



## NURSE RETENTION STRATEGIES

With the national shortage of nursing professionals projected to reach one million by 2010, as well as the increasing evidence supporting the impact of nursing ratios on patient outcomes, the role of retention efforts has become a critical task for nursing leaders throughout the country.

What follows are examples of retention strategies from the current literature for your consideration as you brainstorm ideas that can be implemented into your organization's nurse retention and staff satisfaction programs.

### WAGES / SALARY

1. Evaluate salaries in light of your current market. Salaries should be at market; however, being significantly above market does not necessarily enhance recruitment or retention.
2. Consider paying staff for on-call shifts
3. Attempt double-time pay for nurses who are on-staff when the patient census is high (i.e., when ratios fall below minimum #s, those working receive double hourly wage).
4. Consider small "special occasion" bonuses (i.e., a \$25 check on their birthday, anniversary, birth of a child, etc.)
5. Consider "perfect attendance" bonuses (i.e., for every month of perfect attendance, award the nurse an additional 2 hours bonus pay). Provide larger bonuses for nurses who demonstrated perfect attendance for an entire year (i.e., a larger cash bonus, or a gift of their choice)

### SCHEDULING / STAFFING

6. Possibly eliminate mandatory overtime.
7. Explore a structured approach to self scheduling.
8. Consider flexible scheduling, and implementing 6/8/10/12-hour shift options. Flexibility translates into control for the employee.
9. Evaluate creation of specific schedule slots (i.e., 9am – 2pm) for parents who have school-aged children.
10. Strive to reward longevity with increased vacation time or personal days.
11. Discuss the option of "Economy Time Off" during low census – give staff members the option of taking the day off or leaving early (without *requiring* them to do so).
12. Consider giving additional vacation time for working during high census/acuity/short staffed periods.
13. Make an effort to send Thank-You notes to nurses (and separate ones to their family members!) who have worked a significant amount of overtime.
14. Perhaps develop an internal float pool of nurses to reduce dependency upon agency nurses



15. Consider providing bonuses for nurses who pick up a pre-determined number of extra shifts.

### ENHANCED BENEFITS

16. Assess the feasibility of subsidizing employee transportation costs (i.e., bus passes, employee van pools).
17. Evaluate development of partnerships with local banks to offer low-interest loans for house/car purchase.
18. Consider subsidizing part or all of day care or child care costs for employees.
19. Discuss the option of paying for part or all of nurses' malpractice insurance.
20. Explore providing free or discounted memberships to local gyms or health clubs.
21. Consider providing an annual uniform allowance/stipend.
22. Assess the feasibility of paying for 100% of your employees' health insurance coverage.
23. Appraise the option of providing a menu health benefits plan, in which employees can choose the plan that works best for them.
24. Consider implementing a "no-benefits pay" option for employees who don't need health coverage (i.e., they are already covered under their spouse's plan). Increase their base salary by the amount (or some portion of the amount) that your organization would have spent on their health coverage.
25. Appraise the option of implementing a menu retirement benefits plan, in which employees can choose a plan that works well for their financial situation and long-term goals.
26. Think about providing free magazine subscriptions (i.e., *NursesWeek*, *Advance for Nurses*, etc.)
27. Discuss paying for your nurses' licensure/re-licensure fees
28. Consider paying for your nurses' memberships to professional organizations (i.e., ANA, NMNA, specialty nursing associations)
29. Evaluate the possibility of developing a scholarship program for children, spouses or dependents of your employees.
30. Explore establishment of discount programs for your employees with local merchants (i.e., restaurants, gift shops, grocery stores, gas stations, etc.).
31. Assess the feasibility of paying the down-payment of a new home, or the first month's mortgage.
32. Strive to make donations to employees' favorite charities after they have completed a year of service.
33. Consider providing onsite sick child care.



34. Consider providing an on-site massage therapist, free-of-charge or at a discounted rate for your employees.

## STAFF INVOLVEMENT

35. Try to involve your nursing staff in the interviewing and selection of new staff whenever possible.
36. Aim to conduct monthly departmental staff meetings to facilitate and encourage communication between and among department managers and staff members. Tape a \$5 bill under three randomly selected chairs as an added perk to showing up!
37. Ask Nurse Managers to post “Come On In!” times on *their* office doors, to encourage a sense of open communication among your nursing team and their supervisors.
38. Encourage you nurse managers to make it a policy to address problem employees quickly.
39. Investigate the possibility of including your nursing staff in agency decision-making, and ask for their opinions. The gesture can make your nursing staff feel appreciated, and they may also have insights that never occurred to administration.
40. Try to keep your nursing staff updated and informed of the rationale behind decision-making processes and changes.
41. Evaluate implementation of a nursing shared governance group model to involve staff nurses in making decisions about nursing practice via participation in a committee structure. Issues covered can include nursing quality, nursing policy and procedure, nursing research, resource utilization, pay practice issues and professional growth.
42. Discuss establishing a Professional Relations Committee to create an environment of excellent nurse/physician relations and communication, improve retention, and improve nurse and physician satisfaction and patient outcomes
43. Encourage nurses to be involved with other organizational committees (i.e., Documentation, Service Evaluation, QA, etc.)
44. Consider holding focus groups with your nurses asking for positive and negative feedback regarding your organizational culture, and how it affects nurse productivity.
45. Make an effort to schedule monthly rounds in which administrators spend time visiting each department and talking to nursing staff members.
46. Explore the option of establishing a committee coordinated by front line nursing staff to set standards for professionalism among nursing staff. The committee can set ground rules that



will make all staff accountable for their actions, and design and implement reward and disciplinary systems.

