



Strategies Your Facility Can Implement to Survive the Nursing Crisis

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We're nearly three years into the COVID-19 pandemic, and it's safe to say we've all been given a crash course on how a global pandemic can affect every aspect of our lives. If you're a healthcare administrator or manager, particularly if you work in a hospital setting, you may just now be catching your breath from the chaos of the past three years.

Remember those staffing issues you had pre-pandemic? They're likely a walk in the park compared to what you dealt with over the past three years.

We've all had to learn some tough lessons regarding staffing. But just because the pandemic is waning doesn't mean your staffing issues are getting any easier.

Are you a healthcare administrator who is still struggling to keep your unit or facility fully staffed? We see you, and we're here to help!

This e-book is full of strategies and tips to help you keep your head above water and, most importantly, keep your unit or department fully staffed with qualified nurses.

Overworked and Understaffed: How We Got Here

To non-healthcare workers, "crisis" may seem like a strong word. But to those of us in the thick of it, there isn't a more accurate word to describe the nursing shortage. There are so many factors that have contributed to the current state of the nursing industry. The bottom line is the more heads you have in beds, the more nurses you need to be fully staffed.

So, how did we get here?

It truly has been a perfect storm –and one that won't be going away anytime soon.



An Aging Population

We knew the baby boomer generation would catch up with our nation's healthcare system at some point. It's safe to say that day has finally arrived.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. boomers (69.6 million people ages 58 to 76) will remain the second-largest population group in the country in 2022. The boomers alone have created a notable rise in the demand for healthcare services. However, as the boomer population decreases, experts predict the demand for healthcare services will continue to rise largely due to the fact that Generations X and Y are living longer lives, much like the boomer population.

People are Living Longer

Although living longer certainly has its perks, it also comes with the need to receive more healthcare. When the United Nations began keeping global data, the average person born in 1960 could expect to live to 52.5 years of age. Today, the average life expectancy is 72 years.

If you have aging parents or grandparents, you probably know they spend a lot of time visiting their doctors. Aging in a healthy manner requires more than just general oversight from a primary care physician; a wide variety of specialties are usually involved in an elderly person's care.

Healthcare Workers Are Leaving the Industry

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, this year alone, nearly 1.7 million people have quit their healthcare jobs—that's equivalent to almost 3% of the healthcare workforce each month. This statistic should be extremely alarming and a huge wake-up call for healthcare facilities to realize the importance of treating your team well so you can retain the providers you have on staff now.

Nursing Schools Can't Keep Up With the Growing Industry Demand

We all know that well-trained and qualified nurses don't just grow on trees. And according to the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN), nursing school enrollment across the country is not growing fast enough to meet the projected demand for RN and APRN services.

According to a recent AACN report, U.S. nursing schools turned away 91,938 qualified applications (not applicants) from baccalaureate and graduate nursing programs in 2021 due to an insufficient number of faculty, clinical sites, classroom space, and clinical preceptors, as well as budget constraints. None of this bodes well for the demand for nurses.

6 Strategies You Can Implement to Survive the Nursing Crisis

1. The first step is admitting you have a problem

Although the outlook seems dark, the first step in solving any issue is admitting you have a problem. You simply cannot bury your head in the sand and pretend like these issues are going to disappear magically.

Here are a few game-changing revelations we all must come to terms with before we can tackle the nursing crises head-on.

- **Healthcare workers aren't immune to burnout.**

Have they proven they are true heroes? Absolutely. Does that mean they can withstand the status quo forever? Absolutely not. Those who cared for patients during the pandemic will likely feel the effects for the rest of their careers. Healthcare workers were often overworked and stretched thin for months on end. Unfortunately, many still are today.

- **A rapidly increasing census can't compete with unrealistic staffing ratios.**

Your staffing strategy should include a contingency plan. It's not always possible to predict what your census will be. That's why it's important to have a relationship with a staffing agency like Interim HealthCare. When your census rapidly increases, a staffing agency can help ensure you have the appropriate number of clinical staff members to care for your patients.

- **COVID-19 proved that healthcare workers get sick, too.**

During the early days of the pandemic, how many times did you have to wait almost two full weeks for staff to return to work if they had COVID? Even when they returned to work, they probably weren't at their best, which turned into a terrible round of staffing roulette.

It's no secret healthcare workers tend to prioritize the health of their patients over their own. The pandemic reminded us that healthcare workers fall ill, too, which is why it's important to have a plan in place to fill the gaps when your employees aren't well enough to care for your patients.

- **Healthcare workers have learned their worth...and they aren't afraid to go where they feel valued.**

If your organization had a less than stellar response to caring for your staff, including nurses, during the pandemic, it likely bubbled to the surface at some point in the past couple of years. Some organizations got it right and did all they could during those times of extreme supply and staffing shortages, while others struggled to keep their heads above water.

The truth is, we no longer live in a world where employer loyalty means as much as it used to. Your staff members know where they can go to be valued and appreciated—and where they can go to be paid more, too. If you're struggling with employee satisfaction, likely, you're also struggling with staffing,

2. Re-recruit Your High Achievers

Ok, so we've just hit you with a lot of bad news. Now, let's talk about what you can actually do to repair the problem.

If you're not familiar with strategies from The [Huron Group](#), we highly recommend learning more about their approach to developing a highly engaged workforce. One of the key tenets is taking stock of the performance of your current workers. This requires taking a hard look at your staff and deciding who you consider to be high performers, middle-of-the-road performers, and low-performing employees.

The key here is high performers want to be surrounded by other high performers. One bad apple (in this case, one low performer) can spoil the bunch. You may even determine that low-performing employees are the reason you can't keep good nurses.

