancies), to encourage newly graduated nurses to work on their nursing fundamentals in a practical setting.

Standardizing nurse recruiting efforts will assist in retaining employed nurses due to consistency in nursing best practices at each of the partner organization's facilities which has a plethora of benefits to the organization, such as replacing more travel nurses that have a higher pay rate per hour and hence improving the organization's bottom line, and better bedside nurse-to-patient ratios implying that nurses can provide better care to patients due to lesser patient workload per nurse, leading to higher patient satisfaction scores as patients get more timely attention. Having more nurse bodies to fill up nursing shifts will also address concerns around nurse burnout which will ultimately improve nurse retention even further. Such standardized practices will also augment a nursing unit's culture due to consistency in nurse staffing.

This solution is also optimal since recruiting more nurses would allow the partner organization to improve its employee satisfaction scores as well as factor in a charge nurse out of staffing, which will enable faster patient discharges while also allowing nurses to practice at the top of their licenses by alleviating some of their administrative roles to the charge nurse.

From a VBM Perspective

The impact of the authorized solution on the partner organization can be viewed from the lens of three capitals associated with the virtuous organization frame in the Virtuous Business Model (VBM; Brooker & Boyce, 2017) can be seen in the following table.

VBM: Spiritual Capital	VBM: Social Capital	VBM: Economic Capital
Improving nurse recruitment would lead to higher nurse retention which will help with better patient outcomes, increase access to care for the community, and better employee and patient satisfaction. This results in augmenting the partner organization's mission of delivering compassionate, patient-centered care versus solely focusing on the operating margin.	Standardized nurse hiring practices across the entire organization lead to being open and transparent as an enterprise.	Operating cost savings from increased nurse recruitment and retention with reduced travel nurses would free up more resources and services for delivering added quality patient care.

New Insights and Discoveries

Based on the primary and secondary research around best practices for nurse retention, there hasn't been much research around the synergies gained from a nurse recruitment and retention perspective upon standardizing nurse recruiting efforts across the entire healthcare system. Examples of new insights include those mentioned under the recommended solution section, like setting up an enterprise-wide dashboard. The study also shed light on prospective areas for future research initiatives.

Conclusion

General medical and surgical hospitals, particularly safety-net hospitals like the partner organization, are an integral part of society. They deliver quality patient care to those who most need such care in their communities, as most also serve as regional trauma centers. The overall intended outcomes and benefits for the partner organization resulting from standardizing nurse recruiting efforts at its various operational sites to reduce operational risk and enhance ongoing and future nurse recruitment efforts include (a) increased nurse retention, (b) better patient quality and patient safety, (c) a supportive organizational culture, (d) reduction in operating expenses, (e) improved patient throughput, and (f) increased access to care as a safety net health system.

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