Reflections on Creative Recruiting Solutions to the
Nationwide Nursing Shortage

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There is possibly no nobler profession than the field of nursing. An individual selflessly cares for another human being, working long hours for little pay. With the aging population in the United States, there has been a shortage of nurses that can effectively meet the needs of patients. Hospitals are developing new incentives to attract and retain top talent. This paper will review relevant literature on the nationwide nursing shortage. It will show that this is not a new phenomenon, unique only to the United States. We will compare recruiting strategies from the past and develop best practices for recruiting and retention in today's competitive market. An applicable hiring model will be presented.

Keywords: nationwide nursing shortage, nurse recruiting, nurse hiring model, nurse hiring challenges, nurse hiring strategies, nurse hiring best practices, and nurse hiring desired outcomes

INTRODUCTION

There is possibly no nobler profession than the field of nursing. An individual selflessly cares for another human being, working long hours for little pay. With the aging population in the United States, there has been a shortage of nurses that can effectively meet the needs of patients. This benefits current nursing staff because it means that their skills are in high demand due to a limited workforce supply. This country has 6,093 hospitals, all competing for every qualified nurse (AHA, 2022). This means that hospitals are developing new incentives to attract and retain top talent. As a Human Resources (HR) Director at a regional medical center, I primarily recruit and retain qualified nurses. This has become increasingly challenging in recent years with the aging of the nursing workforce. Experienced nurses are at a premium, and as such pick and choose where they want to work; based on incentives. With this limited supply of nursing staff, it has never been more important for hospitals to develop creative ways to recruit and retain quality nursing staff. It might be argued that this is a relatively new problem. This paper will review relevant literature on the nationwide nursing shortage. It will also show that this is not a new phenomenon, unique

only to the United States. We will compare recruiting strategies from the past and develop best practices for recruiting and retention in today's competitive market.

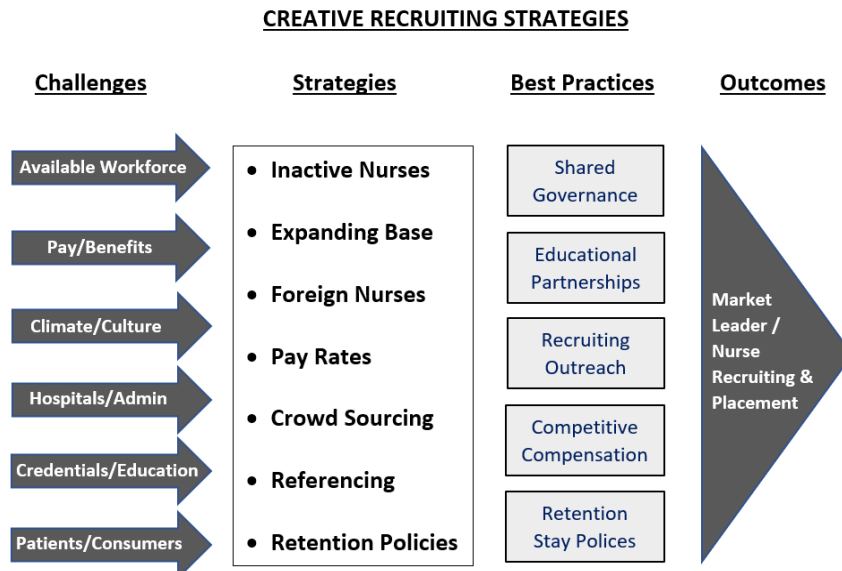## HISTORY OF THE NURSING SHORTAGE AND NURSE RECRUITING

The nursing shortage in the United States dates back to the early 1920s. During the "Roaring Twenties", women were classified into two groups. According to Olmstead (1920), the first group was "those that were classified as having the desire to get money and what money brings; clothes, finery, and pleasure; the other group, those who are eager for a higher education, who are eager to know the joys of service" (p. 974). The field of nursing is very difficult. Nurses work three to four-twelve hour shifts a week often standing on their feet for most of that time. Additionally, they must deal with angry patients, family members, and physicians. Olmstead (1920) argues that even in the 1920s young women could find easier professions that made decent money. This lends weight to the fact that the problems of the nursing shortage are not new to this country. But how did nursing programs separate these two groups? Articles in that period show that nursing schools were creative in reaching new talent. They understood that young women needed to be shown the benefits of selflessly serving others. They needed to be shown that being a nurse was a vocation filled with a life of rewarding experience. An interesting article from that period outlined this effort to reach high school girls and their mothers (E.W., 1921). In California, they put on a conference that 100 girls and their mothers attended. This conference was designed to show young women the benefits of being a nurse. Additionally, it showed their parents that nursing was a noble profession, worthy of pursuit (E.W., 1921, pp. 815-816).

