According to research by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 17.5% of new RNs quit within their first year on the job; more than a third leave within two years. New hires face tremendous pressure and must adjust to long shifts, integrate with an unfamiliar workplace culture, and navigate new and changing procedures.

Yet today, healthcare organizations can’t afford to lose talent. The United States needs more than a million new nurses by 2022 to keep up with the need for patient-centered care. Increased demand for nurses, plus a talent shortage unlike any we’ve ever see, will affect both budgets and clinical outcomes.

How then can organizations engage, inspire, and retain newly licensed RNs?

With a nurse-specific onboarding program that begins before day one on the job.

Onboarding Changes the Retention Game

Onboarding is far more important than just paperwork and orientation. In high-performing healthcare organizations, onboarding is a vital opportunity to integrate new nurses into the workplace culture and ensure they’re both productive and emotionally invested in their new community from the start.

“Quality nurses aren’t found, they’re formed. They grow with the organization. A solid onboarding strategy supported by effective communications can help you prepare new nurses for a long, fulfilling tenure.”

Retaining New Nurses with Strategic Onboarding
The American Society for Healthcare Human Resources Administration (ASHHRA) describes onboarding as a method of getting employees “comfortable, connected, and productive as soon as possible,” and research shows that an effective onboarding strategy boosts new hire retention anywhere between 34-60%. According Human Resources Solutions, “When people are made to feel welcome, they are more productive, less stressed, and more team focused. This all translates into lower turnover rates.”

Five Steps to Successful Onboarding

1. **Onboard early.** In a study of one midsize east coast hospital, exit surveys of nurses and hospital staff reveal that only 50% to 62% of new employees felt that their orientation experience gave them what they needed to be successful, to have a realistic grasp of their jobs, and to know where to go when they had concerns.

   In contrast, 83% of best-in-class organizations start onboarding new hires before their first day. In nursing, this has real, measurable benefits. Nurses who undergo pre-boarding, such as extended orientations or even nurse residencies, experience reduced stress, improved communication and clinical skills, higher job satisfaction, and lower turnover.

2. **Clarify expectations.** Nothing demotivates new nurses quite like finding out the job is not at all what they were expecting. New nurses are anxious to do a good job. Healthcare organizations can make it easier by clearly outlining expectations and ensuring nurses are prepared for a high-pressured workplace. This takes the guesswork out of a new hire’s first days on the job, thus keeping the focus on the right priorities.

3. **Create community.** Feeling socially accepted is one of the top factors in newcomer success. But in a recent survey of 3,000 RNs, only half of nurses polled felt like leadership at their organization was trustworthy, supported their career development, or cared about them as people. Onboarding that drives team building, mentorship, and the development of authentic relationships between nurses and leadership brings nurses into the social network. A sense of community goes hand-in-hand with nurse job satisfaction and patient satisfaction.

4. **Give people time.** New nurses are often overwhelmed during their first few weeks. In addition to caring for patients, new hires are learning procedures, roles, workplace culture, and more. Onboarding mitigates information overload and gives new nurses the flexibility, feedback, and time they need to be successful.

5. **Rerecruit employees.** A good onboarding process isn’t just for new hires. Rerecruiting can rekindle the excitement and enthusiasm that employees had as new hires. Demonstrating an ongoing interest in nurse satisfaction, both at work and in career development, goes a long way. After all, organizations that aren’t re-recruiting their best nurses are all but ensuring that another organization will.
Onboarding Improves Retention

Nurses play a pivotal role in our healthcare system, and nurse job satisfaction correlates directly to positive patient outcomes—and to the bottom line. Yet healthcare organizations increasingly struggle to attract and retain the qualified nurses needed to meet minimum staffing levels. Effective onboarding programs drive productivity, engagement, and retention, which can bridge the gap between new nurse attrition and new nurse achievement.

Read on to learn additional engagement strategies through learning and performance:

Using Learning and Performance to Drive Nurse Engagement

A whopping 63% of nurses are burnt out. What Can Your Organization Do?