RECOMMENDATION #5

Improve retention of nurses in practice environments with high rates of turnover or vacancies by addressing work environment issues such as workloads and offering flexibility in scheduling

Retention of nursing staff has emerged as a significant challenge within the health care sector for a variety of reasons, ranging from workplace conditions to personal factors affecting nurses' job satisfaction and career choices. One of the primary reasons for the difficulty in retaining nursing staff is **workplace stress and burnout**. Nurses often work in high-stress environments characterized by long hours, heavy workloads, and emotionally taxing situations. The relentless pace, coupled with the emotional strain of providing care, can lead to burnout, prompting some nurses to leave the profession.

Work-life balance, compensation, and workplace policies also play a significant role in retention of nurses, particularly in direct care roles. In some regions and practice settings, nurses feel that their salaries do not adequately reflect the skill level required, the responsibilities of their role, or the risks they face. Younger generations of workers have changing expectations and priorities when it comes to choosing work hours, opportunities to work remotely, flexibility to meet family caregiving needs, and other aspects their jobs or careers that can be related to workplace policies.

Other important aspects of retention have been addressed in previous sections of this report, including professional development, culture, and workplace safety:

- **Professional development and career advancement** - A lack of clear career progression paths or opportunities for further education and skill development can leave nurses feeling stagnant and undervalued, prompting them to seek employment elsewhere in order to grow professionally.

- **Workplace culture and management practices** - A supportive work environment that fosters respect, teamwork, and open communication can enhance job satisfaction, whereas a toxic workplace culture can drive nurses away. Effective leadership and supportive management practices that involve nurses in decision-making and recognize their contributions can improve job satisfaction and retention rates.

- **Physical and psychological safety of the workplace** - Nurses who feel unsafe—whether due to inadequate personal protective equipment, violence in the workplace, or exposure to toxic behaviors—are more likely to leave their positions.

Focusing on strategies to improve the retention of existing nurses is crucial. The cost of turnover is high, not just in financial terms but also in terms of patient care quality and safety. Experienced nurses bring invaluable expertise and stability to health care teams, contributing to better patient outcomes. Improving retention can also help to alleviate the current and projected nursing shortages, ensuring that health care systems can meet the growing demand for care.

The Task Force on the Future of the Nursing Workforce recommends the following strategies to improve the retention of nurses in practice environments with high rates of turnover:

Strategy 15 – Expand opportunities for non-traditional employment schedules and settings and increase family-friendly workplace policies (Page 91)

Strategy 16 – Decrease the experience of high workload and documentation burden for nurses (Page 95)

Strategy 17 – Retain nurses in North Carolina and incentivize practice in needed roles and rural areas (Page 100)

Related Recommendations from Other Groups

Nurse Staffing Task Force. Nurse Staffing Task Force Imperatives, Recommendations, and Actions. American Association of Critical-Care Nurses and American Nurses Association; 2023

- **Recommendation: Modernize care delivery models and ensure they are inclusive, evidence informed, and technologically advanced**

- **Recommendation: Reduce physical workload and cognitive overload and prioritize high value patient care by incentivizing the de-implementation of high-burden/low-value nursing tasks**