Early recruiting tactics involved attracting talent straight out of high school. While a good start, the number of nurses in the workforce continued to grow at an alarmingly slow pace. A study conducted between 1950 and 1960, showed that there were only 1,000 additional nurses in the workforce (Bryant & Hudson, 1961, pp. 94-98). To address this issue the recruiting focus shifted towards a strategy based on nurse education. In the 1960's bachelor's degree, nursing programs increased from 167 to 221, and associate degree nursing programs from 28 to 281 (Harty, 1968, p. 767). During this period, hospitals had to look at nurse recruitment differently. This shift in focus was caused by reduced recruiting budgets that forced facilities to focus on nurse internships, rather than social gathering events. Brown (1976) argues that successful recruiting strategies during the 1970's involved employee testimonials and hands-on experience. During this transition, community newspapers published nursing testimonials outlining the job duties and experiences of nurses in various modalities. These personal stories immediately took hold and laid the foundation for nursing internship programs (p. 604). In these programs, students would sign up for hands-on experience to learn practical application skills that would help them in their future careers. This shift towards experiential learning was a foundational step in shaping the recruiting future. Patient Care Tech programs are now a staple in most healthcare facilities today. It is also important to note, that this type of recruiting shifted the focus to the quality of experience of each nursing student at a specific facility.

THE HIRING MODEL

Figure 1 sets out a suggested hiring and retention model that helps facilities focus on the daily struggle to obtain new and retain old nursing talent. The model addresses the following: Challenges, Strategies, Best Practices, and Desired Outcomes.

FIGURE 1
CREATIVE RECRUITING STRATEGIES

CREATIVE RECRUITING STRATEGIES

Challenges	Strategies	Best Practices	Outcomes
Available Workforce	• Inactive Nurses	Shared Governance	Market Leader / Nurse Recruiting & Placement
Pay/Benefits	• Expanding Base	Educational Partnerships	
Climate/Culture	• Foreign Nurses	Recruiting Outreach	
Hospitals/Admin	• Pay Rates	Competitive Compensation	
Credentials/Education	• Crowd Sourcing	Retention Stay Polices	
Patients/Consumers	• Referencing		
	• Retention Policies		

CHALLENGES: THE CURRENT STATE OF THE NURSING

It seems clear that the field of nursing has changed drastically over the years. That being said, many things are the same. Many nursing schools work to graduate nurses who can competently care for each type of patient. Hospitals use students in nurse internships, known as Patient Care Technicians, to offer them extended interview opportunities. Most of all, the nationwide nursing shortage has become a worldwide phenomenon. In Great Britain, the government is highly involved in addressing the shortage of nurses. They have created programs addressing affordable housing, cost of living raises, expanded clinical responsibilities, and aggressive recruiting campaigns (Finlayson, Dixon, Meadows, and Blair, 2002, p. 542). These types of governmental initiatives tend to work well but involve the recruitment of foreign nurses.

Finlayson et. al (2002) argue that organizations need to look at more radical recruiting solutions to provide effective healthcare, with an extreme shortage of nurses. Companies are now looking beyond the United States to find qualified applicants. Surprisingly, in 2008, ninety thousand foreign nurses in the United States made up four percent of the nursing workforce (Stuberauch, 2008). Of these foreign nurses, Lorenzo, Galvez-tan, Icamina, and Javier (2007) argue that the Philippines is the largest exporter of nurses worldwide. For this reason, many healthcare recruiters develop programs to bring nurses from countries like the Philippines to the United States. They make their living on facilitating the immigration process while getting a percentage of the sourced employee's salary. This has helped some healthcare facilities relieve some of the strain on their employees. There are positive and negative schools of thought regarding the recruitment of foreign nurses. A study performed on foreign nurses in 1978 determined that there were several issues with foreign nursing comprehension. Nurses could satisfactorily speak English but struggled with comprehending the differences between American nursing and foreign nursing (Koehler, 1978, p. 2089). The project originally was based on these nurses coming to work for hospitals for one year. After its completion, the researchers deemed that it was not cost-effective to hire foreign nurses. This study had caveats stating that the nursing board should not grant licensure for six months to ensure competency and two-year work commitments were preferred to offset training costs (Koehler, 1978, p. 2089). Foreign nurses do bring some benefits with them. Using the example of the Philippines, these nurses are more likely to hold a bachelor's degree since job opportunities are extremely competitive. Additionally, there is a huge incentive for foreign nurses to enter the United States, money. Nursing wages in the United States increase

by two to two and a half percent for each year of experience. This is compared to the relatively low one percent yearly increases in other countries (Huang, 2011, p. 154). With higher education, foreign nurses may have greater earning potential if they immigrate to the United States.

Companies must carefully consider the ethical implications of hiring foreign nurses. Special attention must be paid to preventing any kind of discrimination or bias within your workforce. Nurses may view incoming foreign nurses with higher education, as competition for specialty positions (Stewart, 1998). Additionally, it is of paramount importance that companies institute a cultural diversity program to present a welcoming atmosphere. Codes of ethics do exist regarding recruiting nurses from foreign countries ethically. These codes often involve allowing sufficient leave time for a foreign nurse to return home to see their family. They may also involve not hiring nurses from countries with poorly developed healthcare systems (Stubenrauch, 2008). Recruiting foreign nurses is a current trend that offers a supply of qualified nurses, at a cost. If companies have culturally diverse workforces, recruiting foreign nurses may be the answer to their staffing shortage problems.

