The nursing profession is being faced with the dilemma of increasing retention and decreasing turnover of nursing staff in the face of economic limitations. Given the current state of the economy, turnover has decreased significantly as retirees continue to work and part-time employees work full-time to support their families. As a profession, nursing needs to be forward thinking; as the economy improves, the anticipated shortage will impact all areas of healthcare. Older nurses will retire, and younger nurses will relocate or change jobs. In the United States, 1.2 million new and replacement nurses will be needed by 2014.1

When a nurse resigns, the vacancy needs to be filled, which incurs added cost for orientation and has a direct impact on the budget. Recent studies report the costs of nurse turnover to range from $22,000 to $64,000 per nurse in the United States.2 Although turnover can’t be eliminated; the realistic and proactive goal is to minimize its impact. Predicting possible turnover will permit intervention to promote retention, control timing of departures, and provide time for contingency planning that’s proactive rather than reactive.

Nurse leaders need to recognize that focusing on job satisfaction, generational expectations, social connectivity, and surroundings to improve work environments will potentially reduce job turnover. The relative impact of job satisfaction, pay satisfaction, and organizational commitment on turnover intentions suggests that organizational commitment has the strongest and most direct impact. Organizational characteristics that influence retention and turnover will be the foundation for future recruitment.

Nurses’ job satisfaction
Job satisfaction is a critical factor in the recruitment and retention of nurses. Aiken and associates reported that 41% of U.S. nurses were dissatisfied with their jobs, and nearly one in four plans to leave their job within a year. Nurse dissatisfaction is present in all organizations to some degree, according to the American Organization of Nurse Executives. The key variables associated with nurses’ job satisfaction are communication with supervisor, autonomy, recognition, routinization, communication with peers, fairness, and locus of control.3 Autonomy and task delegation are the strongest predictors for job satisfaction. It’s important for staff members to know who’s responsible for what tasks in the workplace. Having autonomy and control over workplace decisions is crucial to employee satisfaction.4

Creating a shared vision supports commitment to pursuing collective goals and interests. Job satisfaction highlights four recurrent themes: leadership, professional growth, pay, and stress. Stress is a contributing factor to intent to leave and turnover.5 Working in an organization where values coincide with one’s own is an important determinant of job satisfaction. Job satisfaction is the culmination of many variables that predict how people perform at work (such as attendance, tardiness, and completion of tasks) and whether they’re likely to voluntarily leave their position.6

Blegen and Mueller reported eight factors that influenced retention: satisfaction with extrinsic rewards, scheduling, family/work balance, coworkers/social ties, interaction, professional opportunities, praise/recognition, and control/responsibility.3 These factors contribute to satisfaction or dissatisfaction and have a direct connection to nurses’ value systems. Creating an environment where nurses feel they make a difference is of critical importance to satisfaction and retention. A good working relationship among staff, colleagues, and supervisors is essential to a healthy work environment.4
Sherman and Dyess reported 30% of new nurses leave their first nursing job during their first year and 57% of new nurses leave their first job by the end of 2 years. New nurses have reported feeling completely overwhelmed by the challenge of learning the job in the face of abbreviated orientations, staffing shortages, high patient acuity, short lengths of stay, and high expectations from staff and patients. Communication and social connection would decrease the stress associated with these challenges. Open communication leads to trust and improved social connectivity, which may improve creativity and innovation, increasing satisfaction and decreasing turnover.

Job satisfaction makes a difference in maintaining qualified nurses in the profession. Factors include professional autonomy, leader role expectations, organizational climate, perceived role conflict and role ambiguity, leadership behaviors, and organizational characteristics. Nurses need to take responsibility for their own career happiness. A positive patient experience early in nurses’ careers keeps them seeking additional opportunities for such a connection throughout their work lives. Patient connection and social connectivity are a means to increasing retention and job satisfaction. Mentors who can model that connection are demonstrating that positive patient experiences have an enormous impact on new nurses’ careers.