While you'll need to implement some strategies that can help move low performers up to the middle, you'll also have to come to terms with the fact that certain low performers need to be moved out of your organization. With a little mentorship and guidance, middle-of-the-road performers can become high performers. And you absolutely must focus a good bit of your efforts on retaining your high-performing nurses.

Keeping those high performers happy and engaged while also addressing the low performers will inevitably help you keep your best staff for years to come. Here's how:

- **Check-in on your team and show them you care**

One of the easiest ways to stay in sync with your high performers (and all of your staff, for that matter) is to check in on each team member at least once a month. This will help you keep a pulse on issues your high performers are experiencing. It also provides them the opportunity to ask tough questions and empowers them by giving them a voice.

- **What gets rewarded gets repeated**

It's also incredibly important to recognize and reward exceptional performance. Remember, what gets rewarded gets repeated. Whether it's a formal acknowledgment or award, a handwritten thank you note, or even just a pat on the back, people like to know they are appreciated. Rewarding and recognizing your team for going the extra mile works, but you must do it consistently.

- **Work hard to address your low performer**

Low performers are literally low-hanging fruit, and the more their actions are tolerated, the less your high performers will want to stick around to deal with the fallout of their poor performance.

You simply can't afford to lose high performers in this climate. Learn more about how to use Huron's high-middle-low approach [here](#).

3. Expedite the time-to-hire process

When it comes to filling crucial gaps in your staffing, time is literally money. Take some time to re-evaluate how you can reduce the sometimes long and arduous time-to-hire process.

Here's a checklist to take to your Human Resources department. If you don't have an HR department, work through this list as best you can.

— Improve the career section of your website by offering an enhanced user experience.

Now's the time to work with your web team to audit your career page's user experience and see what might need to change. It could be as easy as moving an "apply here" button higher up on the page or even adding it to multiple locations. Whatever the possible hindrance is, identify it and resolve it soon.

— Utilize job posting optimization.

In 2022, it's no longer enough to post your job and simply hope that all the right candidates will come running to your door. Make sure you have a searchable URL for the job posting, use the right keywords, share the job posting on social media, post on high-traffic job boards, and even write a blog post about your hiring process.

These can all make a huge difference in the prevalence of your job posting.

— Write better job descriptions.

Don't be tempted to use trendy buzzwords like "ninja" or "guru." Stick to the facts of what the job truly entails. You've probably read a lot of job descriptions and felt more confused than informed. Be concise but direct; this will save both you and your candidates from wasting a lot of time.



— Streamline the requisition approval to hire for a vacancy.

If this process traditionally takes forever at your organization, do everything you can to streamline the time it takes to approve a requisition. Are there steps that can be removed from the process? What are you required to do on your end to make the process faster?

— Automate the interview scheduling process.

Once you have a viable candidate in the queue, the clock is ticking. If they haven't already, it won't be long before your candidate is interviewed and hired by another employer.

There are some great interview scheduling software options that utilize artificial intelligence to automate the interview scheduling process. This will help you get the best candidates in the door for interviews quicker, hopefully before they meet your competition or accept a job elsewhere.

— Streamline the interview process.

Just like you should automate the scheduling process for an interview, you need to make sure the interview process itself is running like clockwork. Don't waste time thinking about which people should be in the room, deciding what questions you will ask, or even booking a space to hold the interview. Plan your work, and work your plan! Then use the same plan over and over each time.

— Digitize reference checks

Checking references is probably one of the most important aspects of the hiring process—especially if you are being introduced to the candidate without any prior connections. But, it can also be very time-consuming to track down all of those references. By using an automated program that handles the reference-checking process for you, you will be on your way to greeting your new employee at orientation.

4. Prioritize a healthy workplace culture

Your staff doesn't just experience burnout from working long hours. Deficiencies in mental and emotional support are a real thing.

If you didn't have a process in place to support your staff mentally and emotionally, your areas of opportunity were most likely revealed very quickly during the pandemic. Staff didn't just need PPE during the pandemic. They needed to learn how to cope with emotional trauma every day, and they needed support from you.

Healthcare providers are notorious for putting their feelings aside to get the job done. The pandemic taught them to re-learn what self-care looks like. As a healthcare manager, it's now your responsibility to cultivate a healthy culture in your unit or department.

We'd suggest reaching out to your organization's behavioral health team for tips on how to make this realistic for your own area. Aside from prioritizing self-care, learn more from the AACN about their standards for creating a healthy work environment.

According to the AACN, the healthiest work environments integrate all six of these standards:

1. Skilled Communication
2. True Collaboration
3. Effective Decision Making
4. Appropriate Staffing
5. Meaningful Recognition
6. Authentic Leadership

You must do everything you can to make your department or unit the place where nurses want to work. If you're a nurse yourself, you know better than anyone that nurses talk—they will share the good, bad, and the ugly about their experiences. Make sure they only have "good" to share about your facility, floor, or unit.

5. Hire a staffing agency to handle everything for you

If you made it this far, you are probably thinking to yourself that although these tips sound great, you don't have the time, resources, or funds to make these changes on your own. This is the beauty of hiring a staffing agency like Interim HealthCare to do all the hard work for you.

We already have all these boxes checked, especially those that require automation, and we will bring the vetted candidates to your door.

If you're tired of going through the hiring process alone, reach out to Interim. We are here to help. We want to give you time back in your day— and, more importantly, we want to reduce the stress on you that is caused by the ever-present nursing crisis.

6. Know that you will survive this!

If we have learned anything from the pandemic, it's that we can do really hard things. Surviving this nursing crisis is no different. Take the tools you've learned from this guide and put them to good use. More importantly, reach out for help from Interim HealthCare if you need it. You don't have to do this on your own!

