



## Strategy 16

### Decrease the experience of high workload and documentation burden for nurses

#### Strategy 16.1 Employers of nurses should consider:

- Designating nurse-led interprofessional committee to review all documentation fields in their charting system, electronic or otherwise.
- Ensuring that nurses are part of the decision-making team about procurement of technology solutions; provide guidance on pilot testing, implementation processes, and strategies to navigate implementation challenges; and are provided resources for ongoing tech support.
- Identifying strategies to minimize the additional work that nurses are called upon to do to fill gaps left by inadequate support staff and other health care team members.
- Ensuring that job descriptions accurately reflect the role that is expected of the nurse and are updated as needed.
- Compensating nurses for time spent in required or optional trainings and finding opportunities to improve the efficiency of completing trainings.
- Improving awareness and knowledge about documentation tools available in the organization, such as speech recognition technology, dictation programs, and smart phrases for documentation of care plans and patient education.

**Strategy 16.2** To incentivize time-limited commitments to serve in roles as health care support staff (e.g., environmental services, catering, etc.), associations representing employers of nurses should conduct an environmental scan of existing employment programs that pay for support staff to earn health care professional certifications or degrees and increase awareness of these programs.

#### Desired Result

Nurses will have reduced stress and burnout related to workload and will be part of decision-making about processes and technologies that will impact their workload and patient care.

#### Why does the task force recommend this strategy?

It is crucial for employers to actively engage in reducing the workload of nurses by addressing pivotal issues such as documentation burden, gaps in support staffing, and decisions about technology solutions. Excessive documentation requirements can significantly detract from patient care, consuming time that could be better spent on direct patient interactions. Furthermore, insufficient support staffing amplifies the strain on nurses, compelling them to assume a broader range of tasks that could be allocated to support personnel, diluting the quality of nursing care. Decisions regarding the implementation of technology solutions also hold profound implications for workload management. Thoughtfully chosen and well-implemented technology can streamline processes, reduce manual tasks, and enhance efficiency. Conversely, poorly selected or implemented systems can add complexity, hinder workflow, and increase the burden on nurses. Addressing these issues is not merely about improving operational efficiency; it's about safeguarding the well-being of nurses, enhancing patient care quality, and fostering a sustainable work environment that can attract and retain skilled nursing professionals.

#### Context

A survey of NC nurses who work full- or part-time found that:



42% have Marginal or Poor control over their workload

39% have Marginal or Poor sufficiency of time for documentation



36% say their work atmosphere is intense, hectic, or chaotic

A national survey of nurses found that **TWO of the TOP FIVE** best strategies for reducing stress among nurses are:

**1.** Increase support staff (90% agree)

**2.** Increase nurse input into decision-making (86% agree)

Source: Pulse on the Nation's Nurses: Mental Health and Wellness Survey by American Nurses Foundation, 2023; <https://www.nursingworld.org/practice-policy/work-environment/health-safety/disaster-preparedness/coronavirus/what-you-need-to-know/survey-4/>; AMN Healthcare Survey of Registered Nurses, 2023; <https://www.amnhealthcare.com/siteassets/amn-insights/surveys/amn-rnsurvey-2023-final.pdf>

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

*“[N]ew documentation is added periodically without a review of all existing documentation and this practice leads to duplication and redundancy that causes clinician dissatisfaction and can negatively impact patient safety when documentation requirements become overly onerous and reduce time for direct patient care.”*

-Cooper AL, et al. Co-design of an intervention to reduce the burden of clinical documentation: A clinician-researcher collaboration. *Applied Nursing Research*. 2023(73). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apnr.2023.151730>

### DOCUMENTATION BURDEN

Nurses are required to complete extensive documentation in the electronic health record (EHR) to ensure accurate patient records, comply with legal requirements, and facilitate billing processes. This extensive documentation can be time-consuming and diminishes the time available for direct patient care. Moreover, it can contribute to nurse burnout and dissatisfaction, as the administrative tasks are perceived as detracting from the core nursing responsibilities of care and compassion.<sup>96</sup> Nurses experience frustration that many EHRs design nursing documentation as check boxes that do not reflect nursing level of effort, the cognitive and analytical abilities of nurses, and their need to document the human response. The increasing complexity of health care services, alongside regulatory and accreditation requirements, further exacerbates the documentation demands.