Healthcare facilities also utilize temporary contract nurses to address their short-term staffing needs. Contract or "co-op" nurses have been around since the 1960's. These traveling nurses make their living filling temporary needs at a premium pay rate. Typically, these nurses sign on for thirteen-week assignments with each facility before moving on. We would argue that companies view these expensive travelers as a necessary evil for critical staffing needs. In a best-case scenario, the contracted employee will enjoy their experience and sign on to continue working full-time. This is not often the case. Typical complaints with these nurses are that they are only there for a short time (Coghill, 1962, p. 865). This causes issues due to rushed orientations, with typical training only lasting two days to one week for travel nurses. Additionally, these nurses do not possess any loyalty to the company. For this reason, companies find it hard to discipline these nurses because they do not technically work for them. All things considered, agency nurses have fulfilled a need within the field of healthcare.

The demographics of nursing are aging with the American population. According to Inglis (2004), the average nursing age is 45 years old (p. 25). This is due to medical advancements and healthy living initiatives that have extended the average lifespan of American citizens. Since people are living longer, more nurses are required to care for the ever-growing population. This is an urgent problem that many organizations are trying to address. Fewer nurses, with more patients, mean a higher patient load that leads to nursing burnout. Staff burnout is a root cause of high turnover. Estryn-Behar et al. (2007) support this assumption stating that one-fourth of surveyed nurses who experienced burnout considered leaving their company soon (p. 945). Healthcare facilities should focus on recruiting quality talent if nothing else to prevent staff burnout.

Other factors affect nursing staff. These include effective teamwork in their unit, work-family conflict, and shared governance over workplace tasks (Estryn-Behar et al., 2007, p. 948). Nurses deal with life and death in their work. As such, their success or failure is contingent on good teamwork. If nurses quarrel regularly patient outcomes are more likely to be negative. We would argue that managers should foster an environment of team checking and team coaching to ensure that all employees feel a sense of safety with their team. The work is stressful, and nurses must work together to achieve better outcomes. Shared governance is another strategy for staff retention that increases each employee's sense of ownership in their work. Unit councils can help decide the direction that a department wants to take on a particular issue. In matters of discipline, peer review committees can be formed to determine whether a party committed an act of wrongdoing within the nursing scope. With long shifts and stressful assignments, shared governance programs may offer a sense of control for nurses in an otherwise fluid work situation.

Short-staffing, burnout, poor teamwork, and lack of authority have caused nurses to work more for procedures than the patient. Facilities mandate that certain protocols be followed, even if they are not conducive to patient satisfaction. With current trends in healthcare being shifted towards the customer experience, it has never been more important for hospitals to find ways to improve the outlook of their nursing staff. If they fail to do so, nurses may lose sight of why they entered the field of nursing in the first place; to care for the sick (Gordon & Nelson, 2005, p. 69). Poor-performing hospitals have few educational programs centered on pain management and customer waiting. Good hospitals have adequate protocols that

are punitive, which force nurses to comply or risk dismissal. Great organizations create a caring culture where the patient's safety and experience are the mission. In a world where healthcare finds itself in desperate need of qualified nursing staff, it has never been more important to develop creative recruiting programs to address the complexities of this market. This literary analysis has shown that the nursing shortage is not a new problem. It has been around for nearly a hundred years and affects many countries today. In the next section, we will outline the implications of the current state of nursing, set forth best practices for nurse recruiting, and will detail creative strategies for filling vacancies with the limited supply of nurses in the market.

IMPLICATIONS FOR HEALTH SYSTEMS

The primary organization in the author's local area is a large Regional Medical System. It is an 850 licensed-bed acute health care facility. Depending on the time of year, this facility has between four thousand five hundred and five thousand employees. There are currently more than five hundred nursing openings at the facility. The work of an HR Director is to find creative ways to outcompete other hospitals for the limited supply of qualified candidates. Our literary analysis detailed how short-staffing leads to burnout and poor patient outcomes. From the business perspective, bringing in new physicians offering new service lines is difficult if you cannot find the nursing staff to care for their patients. A further challenge is the competition between for-profit and not-for-profit hospitals. As a non-profit facility, many of its profits come from wealthy donors with strong loyalties to their organization. Non-profits can offer higher salaries and larger bonuses than for-profit organizations. This makes recruiting in any market area very difficult because companies must be creative with recruiting nurses against a titan non-profit hospital. Thus, it is paramount to find nursing staff wherever, and however you can.

CREATIVE RECRUITING STRATEGIES: INACTIVE NURSES

As previously stated, the nursing workforce is aging (Inglis, 2004). Typical frames of thought might show that many nurses are retiring from the workforce due to their advanced age. We argue that many older nurses are working longer due to their financial inability to retire. This is advantageous for both the employee and employer. If competent, the employee can earn a high wage and save for their delayed retirement. The facility reaps the benefit of their experience. It can be argued that the field of nursing is made up of predominantly female employees. Some employees may leave the field to raise children as homemakers. These are only two of many reasons that nurses leave their occupations. We would argue that these inactive nurses represent an untapped resource that needs to be explored by organizations. This is by no means a new idea. A study conducted regarding inactive nurses in the 1960s showed that a significant number of nurses were interested in returning to work. After conducting this study, they determined that fifty percent of inactive nurses would return to work for the right opportunity (Barker & Staton, 1965, p. 645).

