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What is the Impact of an Aging Workforce

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POST-TEST

1. Which of the following is a primary demographic trend impacting the nursing workforce?
 - a) A decrease in the global elderly population.
 - b) A steady decrease in the average age of registered nurses.
 - c) An increasing average age of registered nurses and projected retirements.
 - d) A surplus of new nursing graduates exceeding retirement rates.
2. A significant threat of an aging nursing workforce is the loss of:
 - a) Financial profits for healthcare organizations.
 - b) Institutional, clinical, and cultural knowledge with retirements.
 - c) Opportunities for new technological advancements.
 - d) The need for flexible scheduling options.

3. Which of the following is an effective strategy for creating age-friendly work environments?
 - a) Increasing manual patient handling requirements.
 - b) Reducing access to continuing education and training.
 - c) Providing ergonomically correct designs and equipment for safe patient handling.
 - d) Implementing mandatory overtime for all staff.
4. Why is knowledge transfer considered imperative when addressing an aging nursing workforce?
 - a) To replace all older nurses with new graduates immediately.
 - b) To capture and transfer critical knowledge from departing experienced staff.
 - c) To decrease the need for professional development programs.
 - d) To reduce the number of new nurses entering the profession.
5. What is a primary benefit of strategic succession planning in nursing?
 - a) To ensure leadership continuity and prepare nurses for future roles.
 - b) To discourage nurses from seeking leadership roles.
 - c) To solely focus on cost reduction in staffing.
 - d) To eliminate the need for any formal training programs.

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Impact of an Aging Workforce

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Learning Objectives

As a result of this course, participants will be able to:

- Understand the demographic shift in the nursing workforce.
- Identify key challenges and opportunities presented by an aging nursing workforce.
- Explore evidence-based strategies for retention and support of older nurses.
- Discuss the importance of knowledge transfer and succession planning.
- Recognize the implications for patient care and healthcare systems.

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Why this matters now

- An unprecedented aging of the global population
- Average age of our registered nurses is steadily climbing
- Presents a 'replacement challenge'
- A current reality shaping our healthcare landscape:
more than 138,000 nurses left the workforce since 2022
and by 2029, almost 40% of nurses intend to leave the
workforce, reinforcing concerns about ongoing labor
shortages and systemic workforce challenges

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Alarming statistics

- By 2027, over 800,000 RNs and almost 200,000 LPNs, say they have an intent to leave the nursing profession.
- This is equivalent to 20% of the total licensed nursing workforce, 24% of those nurses that want to leave nursing have less than 10 years of experience.
- Reasons for leaving are burnout, understaffing, concern for patient safety, a lack of educational preparation for entering the workforce, and violence in the workplace, and bullying.



Current Workforce Data

- Nursing is the nation's largest healthcare profession, with nearly 4.7 million registered nurses (RNs) nationwide
- The median age of RNs is 46 years. More than one-quarter of registered nurses report that they plan to leave nursing or retire over the next five years.
- The federal government projects that more than 203,000 new registered nurse positions will be created each year from 2021-2031
- Nearly 55% of RNs worked in general medical and surgical hospitals



Growth in the RN workforce will occur due to:

- Increased emphasis on preventive care; growing rates of chronic conditions, such as diabetes and obesity; and demand for healthcare services from the baby-boom population, as they live longer and more active lives.
- There are four times as many RNs in the United States as physicians, nursing delivers an extended array of healthcare services, including primary and preventive care by nurse practitioners with specialized education



Nursing Workforce comprises 4 Generations of Workers

Baby Boomers and Gen Xers represent 59% of registered nurses. Millennials make up 39%, while Gen Z comprises just 1% of the workforce.

- Baby Boomers and Gen X nurses value face-to-face communication.
- Millennial and Gen Z colleagues prefer digital interactions.
- Multigenerational teams face challenges and opportunities daily. Younger nurses adapt quickly to new technologies, while older generations excel at traditional clinical care.



