Next-Generation “Transition to Practice” Strategies
Laying a better foundation for practice-ready nurses and sustainable workforces
There are many reasons why today’s healthcare organizations need to prioritize and optimize nursing education and onboarding strategies. Substantial challenges continue to plague the industry and nursing profession, and the outlook ahead is not very encouraging.

Between unprecedented professional shortages, high turnover and burnout rates, and a fluid healthcare landscape, staffing difficulties and dilemmas have reached a tipping point in many health systems. The critical need for effective recruitment and retention programs is not lost on nurse leaders, and many organizations have worked diligently to implement orientation and residency programs to get out in front of staffing gaps.

Yet, amid these well-intentioned efforts, the unfortunate reality is that one in five newly-licensed nurses leave an organization during their first year, and one in three leaves within two years. Nurse leaders know that the transition from school to practice is critical for establishing professional identity and long-term commitment. Simply put, efforts to produce confident, practice-ready nurses continue to fall short.

While nurse retention rates at one Texas-based health system have remained healthy in the current climate, the organization’s clinical leaders determined there was a better way forward. Thanks to the executive team that is always looking for innovative ways to improve performance, the health system recently participated in a pilot program for Elsevier’s newly-introduced Transition to Practice platform to get ahead of challenges and keep nurse retention metrics above industry benchmarks. Elsevier’s Transition to Practice solution completes the nursing education offerings from Elsevier, which addresses the full lifecycle of learning from the critical transition of a newly graduated nurse to practice through orientation and career advancement.
Encompassing a large academic medical center and three community hospitals, the health system enrolls three cohorts per year, each with between 15 to 30 nurse residents. The pilot program was designed in response to industry feedback around three main themes:

• The need to engage a more diverse set of nurse graduates through customized education programs
• Communication shortfalls and insufficient preceptor support tools that allow struggling nurses to fall through the cracks during orientation and residency programs
• Lack of actionable data to personalize education and proactively address at-risk nurses

With the platform in place, nurse residents move at their own pace through e-learning modules that provide a safe environment for practicing skills on virtual patients without negative repercussions, honing critical thinking, prioritization, delegation and other professional skills. The solution assesses each new nurse and designs a personalized learning experience, while accelerating professional ability. In addition, nurse leaders regularly draw from available learning and performance data to proactively identify issues that could impact a new nurse’s long-term success.

Helping to instill a sense of pride in their work is also key to improving retention. For example, “rebranding” acute care to reflect that it includes multiple specialties and/or creating a path for nurses to move more quickly into clinical practice and also to become involved in other activities that help guide organizational strategies. This can go a long way toward instilling a sense of ownership in organizational success. This ensures that nurses are engaged from the outset by giving them a voice and a path to make a real difference. It also provides an opportunity to have contributions recognized by hospital leadership.

Unpacking Trends

There is no shortage of data related to the ongoing nursing crisis. Industry projections point to the need for more than 1 million new nurses by 2022, and professional shortages are expected to continue to impact hospitals through 2025.

In 2017, turnover rates for bedside RNs rose 2 percent to 16.8 percent—a growing issue that is wreaking havoc on the bottom line in hospitals as turnover costs are significant. Hospitals lose on average between $37,700 and $58,400 for each RN departure and between $5.2 and $8.1 million total annually.ii

Exacerbating these trends is increased unrest among new nurses and high burnout rates (63%) associated with an increasingly complex and demanding role in care delivery. The reality is that current healthcare movements and trends necessitate a higher-level skill set from new graduates when compared to their colleagues from previous decades. Nurses entering the field today must be equipped to address increased demand for services and higher-acuity patient populations—all within the framework of value-based care.
It’s a hefty pill to swallow for a brand new nurse. Modern day complexities aside, the nursing journey from school to practice has always been a time of extreme professional vulnerability. Stress levels run high as new clinicians move from simulation to real-life patient situations. Without optimal support systems in place, many simply leave the organization within the first year. To improve the outlook, today’s health systems not only need to get new nurses into practice faster, but they need programs that help nurses feel they are receiving adequate support to ensure optimal patient care and minimal bottom-line impacts associated with turnover.

A Personalized Approach to Learning
Residency program goals have always been centered on producing a confident, competent, practice-ready nurse. In today’s climate, strategies must also ensure that no one falls through the cracks. This means that a cookie cutter approach to education will no longer suffice when it comes to optimizing retention.

Through the Transition to Practice pilot, residents at the Texas-based health system are benefitting from a personalized approach to learning characterized by learning pathways customized to the needs of the end-user.

Learning styles and speeds vary widely across nurse residents, and it is often difficult to gauge a new nurse’s ability to comprehend and apply knowledge at any given moment. Since using the Transition to Practice platform, the organization has identified common skill gaps such as time management, prioritization, delegation and critical thinking—all vital skills in today’s fast-paced healthcare environments. The solution assesses individual residents and, once weak areas are identified, the e-learning modules automatically adjust curriculum priorities to better support individual needs.

In addition, the platform offers a variety of learning models that new generation nurses find more engaging than traditional classroom approaches. Tools such as 3D simulation, videos and gaming keep residents focused and more willing to overcome skill shortfalls.
Most important, the platform supports the highest quality evidence for best practices in nursing and seamlessly aligns with residency program curriculum built around American Nurses Association standards. As new nurses begin their professional career, or experienced nurses transition to different specialties, it’s important to ensure knowledge and skills are reflective of the most current evidence.

**Actionable Data for Proactive Outreach**

In addition to a personalized approach to learning, the Transition to Practice platform equips residency coordinators with learning and performance data that can be used to detect at-risk residents by tracking changes in nurse’s outcomes, improving communication and identifying the root cause.

For instance, data from the pilot program reveals that stress levels peak around the six-month mark, the time when new nurses are coming out of orientation and moving into real practice environments. When programs reach this juncture, it’s critical to understand how any given nurse is feeling about their program, and communication lines are vital. Through the platform, residency coordinators can look at data a number of ways—across the entire cohort or year or drilling down into specific units and residents within a given month for instance.
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Nurse leaders engaged in the pilot program have found the solution’s end-of-shift survey particularly helpful in terms of gauging how supported a new resident feels. Trending data can reveal whether issues are recurring or if a resident is simply having a bad day. When coordinators determine that a new nurse is at risk due to lack of support, they can get ahead of potential issues by closing the loop and working through issues with both preceptors and the resident.

Positioning for the Future

In today’s performance-driven healthcare climate, new nurses need more support than ever. And notably, health systems have a vested interest in ensuring that every nurse coming into their facilities is primed for success. Residency programs that engage nurses through next-generation learning models and actionable data are primed for higher levels of support that increase success rates and produce better clinicians. Elsevier’s Transition to Practice platform builds newly-licensed nurse confidence by accelerating professional confidence through precision learning, monitoring satisfaction, and providing actionable insights to address concerns.

References

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