To capitalize on this resource, hospitals can purchase a recruiting database to see inactive nurses in their local area. This facility has many options including part-time, or per diem work, where employees may work two shifts per week without earning medical benefits. These positions are those that the hospital focuses on for older nurses who are looking to keep working. As previously stated, the facility benefits from having their experience for our younger nurses. Some mothers have stepped away from work to care for children who are looking to reenter the workforce. This database allows us the ability to actively recruit them as well. Studies have shown that nurses are more likely to return to work if they have more children (Barker & Staton, 1965, p. 644). In many cases, they have been out of the workforce for several years and are not sure how to reenter the market. This service allows the facility to bridge that gap of communication to facilitate their transition back to work. This is relatively new and has not seen large amounts of participation to this point. It can be argued that this source of nurses is very valuable, and it would be foolish to ignore this resource. The recruitment of inactive nurses will become more commonplace as companies

struggle to find qualified staff. This Regional Medical Center hopes to create a competitive advantage by tapping into this resource.

CREATIVE RECRUITING STRATEGIES: EXPANDING THE RECRUITMENT BASE

In the earlier literary analysis, it was argued that the local area does not possess a large number of experienced nurses looking for a new opportunity. To address this deficiency of nurses, this facility has on occasion engaged the services of a recruiting software company. Again, this service allows the hospital to see upwards of three hundred thousand nursing candidates in the United States. This software offers a great start but does not solve all problems initially. Problems like many facilities utilizing recruitment firms to place qualified nursing candidates at their facility. They use these types of databases to source candidates in their line of work. This facility's goal is to use this database to actively recruit its nursing staff, effectively eliminating the use of recruiters over the next few years. This service allows them to map out candidates by geographic location, experience, and specialty. Recruiting by geographic location is of paramount importance because it is a key indicator of earning potential. For example, nurses in rural areas of the country will not earn as high of a salary. Salary rates in these rural areas are usually lower than those found in the Abilene Texas area. Aggregating this data will help identify recruitment opportunities in these other states. Once the facility determines which areas to pursue, they separate active job seekers from inactive ones. From the active pool, they identify candidates that would be qualified to work in areas of need at their facility and send out a feeler communication. This communication helps them identify candidates that have ties in the state of Texas. Being near family makes them much more likely to relocate to the local area. This facility typically sends candidates that fit this criteria information about the local town in a "pacer" email that includes opportunities at the facility and some information about the local area. This email includes all aspects of local life because when hiring, you are also recruiting their families. The local area is benefited by having excellent educational institutions, low cost of living, and geographical proximity to metropolitan areas of Texas. These are all aspects that are included in a pacer communication. The more specific this information is to the candidate the better. There have been some early successes with this program, and the facility hopes to continue to improve their nurse-sourcing program.

CREATIVE RECRUITING STRATEGIES: RECRUITING FOREIGN NURSES

Foreign nurses are also readily available. Lorenzo et al. (2007) argue that the Philippines is the largest exporter of nurses in the world. This local facility is considering bringing in more Filipino nurses since their contracts tie them to the hospital for at least two years. Additionally, they are generally highly educated and are very loyal to the companies that bring them to the United States. This facility works with companies like Passport U.S.A. and Guardian that facilitate the immigration process. They also help candidates find housing and purchase a car. They essentially establish roots and connect them with other Filipino social groups in the area. This facility has seen high success with this program but has observed that it is more difficult for nurses who have families back home. They include aspects of cultural diversity training in work units to help them acclimate to and accept their new co-workers. Additionally, they schedule coaching sessions between unit directors and these employees to see how their orientation period is progressing. It has been found that sometimes Filipino nursing staff do not feel comfortable asking questions of their preceptors. These sessions allow them to honestly open up about their learning and improve their overall patient care. Foreign nurses offer a vast resource that modern healthcare facilities must capitalize on to be successful. This initiative is still small at the facility, but they hope to continually use these nurses to provide superior care to our patients.

CREATIVE RECRUITING PRACTICES: COMPETITIVE PAY RATES

It might be argued that the nursing shortage benefits nurses because their average hourly wages have steadily increased over previous decades. To deal with this reality, healthcare facilities must remain

competitive in the market. We achieve this by subscribing to national and state compensation surveys that help us determine what a Registered Nurse in Texas should make. In the past, other hospitals performed a market adjustment on their nursing staff. This caused our facility to look at their pay scales and make adjustments to remain competitive. This project allowed the facility to analyze each nurse's experience level and adjust their pay rate to reflect a competitive wage. Even though it was a meticulous process, it was of paramount importance to offer competitive pay rates. If not, nurses will take their services elsewhere. Our facility should continue monitoring their market to ensure that they offer competitive wages to new hires. By doing so, they can ensure that they remain relevant in the field of nurse recruiting.

