



Strategy 7

Identify opportunities for nurses to participate in educational advancement, leadership, mentoring, and preceptorship

Strategy 7.1 Employers should consider:

- Partnering with academic institutions and NC AHEC to create cross-training and refresher course opportunities for nurses to transition into different specialty areas if desired, allowing for flexibility within nursing education and clinical practice.
- Prioritizing education initiatives and work schedule flexibility to support nursing staff seeking higher education opportunities, such as accelerated BSN programs, LPN to BSN, MSN entry programs, DNP, and PhD pathways.

Desired Result

Nurses interested in developing new skills or pursuing further education in nursing will be encouraged and supported by their employers.

Why does the task force recommend this strategy?

Employers can help to develop the careers of their nurse employees by supporting them in their pursuit of developing new skills or furthering their education. Doing so can directly contribute to the enhancement of patient care quality, fostering a culture of continuous learning, and boosting overall job satisfaction and retention rates. When nurses are encouraged and supported to advance their education and skill set, they bring back a wealth of knowledge and innovative practices to their workplace, improving patient outcomes and health care delivery. This investment in nurses' professional development also signals to the staff that their growth and contributions are valued, leading to increased loyalty and a lower likelihood of turnover. Furthermore, by facilitating opportunities for advancement, employers can cultivate a workforce that is versatile, highly skilled, and better equipped to meet the evolving demands of health care. This not only strengthens the health care team's capacity to tackle complex patient care challenges but also positions the organization as a forward-thinking and desirable employer for current and prospective nursing professionals.

Context

TRAINING FOR NEW ROLES

Nurses can practice in a wide variety of practice settings and specialties with some additional training and orientation. Most nursing curricula remain focused on the acute care environment, however the need for more nurses in other care delivery settings, especially community settings, is needed. For nurses seeking a change, curious about different patient populations, or interested in learning new skills, the opportunity to explore these options can be a significant incentive to remain in practice and continue working for their employer. For employers, particularly in larger practices or health systems, this can be an opportunity to retain valuable employees.

Considerations for providing opportunities to learn new skills and change roles include:

- Regulatory Requirements** - Different specialties may have specific regulatory requirements or certifications. Ensuring that the cross-training meets these requirements is crucial for the nurse to practice legally and effectively in the new specialty area.

- Clinical Competencies** -The training should encompass the necessary clinical competencies required for the new specialty. This includes both theoretical knowledge and practical skills, ensuring that the nurse can provide safe and effective care in their new role.
- Mentorship and Support** - Transitioning to a new specialty can be challenging. Providing access to mentorship from experienced professionals in the target specialty can greatly enhance the learning experience, offering guidance, support, and real-world insights.
- Integration of Evidence-Based Practice** - The training should incorporate the latest evidence-based practices relevant to the new specialty. Keeping abreast of current research and best practices ensures that nurses can provide the most up-to-date care.
- Flexibility in Training Delivery** - Considering the busy schedules of nursing professionals, offering flexible training delivery methods such as online modules, part-time classes, or intensive workshops can make it more feasible for nurses to participate.

Spotlight on North Carolina

Primary Care RN Certificate at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill – The certificate is “self-paced and consists of 5 modules. Modules review common issues in contemporary primary care settings and incorporate how changes to patient care delivery systems impact RN practice.... This broad overview of primary care will help RNs currently working in acute or long-term care to become familiar with primary care terminology, concepts, and basic skills. Every module culminates in a twenty to twenty-five-question, multiple-choice exam that assesses your mastery of the learning outcomes”.

Source: The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Primary Care RN Certificate at UNC-Chapel Hill. <https://primarycare.web.unc.edu/course-description>

Primary Care Certificate at Western Carolina University – WCU has successfully trained new graduate nurses through a post-BSN residency model and has developed specific continuing education focused on primary care nursing. The certificate “prepare[s] baccalaureate nurses to function at the highest level of their license in all aspects of inter-professional primary care. Nurses will be prepared to function as leaders and educators providing excellent care in patient-centered health maintenance, prevention of illness, chronic disease management, triage, case management, quality metrics and population health”.

Source: The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Primary Care RN Certificate at UNC-Chapel Hill. <https://primarycare.web.unc.edu/course-description>

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

SUPPORTING NURSES IN CONTINUING EDUCATION

Providing flexibility and support to nurses to seek advanced degrees in nursing can benefit employers in several ways. These include higher skill levels in patient care, implementation of best practices, increased leadership experience, increased compliance with accreditation standards, employee loyalty, and attracting new talent.

Employers can adopt several strategies to help nurses have the flexibility to pursue further education. Some effective approaches include:

- **Flexible Scheduling** - Implementing flexible work schedules or reduced hours can accommodate nurses' class times and study requirements. This could involve offering longer but fewer shifts per week (e.g., three 12-hour shifts) or allowing for part-time work arrangements.
- **Tuition Assistance Programs** - Providing financial support through tuition reimbursement or scholarships can alleviate the financial burden of further education on nurses. This support can be linked to service commitments, ensuring that the organization retains skilled employees after their educational advancement.
- **Leave of Absence or Educational Leave** - Offering sabbaticals or leaves of absence for nurses pursuing advanced degrees or certifications can be a significant support, allowing them to focus on their studies without the stress of balancing work and education simultaneously.
- **Career Development Planning** - Working with nurses to develop personalized career development plans that include educational goals can help align their aspirations with organizational needs. This planning can help identify the best times for pursuing further education based on the nurse's career trajectory and the employer's staffing needs.
- **Supportive Workplace Culture** - Cultivating a culture that values continuous learning and professional development can motivate nurses to pursue further education. Recognition of educational achievements and creating an environment that encourages sharing new knowledge and skills with colleagues can further enhance this culture.
- **Partnerships with Educational Institutions** - Establishing partnerships with colleges and universities can provide nurses with benefits such as discounted tuition, specialized programs tailored to the organization's needs, and direct access to educational advisors.
- **Professional Development Opportunities** - Offering in-house training, workshops, seminars, and conferences can complement formal education and provide nurses with additional learning opportunities that are directly relevant to their work.

KEY RESOURCE NEEDS



Trade associations representing employers of nurses should help employers implement strategies to promote career progression for nurses through additional training and education by developing and/or promoting resources that help employers learn from best practices from their peers and research, employer trade associations, and the NC Center on the Workforce for Health.



Employers will need to identify additional resources or reallocate existing resources to accomplish this work. Health care payers could help by identifying payment incentives for employers to provide educational advancement opportunities to nurses.