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More than 3 years into COVID, nursing workforce now holding steady—but with clear room for improvement

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What's Trending: New Survey Highlights Retention Improvements Organizations Can Control

A new national survey of more than 900 nurses reveals some good news on the healthcare workforce front: the trendline for nurses' job satisfaction is no longer pointing downward but holding flat from 2022.

Two-thirds of nurses say they are satisfied with their jobs—an identical number from the same survey conducted last year by Jarrard, Inc., a Chartis company. On the flip side, 19% of nurses are neutral about their jobs—and 15% describe themselves as dissatisfied.

While retaining nurses in this competitive workforce environment is a challenge, the survey probed nurses beyond compensation and benefits, pinpointing improvements that are within reach.

Why It Matters

Knowing what nurses need now can help healthcare leaders move the flat trendline on job satisfaction to an upward one. Key areas where nurses would like to see changes include:

1. Work dynamics. The percentage of nurses planning to stay in the profession is up across the board (across experience level and organization type). Whereas 75% of nurses in 2022 said they were likely to stay in healthcare, 81% said so this year.

But the dynamics of nurses' particular teams and day-to-day work life can dictate how much loyalty they will have to their organization. When asked what factors would meaningfully decrease their job satisfaction (excluding pay cuts and workload), the top 5 answers were:

- Difficulty meeting their basic physical needs while at work—such as eating, drinking, and using the restroom.
- Weak teamwork and communications within their department or practice.
- Insufficient support from their manager or team lead.
- Inadequate engagement between organizational leadership and their team.
- Too little two-way communication between their manager and team.

2. Trust in their leaders and organizations. 7 in 10 nurses feel loyal to their team, but loyalty declines when it comes to supervisors and organizations.

Fewer than half of nurses have a high degree of trust in their direct manager and department head, and that percentage declines further when it comes to the organization's Chief Nursing Officer, Chief Medical Officer, and Chief Executive Officer.

3. Organizational resources and support. Of the nurses surveyed, two-thirds or fewer believe their organization gives new nurses the early information, tools, and resources to succeed. That includes administrative/Human Resources needs, clinical preceptorship and medical operational needs, and getting up to speed on the job in the first 90 days.

Roughly half of nurses believe their organization is committed to the success and satisfaction of their experienced nurses. And just over half of nurses feel they are provided career growth opportunities.

What's Next

For organizations looking to improve retention among their nursing workforce, a set of concrete actions will be required. They include:

1. Identify and meet on-the-job needs. The top 5 factors nurses identified as contributors to greater job satisfaction (excluding pay and workload) were:

- More recognition, appreciation, or empathy from their manager and team lead.
- Stronger interdisciplinary teamwork and communications within their department or practice.
- Ability to meet basic physical needs—such as eating, drinking, and using the restroom—while at work.
- More authentic two-way communication between their manager and their team.
- An easier time obtaining supplies and medications they need to help their patients.

But leaders shouldn't assume these are the top 5 for their organizations. They need to start by surveying their own nursing staff to understand factors that are specific to their organizations and the individual nursing units.

“At the most basic levels, these professionals need to work in an environment that meets their physical needs and ensures their safety,” said psychologist [Dan Shapiro, PhD, Director of the Chartis Center for Burnout Solutions](#). “Health systems often think an employee’s relationship with their manager will have the most significant impact. But if nurses are hungry, dehydrated, haven’t had regular access to a bathroom, and are dealing with violent patients, their relationship with their manager isn’t the most important thing in their professional environment.”

2. Cultivate communications and accountability. 3 of the top 5 factors nurses identified as *decreasing* their job satisfaction were around communications and engagement. On the flip side, 2 of the top 5 factors that would increase job satisfaction were also related to greater communications and engagement—especially within their direct teams and departments.

The challenge of building trust in leaders and the organization is closely tied to having authentic and frequent two-way communication. Improving the communication skills of immediate supervisors can have the most impactful, direct benefit on the team.

Providing communications training for nurse managers will be key. “Give them time, resources, and encouragement to be more present with their team,” said [James Cervantes](#), Vice President at Jarrard. “Importantly, train them to invest in and engage with young nurses early on—and to make relationships-building expectations of their jobs as managers.”

“And, equally important, continue to cultivate established nurses. Those regular check-ins with and clear communication from managers will help more experienced nurses remain connected with the organization and their role in it,” Cervantes said.

But direct managers shouldn’t be the only ones held accountable for strong two-way communications. Culture and communication starts at the top—behaviors an organization needs from its staff should be modeled by its leaders.

3. Revamp onboarding for new nurses and support for experienced nurses. In addition to lower marks on organizational resources and support, only 1 in 4 nurses give the onboarding process high marks. As a first impression of your organization’s commitment to their success, it’s important to get it right.

Efforts to strengthen onboarding should include expanding preceptor programs. Rather than throwing new nurses into the fire of clinical care before they’re fully ready, focus on ways to provide them with a consistent, complete preceptor experience. In addition to clinical onboarding, ensure nurses have the complete picture of their work. Clearly define the administrative side of onboarding, including plenty of time with colleagues and team leads to talk about team dynamics.

For established nurses, provide ongoing opportunities to grow and advance in ways meaningful to each individual. Involve them in dialogue about the organization so they can see where things are headed. When employees don't see that direction or feel left out of change, they're less likely to stay.

"We want our workforce to be able to see that they have a future career where they can grow here," said [Kevin Kearns, PhD](#), Vice President at Jarrard. "One of the things we need to do is grow the ability for employees to manage change ... to learn and grow, to be able to shift around in the organization to have a bigger impact."

Taking action in these clear areas for improvement can help turn the flat trendline for nurse job satisfaction into an upward trendline for retention at your organization.

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