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National Nurses Week: Honoring dedication and addressing workforce challenges

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The Buzz This Week

May honors nursing professionals and students, recognizing their dedication to serving patients and communities. The American Nurses Association (ANA) has chosen this year's theme as “You Make a Difference.” The ANA highlights 4 focus areas for the month of May: self-care, recognition, professional development, and community engagement. The second week of the month, May 6-12, is designated National Nurses Week, ending on the birthdate of Florence Nightingale, the nursing pioneer and founder of modern nursing. May 8 is designated as National Student Nurses Day and National School Nurse Day.

National Nurses Week provides multiple opportunities to recognize and appreciate the efforts of nurses. The ANA is kicking off the month with a “Text to Thank a Nurse” campaign, encouraging the public to show their gratitude to nurses by donating to the American Nurses Foundation. The American Nurses Foundation provides financial support for resources and programs aimed at promoting the mental, physical, and emotional well-being of nurses.

Some individual health systems are also celebrating their nursing workforce. For example, Vanderbilt University Medical Center celebrates nurses by honoring those nominated by their colleagues for going above and beyond delivering care. Novant Health is encouraging patients and their loved ones to recognize remarkable nurses through stories. To ensure that nurses feel appreciated year-round, it is essential to recognize their contributions beyond the designated National Nurses Week.

Why It Matters

For more than 20 years, Americans have rated nursing as the most honest and ethical profession, according to Gallup. Nurses work in every aspect of healthcare and are often the first healthcare worker to interact with a patient and deliver much of the hands-on care to patients. Nursing comprises the largest share of the healthcare workforce, with approximately 4.2 million active registered nurses nationwide—more than 3 times the amount of physicians in the U.S.

Yet the nursing profession in the U.S. is in crisis, facing major challenges even before the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Nurses continue to face high levels of burnout, with inadequate staffing currently the primary driver of burnout, according to ConnectRN. Nurses are experiencing increased workloads, unsafe work conditions, and lack of support from their workplaces. Nurses are also facing a spike in workplace violence, with Press Ganey reporting that on average, 2 nurses are assaulted every hour.

Recent polls indicate that half of nurses have considered leaving the profession, and there has been an accelerated exodus of nurses retiring earlier than anticipated. In addition, a Health Affairs study found that a significant number of younger nurses are leaving the workforce—a reflection of the current work environment and opportunities beyond the bedside. These factors further intensify the nursing workforce shortage in the U.S. as the demand for nursing and healthcare is only expected to increase with an aging population and higher prevalence of chronic diseases.

Nevertheless, Medscape's 2022 report on nurse career satisfaction found that 72% of nurses reported they are happy with their career choice, despite staffing shortages, burnout, and workplace safety. Nurse.org's 2023 State of Nursing report also confirmed nurses' devotion to the profession, revealing that 60% of nurses love being a nurse—though 62% report concern for the future of nursing. Employers, trade associations, policymakers, and educators are all working to improve the state of nursing.

Health systems are addressing the workforce challenges by increasing investment in upskilling and using modernized staffing models. Some providers are implementing gig work apps to fill open shifts by offering higher pay and shorter hours, while others are creating an internal staffing agency. Healthcare organizations and educators are working to improve the nursing pipeline, and in 2022, more than 135 nursing programs and partnerships were launched. Healthcare organizations must continue to address the challenges that face the nursing workforce, while planning for the future of the profession, so nurses can continue to deliver high-quality care to the patients and communities they serve.

Last month, the Improving Care and Access to Nurses (ICAN) Act was reintroduced to Congress after failing to pass in the last session of 2022. This legislation would remove practice barriers for advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs), which includes nurse practitioners, nurse anesthetists, nurse-midwives, and clinical nurse specialists. This bipartisan bill also aims to improve quality and increase access to services provided by APRNs under Medicare and Medicaid.

During the COVID-19 public health emergency, waivers were granted by the federal government and states for APRNs to practice at the top of their license. The [ANA shared](#), "APRNs fill an essential, often lifesaving role for people who may have no other access to critically important medical services. But it's not just rural America that stands to benefit. The ICAN Act means that communities nationwide will get improved access to high-quality care from trusted, highly skilled nurses." While there are still many legislative hurdles to clear, the bill is getting [strong support](#) from nursing leadership and national professional nursing organizations.

The nursing profession plays a vital role in healthcare, and it is important to recognize and celebrate their efforts. Although nurses face many challenges, they remain committed to their profession, and there are efforts underway to address the issues they face.

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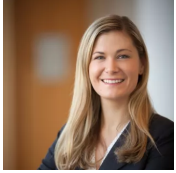
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