

CHAPTER 3 - DEVELOPING, SUSTAINING, AND RETAINING NURSES IN THEIR CAREERS

RECOMMENDATION #3

Ensure a workplace culture that values the physical and psychological safety and well-being of nurses

Nurses are at the frontline of health care, providing essential services that demand not only physical stamina but also emotional resilience. The nature of their work exposes them to various risks, including occupational injuries, infectious diseases, emotional and psychological stress, harassment, and assault. A supportive workplace culture that prioritizes their safety and well-being can have far-reaching positive effects on health care delivery, patient care, and the nursing profession as a whole.

ENHANCING PATIENT CARE AND SAFETY

The well-being of nurses is intrinsically linked to the quality of patient care and safety. Nurses who work in environments that prioritize their health and safety are more likely to be engaged, attentive, and capable of delivering high-quality care. They are less prone to making errors, more likely to catch potential issues before they escalate, and better equipped to provide compassionate care. A positive workplace culture can reduce burnout and turnover, helping to retain experienced nurses in the profession, thereby maintaining a stable and skilled workforce dedicated to patient safety.

PROMOTING NURSE RETENTION AND RECRUITMENT

Nursing shortages pose a significant challenge to health care systems, and a workplace that values nurse safety and well-being can significantly enhance retention by creating a positive and supportive environment that encourages nurses to stay in their positions long term. Moreover, fostering a culture of safety and well-being can make the profession more attractive to potential employees and help to alleviate workforce shortages. This is particularly crucial in attracting the next generation of nurses, who increasingly prioritize workplace culture, life work balance, recognition, and values in their career choices.

Nurses' Perception of Employer Priorities, US

"My workplace culture prioritizes the well-being of its staff."

31% Agree or Strongly Agree
42% Disagree or Strongly Disagree

- Pulse on the Nation's Nurses: Mental Health and Wellness Survey by American Nurses Foundation; <https://www.nursingworld.org/practice-policy/work-environment/health-safety/disaster>

SUPPORTING MENTAL HEALTH

The emotional and psychological demands of nursing—dealing with suffering, death, and critical situations—can take a significant toll on nurses' mental health. A culture that promotes psychological safety, provides support for mental health, and encourages open discussions about stress and burnout is essential for helping nurses manage these challenges. Access to resources such as counseling services, stress management programs, and peer support can help nurses maintain their mental health and perform their roles effectively.

ENHANCING TEAMWORK AND COLLABORATION

A workplace culture that values safety and well-being fosters a sense of camaraderie and collaboration among nurses and between interdisciplinary teams. When nurses feel supported and safe, they are more likely to contribute ideas, speak up about concerns, and work together to solve problems, leading to more effective teamwork and improved patient outcomes. Such an environment encourages learning and innovation, allowing nurses to share knowledge and best practices. Intentional efforts to promote effective team-based care are needed, with dedicated time and resources for team development. The holistic perspective that nurses bring to the table makes nurses well suited to lead interprofessional teams.

REDUCING HEALTH CARE COSTS

Investing in the safety and well-being of nurses can also lead to cost savings for health care organizations. Costs associated with nurse turnover, absenteeism, and occupational injuries can be significant. By creating a safer and healthier work environment, health care organizations can reduce these costs. Furthermore, by improving the quality of care and patient safety, organizations can capitalize on the financial incentives associated with quality care and outcomes for patients.

"Only one quarter of nurses (26%) say their employer supports a culture of wellness a great deal or a lot, down from 34% in 2021. Nearly one-half (46%) say their employer supports a culture of wellness a little or not at all."

- AMN Healthcare Survey of Registered Nurses, 2023; <https://www.amnhealthcare.com/siteassets/amn-insights/surveys/amn-rnsurvey-2023-final.pdf>

BUILDING A POSITIVE PUBLIC IMAGE

Health care organizations that are known for valuing their employees' safety and well-being are more likely to be viewed positively by the public and their own staff. This positive reputation can enhance patient satisfaction, attract high-quality health care professionals, and position the organization as a leader in health care delivery.

Cultivating a workplace culture that prioritizes the physical and psychological safety and well-being of nurses is not just an ethical imperative—it is a strategic necessity. By investing in the well-being of nurses, health care organizations can ensure a more resilient, effective, and sustainable health care system. The Task Force on the Future of the Nursing Workforce recommends the following strategies to ensure a workplace culture that values the physical and psychological safety and well-being of nurses:

Strategy 9 – Create and promote a supportive and inclusive workplace culture (Page 63)

Strategy 10 – Protect nurses from violence in the workplace (Page 68)

Strategy 11 – Increase awareness and support for the mental health of nurses (Page 74)

Strategy 12 – Evaluate the current state of efforts to address equity in the nursing workforce (Page 77)