Workforce management policies and nurses’ perceptions of staffing adequacy are areas of documented satisfaction. These include management’s responsive to concerns, opportunities are available to participate in decision making, and acknowledgment of contributions to patient care are intrinsically important.

**Generational expectations**
The generational majorities in the nursing profession are a mix of baby boomers, generation X, and millennials. Knowing the goals and values of the generations is an important component in designing a future work environment that seeks to promote retention. Organizational factors are key components for generation X and millennials.

Generational differences have a direct impact on retention and turnover of nursing staff. Basic assessment of why a particular unit or area of specialty was chosen and basic knowledge of generational characteristics, coupled with knowledge of the work environment, will effectively provide the information needed to influence retention of the newly hired employee. These points will augment the nurse manager’s ability to predict turnover and intervene to decrease turnover rates.

Turnover among younger generations is more likely and needs to be recognized before taking steps to set aggressive goals for new employee retention. The next generations will continue to gravitate toward educational exploration, new specialties, the journey to goal realization and achievement, new geographic regions, and innovative jobs. Investment in training and retention programs are the best means to ensure return on investments in recruiting strategies. One key component to a successful retention strategy is to implement leadership accountability for new employee turnover. Studies show that a negative perception during the first 60 to 90 days of employment can lead new personnel to look for a new job within the year.

**Organization and leadership impact**
Nurse job satisfaction dimensions, other than salary and incentive, include leadership styles in the organization and challenging opportunities at work. Communication with management is important for professional fulfillment and growth, which includes orientation, knowledge of the objectives and goals of the organization, the degree of direct supervision, and regular feedback. A perception of satisfaction with management usually leads to trust, pride, and high morale, whereas dissatisfaction leads to frequent turnover, conflict, and lowered productivity. The degree of social connectivity, the ease of referral among colleagues, and the opportunity to discuss cases enhance the team aspects of the job and decrease turnover rates. An adequate number of qualified support staff is essential to the smooth workings of any healthcare organization. The quality of physical facilities and the environment are very important to productivity, effectiveness, and efficiency in patient care.

Improved work relationships, positive changes in work environment, supported integration and professional growth for nurses, expanded career options, increased ergonomic technology, and labor-saving technology have a positive impact on nurse retention. Retention increases when nurses are viewed as strategic assets. Leaders who represent professional nursing have an obligation to be part of the organizations executive team. This structure strengthens shared decision making; supports education for all nurses, managers, and administrators; and increases visibility of nursing’s contributions to quality healthcare. Nurse executives have an obligation to be key decision makers to give nurses a voice.

More productive people tend to be more satisfied. Keeping your staff productive and satisfied can
limit costly turnover and increase your organization’s overall productivity. Job dissatisfiers include being in the wrong job, unclear responsibilities, poor communication, and boredom. Goals that increase productivity are specific, reasonable, short-term and/or long-term, and ensure success. The best way to improve productivity is by striving for the shared goals of employees and managers. Goals give a sense of purpose, provide direction, and help guide behavior.

Developing a collaborative vision and shared decision-making model among nurses on the unit will improve retention and satisfaction. Strategies to increase productivity include teaching the 80/20 rule on how to set priorities and deadlines, focusing efforts on important tasks first, simplifying work wherever possible to increase satisfaction, and positively reinforcing desired behavior by providing recognition, praise, and rewards. Developing a collaborative vision and shared decision-making model among nurses on the unit will improve retention and satisfaction. Strategies to increase productivity include teaching the 80/20 rule on how to set priorities and deadlines, focusing efforts on important tasks first, simplifying work wherever possible to increase satisfaction, and positively reinforcing desired behavior by providing recognition, praise, and rewards.14

Organizations need to pay attention to job satisfaction regarding professional staff. Nurses need to be assessed on a regular basis for areas where management might augment work satisfaction and improve retention. Through strategic planning, management can facilitate job satisfaction, offer job enhancement, increase productivity, ensure high-quality service, avoid burnout, and reduce turnover.15

REFERENCES

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