CREATIVE RECRUITING PRACTICES: CROWDSOURCING

Databases of contacts are a wonderful thing. The problem is that being seen and contacted by a corporate entity may not be convincing enough to encourage that first contact with the local hospital facility. This hesitancy can be overcome by introducing a third-party personal contact and recommendation process to the contact list. This known contact can become a leverage point to encourage contact with the suggested employer. With the advent of the internet, we now can utilize vast numbers of contacts to throw out a problem and ask for a solution.

Crowdsourcing is currently a little-used process but could garner applications from market areas hitherto unreached by regular recruiting processes. Crowdsourcing is the ability to collect information from an extended group of people via the internet. Using crowdsourcing allows companies to save time and money while tapping into disparate and distant groups of people with different skills worldwide. The main advantage of crowdsourcing is its ability to reduce costs, increase reach, and speed up the collection of information regarding possible new hires. (https://www.investopedia.com/terms/c/crowdsourcing.asp) This model is thus a compensated crowdsourcing system.

Currently, the main disadvantage of crowdsourcing for nursing or medical position hiring is the systematic matching required to ensure all three parties are made whole in the hiring process, (the company gets a new hire, the new hire gains a position plus hiring bonus, and the referrer receives the agreed upon compensation for referring the new hire).

An example is that Facility X needs to hire an ER nurse to fill a vacant position in our local town. Facility X posts on the web that they need an ER nurse and are willing to compensate successful referrals with say $4,000 throughout new hire tenure (say $2,000 on the start date and $2000 on the 6th month anniversary). The posted position is then pushed to both non-medical mailing lists and/or contact lists maintained by the hospital. By reaching outside of the normal medical hiring databases you introduce new leverage points that help ensure contact and more consistent follow-through should occur.

> *"The main advantage of executive crowdsourcing is that it exposes your job to a much larger pool of interested candidates, consultants with executive contacts, and/or recruiters with their pools of candidates to draw from. Sheer size is always the advantage of crowdsourcing; the larger the pool, the more likely an ideal or exceptional candidate will be found." (*Flesher, n.d.)

CREATIVE RECRUITING PRACTICES: REFERENCING

In addition to crowdsourcing, healthcare organizations should consider utilizing referencing or networking to identify potential candidates. This process involves being proactive with the current workforce and seeking ways to encourage the sharing of potential candidates through their direct contacts. By using employee referrals, you can help improve candidates' quality and increase the likelihood of building a more positive labor force that works well within the organizational culture. Referencing can be fostered through employee referral programs that provide benefits for everyone involved (both current employees and those seeking job opportunities).

When designing or implementing an Employee Referral process it is important to engage current employees to help recruit or recommend others for roles in the organization. As part of this process, it is common to provide incentives and recognition for employees who refer quality candidates to the organization. This process saves time, and costs and helps build positive morale by recognizing the efforts of those currently employed and also adds new employees who already have a connection to the healthcare organization. Incentives can include financial bonuses, prizes, and a shared recognition that is based on the quality of the candidate recommended. Employee referral programs should not be the only form of recruiting methods utilized by the organization but should support a broader approach to identifying potential candidates.

CREATIVE RECRUITING PRACTICES: ACTIVE RETENTION POLICIES

The nationwide nursing shortage has been an issue since before the author(s) wrote this original work in 2016. This labor shortage has grown exponentially through the COVID-19 pandemic and is continuing at a pace that many healthcare organizations are unable to keep up with. Limited labor supply has led to increased opportunities for nurses to change employment. This factor paired with limited financial resources due to dwindling operating margins in the healthcare sector has resulted in decreased nursing retention and increased operating costs.

The American Nurses Association states that there are approximately 4.3 million RNs in the workforce, and the US Bureau of Labor Statistics projected 194,500 average annual openings for RNs between 2020 and 2030; a 9% increase (American Nurses Association, 2020). This opportunity is leading many nurses to leave their employer for nursing roles at other organizations or to take travel nursing assignments. According to the NSI National Health Care Retention Report, the current average hospital turnover rate is 22.7%. That means that nursing units have the potential to turn over their entire nursing staff every five years (NSI Nursing Solutions, Inc., 2023). This picture becomes even more difficult when considering the aging of the workforce, and accelerated retirements and labor exodus in nursing. A 2023 news release with the NCSBN showed that approximately 100,000 RNs left the workforce during the COVID-19 pandemic in the next two years due to stress, burnout, and retirement. Another 610,000 are reporting an intent to leave the workforce by 2027 due to stress, burnout, and retirement. Perhaps the most concerning fact is that many of these factors that have contributed to nurses leaving the workforce (a workforce that has declined by 3.3% over the past two years) are most pronounced in nurses with 10 or fewer years of experience (National Council of State Boards of Nursing, 2023). These factors are forcing healthcare organizations to re-evaluate not only short-term strategies like their continued financial viability, but to focus on creative recruitment and retention solutions.