Challenges of an Aging Nursing Workforce

- **Physical Demands and Health Concerns**
 - As nurses age, these physical demands become more pronounced
 - An increased risk of musculoskeletal disorders, chronic pain, and fatigue among older nurses
 - The impact of shift work



Challenges of an Aging Nursing Workforce

- **Cognitive and Sensory Changes**
 - Age-related changes in vision, hearing, and reaction speed
 - Rapid pace of technological advancements
 - Pervasive stress



Challenges of an Aging Nursing Workforce

- **Psychological and social stressors**
 - Burnout, stress, and exhaustion
 - Moral injury due to chronic staffing shortages and overwhelming workloads
 - Ageism and stereotypes can also exist in the workplace
 - Balancing demanding work with personal life, family responsibilities, and health needs



Stress and Burnout are not the same thing

Stress	vs	Burnout
Characterized by over-engagement		Characterized by disengagement
Emotions are overactive		Emotions are blunted
Produces urgency and hyperactivity		Produces helplessness and hopelessness
Loss of energy		Loss of motivation
Leads to anxiety disorders		Leads to depression
Primary damage is physical		Primary damage is emotional



Brain's Reaction to Stress


- Hypothalamus tells adrenal glands to release stress hormones (adrenaline and cortisol)
- These hormones increase heartbeat and send blood rushing to the areas needed for emergencies (e.g., muscles, heart, and other important organs)



Burnout

Exhaustion resulting from “excessive demands on energy, strength, or resources” in the workplace

Symptoms including malaise, fatigue, frustration, cynicism, and inefficacy



Select

Chronic Uncertainty

- Uncertainty means haziness and doubt
- The stress of chronic uncertainty is among the most harmful stressors we experience
- The brain is trying to determine the best course of action for survival
- Combine “uncertainty” with “threat” and you get anxiety, stress and burnout

Select

Effects of Chronic Uncertainty

- Constantly preparing for bad outcomes can have psychological and biological consequences
- May cause exaggerated reactions to perceived threats
- Individuals might experience symptoms of being under chronic stress
- Prolonged activation of the biological stress response can have negative effects on the brain and the rest of the body

Select

Stress presents on a continuum

Contributing Factors

Within a workplace there will be:

- Employees who are feeling well
- Employees feeling like there is no other answer available to them but to leave the profession

Select

Communication Barriers

- Communication is the biggest problem in nursing teams with multiple generations. Baby Boomers like direct, face-to-face conversations, while younger nurses prefer digital communication channels
- This gap causes important information to get lost during patient handoffs and transitions
- Nurse surveys show that communication barriers reduce efficiency and create potential safety risks

Select

Workforce Gaps and Knowledge Loss

- Significant drop in the RN supply from 2020-2021 (COVID)
- Retirements and general exodus from profession now present:
 - Threat of losing invaluable institutional knowledge, clinical expertise, and organizational culture upon retirement
- Inadequate staffing levels and the loss of highly experienced nurses can directly impact patient safety and the overall quality of care

Select

Benefits and Strengths of Experienced Nurses

- **Wealth of Experience and Expertise**
 - Immense value
 - Experiential knowledge is absolutely crucial for patient safety, complex assessments, and nuanced clinical decision-making
 - Often possess superior communication skills, a deep dedication to their profession, and a strong sense of loyalty that benefits the entire team



Mentorship and Leadership Potential

- Experienced nurses play a crucial role in mentoring younger nurses, providing guidance, and facilitating knowledge transfer
- Opportunity to capitalize on their knowledge and skills by empowering them in mentorship and leadership roles
- Presence contributes to a strong, dedicated, and cohesive team, fostering a supportive environment for all nurses



Establishing Mentoring programs

Mentorship is defined as a working alliance between individuals in which the more experienced people support the growth and development of those with less experience *NOT equivalent with supervision*



Formal vs Informal- Structure within an organization

Assigned due to hierarchy vs requested due to respect

May be a group peer model



Relationship should be nonauthoritarian in nature offering guidance, support, and encouragement towards professional development and improvement of the mentee




Tips for a successful program

-  1. Set expectations upfront= write measurable goals for the partnership
-  2. Give and receive honest feedback- Establish the commitment to respectfully provide both positive and constructive feedback for the purpose of improvement
-  3. Recognize accomplishments – point out what is going well
-  4. Hold one another accountable- if a goal or task or meeting was not met or upheld, discuss why and move forward- Don't ignore missed opportunities