### **NURSING EDUCATION**

47. Evaluate the implementation of a comprehensive new-hire orientation program. When nurses learn correctly from the beginning, they enjoy their work more and are likely to stay longer on the job.
48. Strive to provide a comprehensive orientation and support program for new nurse managers.
49. Explore providing Certification bonuses.
50. Encourage nurses to attend job-related conferences, and attempt to pay for their registration fees.
51. Consider reimbursing your nurses for job-related courses or Continuing Education tuition.
52. Make an effort to distribute a list of free or low-cost Continuing Education providers to your nursing staff, as well as monthly Continuing Education schedules that identifying upcoming events in your area. These types of resources can be easily accessed on the websites of the New Mexico Center for Nursing Excellence and/or the New Mexico Nurses Association.
53. Evaluate providing tuition reimbursement or loan repayment programs for nursing education. Consider both payment in-full and monthly repayment options.

### **STAFF RECOGNITION**

54. Consider establishing a Nurse Employee of the Month program within your organization. Perhaps include an article about the staff member in your organization's newsletter.
55. Make it a point to directly thank staff for specific accomplishments.
56. Ask the CNO or Director of Nursing call employees or write them a letter to thank them personally for outstanding performance
57. Consider creating a "Hall of Fame" wall in each unit with photos of your nurses. Include a brief bio under each picture, describing why each nurse is such a valuable member of your team.
58. Explore the feasibility of awarding gift certificates to nurses who do something extra special.
59. To foster a sense of recognition and teamwork among your department, create a "Pass Along" award (i.e., a pin or button, a card, mug, small trophy, etc.). Give the award to a nurse who you think deserves recognition for outstanding performance. When (s)he believes a fellow nurse deserves recognition, (s)he passes it on to him/her.
60. In addition to a raise, make an effort to give your nurses a special small gift (i.e., flowers, a card, a gift certificate, etc.) on the anniversary of their hire date.
61. Consider creating certificates to distribute to your staff, with a catchy name (i.e., "Wow!", "Good Job!", "Way to Go!" certificates). Reward staff with the certificates when they



demonstrate good performance. Develop a system in which nurses can redeem their certificates for a prize (i.e., 10 certificates can be redeemed for cash, gift certificates to local merchants or your facility's gift shop, etc.).

62. Evaluate development of a "Party-in-a-Box" program. When a department successfully meets a pre-determined goal, have a facility Administrator deliver a box containing party materials (i.e., hats, party horns, party favors, balloons, etc.) to congratulate the unit.

## WORK ENVIRONMENT

63. Consider holding seasonal teamwork unit recognition theme parties.
64. Explore creation of T-shirts or tote bags for each unit. Invite staff members to submit designs, and then conduct a voting process to choose the favorite design. Print and distribute the items to all unit staff members.
65. Consider arranging for monthly or quarterly Potluck dinners at staff members' houses.
66. Think about holding a "Water Gun Day" (let staff soak manager or favorite doctor!).
67. Make an effort to send birthday cards to your nurses' home addresses. Have the card signed by their immediate supervisor and the CNO or Director of Nursing.
68. Evaluate the creation of a "Great Idea" box. Have nurses submit suggestions for money-saving ideas or operational improvements (for your department, or the organization as a whole). If an idea is implemented, award the nurse with a gift (i.e., a check for \$50, gift certificates, etc.).
69. Explore the development of a nursing bulletin board for each unit, and designate a section for each nurse to personalize (i.e., have them post pictures of them and/or their family members, jokes/comics, thank-you cards from patients, etc.).
70. Discuss forming a "support group" for new nurses who are making the transition from school to practice.
71. Survey your nursing workforce quarterly or annually regarding why your facility is a great place to work, as well as areas that need improvement. Use the data gathered to implement or redesign your retention and staff satisfaction program.
72. Aim to conduct exit interviews with all nurses who leave your facility. Use data gathered during the exit interviews to determine areas of weakness in your organization's retention efforts.
73. Consider establishing an optional mentoring program. Recruit employees to serve as mentors, and develop a "directory" of nurse mentors within your organization. Distribute the directory to your staff nurses, and allow them to contact a mentor with whom they feel comfortable.



74. Attempt to hold a “Volunteer Day” one weekend each month/quarter. Each month/quarter, choose a local charity, non-profit organization, school, etc. at which to volunteer, and encourage employees to participate.
75. Strive to provide meal delivery services for nurses who are unable to leave the floor.