NURSE RECRUITING BEST PRACTICES: SHARED GOVERNANCE

Even with the large number of nursing schools in the area, there are still too few nurses to meet the rising number of patients in America. As previously stated, this can be dangerous because nurses will have to take more patients and work longer hours to meet the demand. This will lead to burnout, and low employee morale (Estryn-Behar et al., 2007). Hospitals do have an advantage as it pertains to increasing employee ownership in the hiring process. Facilities can increase employees' sense of shared governance by conducting peer interviews. Peer interviews allow front-line staff to screen candidates to determine if their personality and skill level will be conducive to the unit. Typically, these interviews involve questions regarding the nurse's background, behavioral questions, and motivational fit (Alcorn & O'Neal, 2008, p. 72D). At this facility we utilize peer reviewing to increase the investment by each employee in a newly hired staff member. We have found that this strategy is most beneficial as it pertains to the newly hired employee's skills and fit within the unit. As a team, if you make a recommendation for a nurse to be hired, you are much more invested in helping them be successful. This team approach has worked well at this facility, decreasing turnover rates in the Critical Care, and Women Services departments. The company

hopes that it can retain quality nurses using this type of interviewing protocol. This facility must find nurses from beyond the greater regional area to fill these positions.

NURSE RECRUITING BEST PRACTICES: EDUCATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

It is important to foster this love of nursing in the next generation entering the workforce. Several nursing schools in the regional hospital's area send approximately five hundred nursing students through the facility each semester. There is a great deal of emphasis on providing them with a good clinical experience. As detailed in our literary analysis, the shift towards experiential learning has placed greater emphasis on clinical experiences. The authors have found that hospitals can continue recruiting top talent locally by targeting quality students and ensuring they have a positive experience. Mason, Tahmooressi, and Messmer (2003) argue that quality employers look for ways to inspire the next generation of nurses (p. 97). This is not always easy. Just like in previous decades, there are easier fields to go into where one can earn a decent wage, and work fewer hours (Olmstead, 1920). This facility has hired several quality nursing candidates straight out of school due to their positive experiences during their clinical rotations. Surveys have been conducted on clinical experiences, and these have found that specific nurses work very well with students. Most nurses are good at what they do. Not all are good at teaching others why they are doing it.

For this reason, this facility tasks each director with pairing students with their best teaching nursing staff. Other strategies for developing positive partnerships with local nursing schools include holding workshops on resume writing, performing mock interviews, and holding career fairs for schools. Students will be more inclined to work at a facility with repeated exposure. This facility tries to send the same recruiters to each school so that they can build relationships with the students. This facility's goal and expectation is to continually expand the student program to increase the number of students that come to their facility. By doing this, they can recruit from as large a student pool as possible.

NURSE RECRUITING BEST PRACTICES: RECRUITING OUTREACH

Healthcare facilities have always used employee testimonials with good effect. A recruit may receive a written letter from a Chief Nursing Officer, but they may perceive their point of view as biased. In the author's experience, nurses want to work where other nurses are happiest. For this reason, we suggest the use of employee testimonials to show potential new hires employees that provide superior patient care each day. Weber (1959) supports this hypothesis by arguing that people are tired of hearing from hospital representatives about what nurses do. Nurses are the best recruiters for other nurses. They can tell their stories of when they first heard a child's cry in the delivery room, or when they helped a hospice patient pass away peacefully (p. 772). People identify with stories. HR is responsible for facilitating programs where nurses tell their stories to inspire new staff members.

In addition to employee testimonials, this paper suggests several ways in which a broader net could be cast to gain new employees. A key component of these suggested strategies is the setup of effective process management methods to maintain control of each process/strategy. This may involve adding staff to bring in-house the controlling aspects of the suggested strategies. Cost-benefit analysis needs to be completed by each facility to ensure that it makes sense to bring processes such as international nurse hiring in-house or continue to use outside suppliers.

NURSE RECRUITING BEST PRACTICES: COMPETITIVE COMPENSATION

A key focus of any strategy must include an overall compensation philosophy that considers all elements of incentives. Healthcare organizations need to consider attracting and retaining employees with short-term and long-term incentives. As part of the compensation philosophy, care must be taken in designing a structure around qualifications and performance with a competitive and rewarding goal that stays up-to-date with the evolving market. The compensation philosophy needs to answer the questions defining compensation, what are all the components of pay and rewards at the individual and team levels,

how should the base compensation (pay portion) be structured, when and where do you consider performance or merit pay opportunities within the total compensation plan and is there a form or transparency or pay levels based on critical skills, credentials, seniority, and performance.

As noted, compensation is a broad philosophy that needs to be strategic and part of a key component of the recruiting effort that presents the "Total Compensation Package" as part of the hiring offering and long-term retention. As we consider compensation, it is easy to only think of base pay and while this is very important, it is only one part of the Total Compensation Package. The Total package includes a broader landscape of pay, training, workload, personal development, benefits, opportunities for growth, and even an overall culture of support.

To help in the retention side of employment and provide a better understanding of what drives job satisfaction; it is important to consider the work itself (fulfillment), supervision (direct leadership), co-workers (relationships), benefits (in addition to base pay), promotional or career growth opportunities and as mentioned, the overall compensation structure (how it is all pieced together).

