A comprehensive approach to increasing nurse retention

NYC Health + Hospitals implemented a large-scale nurse residency program to reduce turnover, improve transition to practice and support first-year nurses.

High resignation rates among first-year nurses are a prevalent issue in health systems and facilities—and a constant source of stress for healthcare administrators. For NYC Health + Hospitals, that universal challenge is compounded by the health system’s status as a safety net provider that serves uninsured populations, racial and ethnic minorities, members of the LGBTQ+ community and a patient population that speaks more than 100 different languages.

NYC Health + Hospitals employs nearly 10,000 nurses throughout its vast system of 11 acute-care hospitals, post-acute care facilities and services, federally qualified health centers, correctional facilities and more. About 54% of those nurses turned over each year, including nurses in their first year of practice.
To help stem the staff losses, NYC Health + Hospitals partnered with Vizient™. The partnership—sponsored by the New York Alliance for Careers in Healthcare (NYACH) as part of its 28-hospital Citywide Nurse Residency Program consortium—aimed to meet the challenge by using nursing leadership to implement a large-scale residency program with the Vizient/AACN™ Nurse Residency Program (NRP).

**Identifying opportunities in transition to practice**

Physicians graduate from medical school to internships, residencies and fellowships. Allied healthcare professionals from pharmacists to physical therapists have similar programs. Although the nursing transition to practice process begins with nursing orientation, research and practical experience have found that orientation alone does not provide the support that new nurses need to grow and thrive in their new positions.

The threshold question was: Why, after a lengthy training period, were first-year nurses leaving NYC Health + Hospitals? Exit interviews with the nurses—along with other internal research—pointed to two primary reasons: a lack of clinical support and a lack of emotional support.

Through a partnership with Vizient and NYACH launched in 2018, NYC Health + Hospitals joined a consortium of 28 hospitals citywide that were addressing retention problems and other workforce challenges by implementing nurse residency programs founded on a 12-month curriculum from Vizient.

“NYACH and city government wanted to ensure that almost any new nursing graduate entering the workforce in New York City would be given the opportunity to participate in a residency program, to ensure these new nurses would be best positioned for success,” explains Joe Rhoades, NYACH’s deputy director. “In that effort, NYACH did extensive outreach to share the proven value of the Vizient/AACN curriculum and brought hospitals across the city into the consortium.”

NYACH covers the fees associated with the NRP curriculum and convenes participating hospitals to learn from one another and collaborate on unique local challenges. Vizient provides the program curriculum, tools and advisory support, while NYC Health + Hospitals coordinates and manages the program throughout its system. “Having NYACH provide the funding support for this program was a significant and meaningful benefit to our system,” says Natalia Cineas, senior vice president and chief nursing executive for NYC Health + Hospitals. “As a public safety-net health care organization, additional resources and investments that can bolster our workforce are welcomed and appreciated.”
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Improved turnover rates in unprecedented times

As COVID-19 taxed health systems everywhere and clinician burnout regularly topped headlines, NYC Health + Hospitals experienced dramatic improvements in turnover rates—directly attributable to its commitment to the NRP.

A total of 25 cohorts and 1,324 nurses have gone through the program since its inception. Not only has the system improved retention of its new nurses, but Belaro reports that “nurses who are preparing for their board exams are reaching out to see if they can come to work for us and participate in this program.”

With the average expense of nearly $90,000 to replace a nurse, NYC Health + Hospitals’ nurse recruitment and retention costs have dropped dramatically. More importantly, the system’s patients benefit from the continuity of care provided by a well-trained, well-supported and stable nursing staff.

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A closer look at the curriculum

The Nurse Residency Program is designed to support first-year nurses as they transition to practice. Through 12 monthly seminars, nurses develop skills to safely and confidently practice to the full extent of their license. The sessions fall into three categories: leadership, quality outcomes and professional role.

“"The program has helped me grow as a nurse. I feel much more confident now than I did a year ago. This program helps you to become more motivated in patient care, communication and more.”

—NYCHH nurse (2020 participant)
[CASE STUDY]

NYC Health + Hospitals

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