Emerging from the perfect storm: Breaking the unsustainable cycles challenging nursing today

A panel of clinical experts at the NG Healthcare Virtual Summit share their insights on how to better support and engage with your nurses and create a working environment where they'll want to stay.

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While the nursing shortage has been building for years, we recently saw the largest drop in four decades.[1] Between 2021 and 2022, median nursing tenure fell by 19.5%.[2] As a result, there is an increasingly novice workforce caring for sicker and more complex patients.

63% of new graduate nurses report not being **ready for practice**[3]

56% lack **confidence** in their abilities, putting patient care at risk[4]

Healthcare organizations have been operating in crisis mode, applying bandages like relying on staffing agencies for interim solutions. This Q&A, inspired by the NG Healthcare Virtual Summit panel discussion, highlights expert insights on:

- providing effective and engaging support to help improve new nurse competence and confidence
- creating an environment where nurses not only want to work, but want to stay
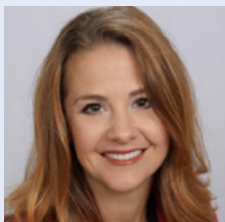- solving challenges with fewer resources

Panelist contributors at the NG Healthcare Virtual Summit

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Narrowing the experience-complexity gap

As time shortens for delivering clinical experiences in school, the complexity of healthcare continues to grow.

Q. How can organizations think differently about how they support practice readiness for novice nurses?

A. Thinking differently requires collaboration with academic partners in support of students and novice nurses. This early engagement can generate positive results in recruitment, retention, and care quality.

One solution is to create or expand externship programs that blend professional development with clinical skill training. Complementing traditional nurse shadowing with virtual learning experiences results in a better-equipped, confident graduate and a positive perspective of your organization.

Q. How can novice nurses learn clinical decision making?

A. In addition to academic methods, clinical decision-making confidence grows through guided "real world" experience. Practice opportunities **within a safe, supported environment**, whether virtual or in person, are an ideal next step.

> **"We consistently see that nurses have less face time with real people… we are having to revamp our approach as to how we onboard and continue to support the confidence and competence of our nurses."**
>
> – Lya M. Cartwright-Stroupe

> **"Not all virtual learning technology is created equally. Organizations… should look to high fidelity simulations with realistic, complex, and diverse patient scenarios that represent what clinicians experience in real life today."**
>
> – Tiffany McCauley

In the first few months of nursing and beyond, using technology to reinforce traditional training is powerful. With a virtual residency program, e-learning modules can be customized to complement in-person learning. Gathering nurses' feedback through surveys and logs helps to keep communication lines open with their managers and support teams. Analytics offer nurse leaders another view into how nurses are performing so they can intervene promptly to address problem areas.

Q. How can organizations innovate and implement efficient processes to ensure novice nurse competency?

A. You can **incorporate real-life practice** through an immersive virtual learning experience that allows nurses to explore patient care while safely testing their skills. Realistic simulations can meet new nurses' needs for expanded clinical and professional education and help them practice communicating with patients and the interprofessional care team. Virtual patients with complex medical and personal backgrounds built on diversity and inclusion principles offer a breadth of experience that may not be readily available any other way.

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Addressing high novice nurse turnover

The pressures of beginning a nursing career can be alleviated with close connection to the organization's culture.

Q. What organizational shifts can be made to address cultural challenges?

A. Values are reflected in everything from the vision of your organization to the benefits offered. Efforts to understand what matters most to your nurses build and nurture a connection based on shared values. By offering specialty virtual training that helps to support, inspire, and motivate, you can keep individuals engaged in their own advancement from the early days of their careers.

"It's really a focus on employee engagement and helping them feel that they belong and have a contribution to what you are trying to achieve."

– Paula F. Coe

Work benefits that reflect quality of life values appeal to today's nurses. Examples include access to a free college education for children of staff, tuition reimbursement, and assistance in paying student loans.

Becoming a nurse takes time and financial resources, and non-traditional paths can mean working while learning. Creating a clear, organizationally supported career path that recognizes the need for time to study and assists in managing finances earns loyalty as well as the benefits of a more skilled staff member.

"We can help them achieve what they want to achieve. "

– Michele Szkolnicki

Q. How do you think the rise in travel nurses is impacting the field of nursing?

A. Since travel nurses bring a wide range of valuable experiences and skills, providing evidence-based tools to support consistent, high quality care is critical.

To maintain a strong culture while incorporating the flexibility of travel nursing, creating "internal travel agencies" is a creative option, offering variety in locations for nurses and consistency and talent retention for the organization.

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The shifting role of nursing and morale

Ongoing pressures are battering nurse morale as well as leading to an evolving nursing care model to address delivery and fuel nurses' positivity.

Q. What changes in nursing roles are occurring?

A. Organizations are moving away from a primary nursing model of care by increasingly using LPNs and technicians as nursing extenders to fill care needs. A blended team at the bedside is common, and evidence-based, standardized care is critical as responsibilities shift to ensure the quality is consistent. Providing a variety of learning modalities across the care team meets varying generational needs, leading to higher satisfaction and a career track to success.

> **"The work we do with organizations provides the resources to help standardize care as those clinicians are going on those career tracks. And that's important as you think about satisfaction and reward. We need to fully utilize the broader team's skill set as we optimize how healthcare is provided."**
>
> – Tiffany McCauley

> **"We need to be innovative and break the paradigm of nursing practice and care delivery models. We need to be nimble, flexible and try out of the box ideas to break the cycle."**
>
> – Paula F. Coe

Q. How can organizations provide learning tools that build novice nurses' morale and confidence?

A. Innovative technologies are shown to be effective in bringing novice nurses up to speed. Virtual education for clinical, professional and communication skills enhance competence, helping nurses and nurse extenders feel confident and ready to practice. You can deliver top benefits for your organization and nurses alike by evaluating your options for evidence-based quality, breadth, and depth of content. Then, implement the option that demonstrates success by offering engaging, immediately accessible content that fits a wide range of learning modalities.

References

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