An interesting and sometimes overlooked view of total compensation is the area of being competitive in the market (internal and external). It is easy to forget that employees compare themselves to those they work with and the external opportunities that might pay or reward more for the same position. One of the theories used in assessing pay is called the Equity Theory (Noe et al, 2023, p. 480) and this theory suggests that people evaluate the fairness of their situations by comparing them with other people. Equity is not equality and when you are developing a compensation philosophy it is important to build it with fairness and equity in mind. It is also important to communicate the process and details of the compensation structure broadly and often. To recruit and keep the best nurses you need to reward them appropriately. The foundational part of the Total Compensation Package does need to address the base pay component with an understanding of pay equity, fairness, and competitiveness.

NURSE RECRUITING BEST PRACTICES: RETENTION / STAY POLICIES

So what retention strategies are healthcare organizations utilizing to address these labor shortages, and to strategically plan for the future? Organizations that will be competitive in this challenging environment will focus on the following key factors: candidate experience, employee engagement, creative incentive/retention programs for current nursing staff, developing an effective employee listening strategy, setting long-term strategic goals that are mission focused and are adaptable, and organization alignment with recruitment and retention initiatives.

Candidate experience is of paramount importance to employee recruitment and retention. Studies show that 1 out of 10 new employees think that their employer has a good onboarding procedure (L. LeGasse, personal communication, 2023). Lengthy applications, cumbersome paperwork, multiple touchpoints with employees, and systems that are difficult to navigate may cause frustration with new employees. This frustration can lead to increased turnover, as many new employees determine how long they will remain with your organization during their first few weeks. HR teams must conduct a deep dive into the application procedure, removing any obstacles and unnecessary steps to make applications as convenient as possible. They must also identify ways to capture passive job seekers (healthcare staff who may be looking for positions but are not actively applying). New candidate experience platforms help make this top-of-recruitment funnel strategy more effective. They can track passive job seekers, and offer them the ability to speak with recruiters at your organization. HR teams must also assess their interview and onboarding procedures.

Candidate interviews play a key role in candidate experience. Hiring managers and HR team members must be prepared for the interview. They must be on time to collect the candidate for the interview. Every step of this interview process needs to communicate one message to the candidate, "we have been expecting you" (L. LeGasse, personal communication, 2023). Effective organizations may consider surveying candidates during the interview process to solicit valuable feedback. This would allow the HR team to identify hiring managers needing additional training or support to improve their interviewing skills. This

survey may be accomplished by utilizing various electronic surveying platforms that exist. The authors recommend refraining from a paper survey process, as this is less convenient for the candidate.

Another strategy that lends itself to an improved candidate experience is for HR teams to review their onboarding procedure to remove unnecessary paperwork. This, paired with limiting the number of separate email communications, helps reduce the confusion and uncertainty a new hire may feel. New Employee Orientation should be an engaging experience. It should also effectively communicate the mission of your organization, how the new hire's role contributes to that mission, and clearly define the next steps to boost psychological safety. For example, if a new hire is attending new employee orientation but is concerned about where to report to work following orientation, they will retain less of the vital information. Organizations should strive to ensure an understanding of the next steps before beginning the orientation procedure. Strategies to address this include communication from the HR team during the job offer process, re-communication during the onboarding processing appointment, and an opportunity to meet with their hiring manager before beginning new employee orientation. These strategies allow managers to answer seemingly small (but not unimportant) questions that will reduce anxiety, and improve a new hire's retention of information during the orientation process.

Candidate experience does not end with New Employee Orientation. Organizations should place an increased emphasis on a new hire's experience during their orientation period. Effective strategies include pairing new hires with a preceptor, buddy, or mentor. Hiring managers should select highly skilled team members who possess good emotional intelligence and soft skills; not just solid technical ability. These skills will allow them to guide or mentor newly hired staff. This feeling of connection or belonging in their new organization is vital to retention. Hiring managers may also set pre-determined check-in points to identify how things are going with the new hire, what obstacles prevent them from doing their best work, and what support they need moving forward.

The employee life cycle does not stop with the onboarding and orientation procedure. Organizations must focus on strategies to engage their employees. According to Gallup, organizations with increased engagement levels have 43% less turnover, 81% lower absenteeism, and 23% higher profitability at their organization (Gallup, 2022). Understaffed and overworked leaders at your healthcare organization may struggle with being intentional about engagement. However, the data shows that being intentional about engaging your team members will save you time spent on other administrative tasks (staffing, interviewing, etc.). Organizations seeking to retain their staff should focus on employee engagement as a strategic imperative. This involves annual surveys that are designed to confidentially measure the engagement levels across all departments in the organization. Leadership should be briefed on these results following surveys. This training must include strategies or guides for leaders to better conduct action-planning conversations with their teams. It should also include resources for managers to create action plans surrounding employee engagement. The cornerstone of success in the realm of engagement does not stop after action plans are created. Leaders must then be intentional about making progress on action plan items and communicating that progress with their teams during their regular meetings. Some leaders may request, or be required to attend additional training if they need mentoring or support during the employee engagement process. A best practice would include new leaders in the organization being also trained on engagement. Improved employee engagement is vital to employee experience and retention, and these strategies may assist in accomplishing these organizational objectives.