Opportunities for health care organizations to diminish documentation burden include:

- Reviewing processes that eliminate duplicative or excessive requirements
- Charting by exception, where appropriate
- Identifying items that nurses are charting “because no one else will/can”
- Implementing policies around documentation at the appropriate level (unit, department, etc.) to divide documentation requirements among team members
- Reducing the number of “Best Practice Advisory” reminders while charting
- Collaborating with IT departments to identify nurses with high documentation time burdens to target training on existing EHR tools that can decrease burden

### IMPLEMENTING NEW TECHNOLOGY

Involving nurses in the decision-making process about new technologies in the health care setting is critical from the beginning of a procurement process through implementation.<sup>97</sup> Given their frontline role in patient care and their direct interaction with these technologies daily, nurses have invaluable insights into the practicalities of care processes, patient needs, and the usability of technology in clinical settings. Their input can help identify solutions that truly support clinical workflows, improve patient care, and address existing challenges. Moreover, including nurses in technology decisions promotes a sense of ownership and acceptance among the nursing staff, facilitating smoother adoption and integration of new systems. It ensures that such advancements are not only technologically sound but also clinically relevant and user-friendly, leading to better utilization and enhanced patient care.

*“Successfully introducing new technology into healthcare settings requires strong partnerships with nurses to drive adoption and deliver value.... Early on, identify the right clinical stakeholders whom the solution will impact: nurses, physicians or both. Then intentionally build relationships between these clinical stakeholders and IT.”*

-Accenture. How talent and technology can help solve the nursing shortage. <https://www.accenture.com/content/dam/accenture/final/accenture-com/document/Accenture-Solving-The-Nursing-Shortage-For-The-Future.pdf#zoom=40>

**39% of clinicians don't believe digital health tools are effectively integrated into their workflows.**

-Accenture. How talent and technology can help solve the nursing shortage. <https://www.accenture.com/content/dam/accenture/final/accenture-com/document/Accenture-Solving-The-Nursing-Shortage-For-The-Future.pdf#zoom=40>

**Nursing informaticists** are highly specialized nurses who operate at the intersection of nursing, information science, and computer technology. Their expertise is pivotal in designing, implementing, and optimizing EHRs and other health care IT systems to support clinical practice and enhance patient care. Nursing informaticists apply their comprehensive understanding of nursing workflows, clinical processes, and technological capabilities to ensure that IT systems are user-friendly, efficient, and effective in meeting the needs of both health care providers and patients. They also play a role in training nursing staff on new technologies, leading quality improvement initiatives, and analyzing data to inform health care decisions and policy.

Once new technologies are implemented, there should be “a continual feedback loop and open communication so that nurses feel that they have a place to voice concerns over what is not working. [Leadership should] heed feedback and if necessary, remodel work so that technology becomes part of the workforce, not just a tool”.<sup>97</sup>

### ADEQUATE SUPPORT STAFFING

Support staff in health care settings play crucial roles that are foundational to the smooth operation of health care services and directly impact patient care quality. These roles include, but are not limited to:

- **Medical Assistants** - Perform both clinical and administrative tasks, helping with patient intake, taking vital signs, preparing patients for examinations, and managing medical records.
- **Nursing Assistants and Patient Care Technicians** - Provide direct care to patients, such as bathing, dressing, and feeding, assisting with mobility, and monitoring vital signs.
- **Environmental and Food Services Staff** - These team members are responsible for maintaining a clean and safe environment within health care facilities and providing meals to patients.



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

- **Pharmacy Technicians** - Assist pharmacists in preparing and distributing medications, managing inventory, and handling prescriptions.
- **Laboratory Technicians** - Conduct a wide range of tests that are critical for diagnosing and monitoring diseases.

Each of these roles contributes to a holistic approach to patient care, ensuring operational efficiency, enhancing patient experience, and supporting the clinical staff in delivering high-quality care. When health care settings experience a lack of adequate support staff, nurses face a multitude of challenges that can significantly impact their ability to provide high-quality patient care, as well as their personal well-being. Most significant among these challenges is an increased workload, in addition to concerns about quality of patient care, strains on nurse-patient relationships, and time and resources for activities like leadership development, continuing education, and mentorship.

Examples of tasks that fall on nurses without enough support staff include answering the phone, cleaning the refrigerators, wiping down toilets, cleaning the water dispenser, cleaning equipment and beds, and transporting patients who are not acutely ill. Nurses may also take on tasks that other health care personnel would typically be responsible for, such as walking a patient when the physical therapist is not available, providing respiratory treatment when the respiratory therapist is not available, feeding a patient when the speech therapist is not available, or teaching patients about their medications when the pharmacist is not available. While nurses are skilled in doing these tasks and they are within nurses' scope of practice, this creates additional workload.

### KEY RESOURCE NEEDS



Safety net and other providers with fewer financial resources may need additional funding or reallocation of resources to implement new trainings and processes.