Tips for a successful program

- 5. Be willing to make a change if the relationship is not working
- 6. Think of yourself as Role Model- Do not expect the other member of the relationship to behave professionally if you are not.
- 7. Allow Mentee to solve problems- facilitates learning- discuss the outcome and alternatives for next opportunity
- 8. Listen – ensures both members are being heard, neither should dominate the conversation. Use repeating back strategies



Tips for a successful program


-  9. Suggest Don't Solve- It can be tempting for a mentor to answer the questions or solve problems immediately. Ask Mentee for input
-  10. Assign and Delegate – Give appropriate assignments to further develop skills
-  11. Know when to End or Exit the Relationship- Have a plan for when the relationship should be over (6 month, 1 year) or acknowledge if something is not working without blame



Evaluating Mentoring outcomes



Describe the mentoring culture at our healthcare organization?



What were the benefits and barriers of the mentoring relationship?



What areas of professional growth were achieved as a result of the mentoring relationship?

This can come from the goals established at the start of the program- Another reason well established measurable goals are important

Select

Stability and Reliability

- Research suggests that older nurses often take fewer sick days and are less inclined to seek other employment, providing valuable stability to our nursing units
- Exhibit high levels of commitment and loyalty to their organizations and their patients

Select

Strategies for Retention and Support

- **Creating Age-Friendly Work Environments**
 - Ergonomically correct designs and providing equipment for safe patient handling, like lifts and specialized beds.
 - Environmental adjustments like improving lighting and reducing noise levels can significantly mitigate the impact of sensory decline, making the environment safer and more comfortable for older nurses

Select

Flexible Work Arrangements and Workload Management

- Flexible schedules, exploring job sharing models, and implementing staggered shifts can help accommodate personal needs and reduce fatigue
- Eliminating mandatory overtime is crucial for *all* nurses, but particularly for older nurses, as it contributes significantly to burnout and exhaustion
- Ensuring appropriate staffing levels is fundamental



Professional Development and Recognition

- Access to continuing education and training, especially in new technologies- stay current and confident in their skills
- Genuinely recognize and value the immense knowledge, experience, and unique perspective that older nurses bring to the team



Health and Well-being Initiatives

- Employee wellness programs – access to meditation resources or gym discounts
- Providing accessible support for both physical and mental health concerns
- Culture of Gratitude



Imperative of Knowledge Transfer

- As experienced nurses transition out of the workforce, capturing and transferring their critical knowledge is absolutely imperative
 - Formal mentoring programs and nurse residency programs are excellent avenues for pairing new nurses with experienced mentors to facilitate this knowledge exchange
 - Practical tools like knowledge binders, job shadowing, and even reverse mentorship where younger nurses can share technological expertise



Maintain the safety net

- Health care systems need to revisit the environment into which new nurses are being introduced and determine whether they are offering necessary support and continued learning opportunities. Focusing time and effort on transition-to-practice programs can help offer the support nurses new to the workforce need.



Strategic Succession Planning

- Succession planning is a systematic process of identifying and preparing nurses for future leadership roles within the organization
 - benefits are multi-faceted: improved retention across the board, increased staff engagement, enhanced financial performance, and crucial leadership continuity
 - demonstrating and modeling work-life balance for leaders is essential to attract and retain the next generation of nurse leaders



Address Violence in Workplace

- Registered nurses experiencing a three times greater number of violent offenses compared to all other occupations.
- Unsafe environments lead to an increase in errors, and mental and physical injuries
- Promote an environment that encourages incident reporting
- Fund safety measures
- Work together to create policies and legislation



Preparation for Environment

- Learning about microaggressions and how to avoid them, how to be aware of your environment, to notice unsafe changes, and, in the event of an incident, knowing how to de-escalate if possible
- Helping nurses become cognizant of important information like exits, how close a patient or family member is getting to them, cues that a situation may become violent, or anything in the room that can be a potential weapon against them



Key Takeaways- Secure Future

- Strategies focusing on age-friendly environments, flexible work
- Prepare for robust knowledge transfer and strategic succession planning
- Appropriate staffing
 - Opportunities to retain experienced Nurses
- Safety in Workplace
- Support Programs for At-Risk Nurses
 - Mental Health Resources



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