The laws of supply of demand have been "rearing their head" over the past few years. Healthcare workers (specifically nursing staff) have plenty of opportunities to leave your organization for other employment opportunities. Reasons for leaving may include frustrations among employed staff regarding increased utilization of contract labor. For example, an ICU nurse may be working next to a traveler nurse, performing the same role but earning a premium rate two to three times the employed nurse receives. Organizations must create staffing models that allow for inventive incentive programs, with a focus on decreased utilization of contract labor. This not only will improve your financials but will also show your staff your willingness to allocate salary dollars to them that may otherwise have been spent on contract labor personnel. Specific attention should be given to strategies that address coverage of premium shifts, like shifts that may be covered by a nurse (whether employed or contracted) that incur overtime. If a nurse

works three-twelve-hour shifts per week, then the fourth shift and above would cause them to be paid at a time and a half overtime rate. Organizations should develop incentive plans that allow them to ensure that their staff are incentivized to work those overtime shifts, rather than pay a contract staff member time and a half at a premium rate. There are other retention incentives (bonuses, bid shifts, etc.) that various healthcare organizations have tried, and some have proven to be more effective than others. What is clear is that healthcare organizations must continue to be creative and adaptable to the ever-changing labor environment.

Healthcare organizations are competing to hire and retain top-quality talent. Long-term strategic thinking should be utilized when developing strategies for your organization. These authors would argue that this planning should be paired with an element of versatility. Specifically, employers should develop robust employee listening strategies, and modify their approaches with their employees accordingly. One method to accomplish this in nursing is through the shared governance model. Shared governance allows nursing leaders to develop committees within their work unit (or across work units depending on the specific objective) to enhance employee involvement in decision-making. This process allows team members that will be impacted by decisions made, to offer input and guidance to programs in their area of responsibility. Shared governance increases ownership of departmental and organizational goals with departmental staff. Hospitals may also develop committees addressing specific issues, like nurse retention. Garnering feedback for committees such as this can be uncomfortable as employees may bring to light frustrations that are also felt by other nursing staff. Organizations that hope to maximize the effectiveness of their retention committees, should ensure that Executive level nursing leaders are involved in them. They must also be open to taking negative and constructive feedback and acting on that feedback to improve the nursing employment experience. Creating a safe space to offer feedback and nurses seeing measurable progress from that feedback will create significant trust capital with your organization.

None of those mentioned above strategies are possible without organizational alignment. Healthcare organizations must have an articulated mission and vision, and empower their key leaders to make decisions that strategically support that mission. If a Chief Nurse participates in a nursing feedback meeting but is not empowered to make changes due to that feedback the entire process becomes meaningless. This author believes that my organization, Hendrick Health, benefits tremendously from an Executive leadership team that focuses on strategies aligned with (and support) one another (*Hendrick Health System*, n.d.). Through the challenges presented by the pandemic, our organization has leveraged these strategies to achieve two of the best nurse hiring years in our 100-year history, along with a 13% reduction in nursing turnover over two years. This alignment and adaptability have also allowed our organization to reduce reliance on contract labor dramatically, at great cost savings. Mission, vision, and alignment at Hendrick Health lie at the center of this success.

OUTCOMES AND CONCLUSIONS

The nationwide nursing shortage represents one of the greatest crises of our lifetime. It could be argued that it might be acceptable for some industries to have a workplace shortage. This shortage facilitates the healthy exchange of labor at competitive rates. Health care might not fit into this category. Our aging demographic will require nursing staff to care for them for years. Communities and nursing schools are taking steps to produce as many quality nursing graduates as possible. As previously stated, this partly benefits nursing candidates because it means that companies need to develop creative incentives to recruit effectively. The authors argue that it is more detrimental to the nursing profession due to potential hazards. Short staffing increases burnout, lack of teamwork, and high turnover rates. It seems apparent that there is no short-term solution for addressing this nursing shortage. In the meantime, healthcare facilities must find creative ways to recruit and retain the limited number of nurses. The authors touched on the importance of maintaining positive relationships with local nursing schools. They have outlined a creative plan for recruiting inactive nurses by identifying potential candidates and easing their transition back into the workforce. They have detailed creative uses for recruitment software to identify geographical areas with more nurses seeking employment. They have articulated the importance of utilizing foreign nurses to ease

the stressed staffing of a hospital unit. They have discussed the use of crowdsourcing as a means to reach the unreachable. Lastly, it was argued that maintaining a competitive pay scale and proactive HR management to attract and retain top-quality talent is paramount. Organizations that will be competitive in this challenging environment will focus on the following key factors: candidate experience, employee engagement, creative incentive/retention programs for current nursing staff, developing an effective employee listening strategy, setting long-term strategic goals that are mission focused and are adaptable, and organization alignment with recruitment and retention initiatives.

Performing this study has allowed the authors to creatively address the needs of our Local Medical Center. Creative solutions discussed in this paper should aid the facility in becoming a market leader in the field of nurse recruitment and retention.

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