

What Nurses Want: Making Sure You are Competitive

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Okay, I get it. As HR leader in a hospital, I would roll my eyes when someone was going to tell me what our nurses wanted. The arrogance of some know-it-all outsider being able to determine from a distance what those on-site could not.

So, I am not going to give you my opinion but share what nurses themselves say that they want from an organization. Registered nurses are in high demand and they have a lot of choices when it comes to employers. So it is important for recruitment and retention that HR professionals understand what nurses want from an employer.

In late 2022, The American Nurses Association (ANA) conducted the 2022 National RN Workforce Survey which included over 20,000 registered nurses across the United States. This is a significant sample size.

Top Three Factors

Rather than analyzing all of the responses no matter how low the ranking, we can get the biggest benefit by concentrating on the top issues. Here are the top three things that RNs want from an employer.

1. **Competitive pay and benefits:** 88% of RNs said that competitive pay and benefits were very or extremely important to them in their current job.
2. **Opportunities for professional development:** 86% of RNs said that opportunities for professional development were very or extremely important to them in their current job.
3. **A supportive work environment:** 85% of RNs said that a supportive work environment was very or extremely important to them in their current job.

Other Important Factors

While not in the top three, there are two other factors that should be mentioned.

1. **Flexible work:** RNs are increasingly looking for flexible work arrangements such as part-time or remote work.
2. **Commitment to quality care:** RN's want to work for an employer that is committed to quality patient care. They want a facility that has the resources and support they need to provide the best possible care to their patients.

HR's Response

Other than saying "that's nice, it confirms what I knew", why is this information important to HR?

I am sure you "get it". It is critical to your recruitment efforts that your organization can offer what is important to nurses. If you don't, your competitor surely will.

It is critical that your nurse retention activities address the issues that are critical to nurses. Otherwise, your competitors that do address these critical issues will become very attractive to your nurses.

Competitive pay and benefits:

This does not mean that you have the highest pay or best benefit program in your geographic area. You do need to be competitive (in the ballpark) with similar organizations. There will obviously be differences in pay between hospitals and clinics-whether family practice or specialty.

Recruitment/retention efforts can emphasize the tradeoffs of each. While hospitals may pay more, RNs usually work 12 hour shifts and these may include weekends. If I were recruiting for clinics with lower pay, I would emphasize the normal 5-day workweek with 8- hour shifts. I might focus on the reduced physical demand (no turning/lifting patients) reduced charting, etc.

Opportunities for professional development:

Again, this may be easy for large hospitals but more difficult for clinics or specialty organizations. By thinking outside the box, smaller organizations and clinics can satisfy some of this demand.

Independent clinics and providers can often take advantage of the opportunities provided by hospitals that they may be affiliated with or admit to. In my experience at large hospitals, we offered our educational and in-service programs to the nurses and professionals of our medical staff. This was a win for both parties. The clinic had access to the professional development activities and the hospital created another link to the provider.

Supportive work environment:

This should be what HR is all about—supporting all of the employees and professional disciplines! I have written several posts on recognition but it is more than that.

A big way to support RNs is to constantly make their job easier. I have described a “rounding program” that actively solicits suggestions for improvement from employees and follows through on their input. I have written several posts on improving the work that nurses are being asked to do.

Nurses really appreciate “fixing” the work. I have had the experience of organizations reducing staffing levels while employee satisfaction scores increased! Why? Because the focus was on fixing and improving work processes! This is why I believe that HR should also be the experts in what we are asking employees to do.

Flexible work schedules

It is difficult for most RNs to work from home so that generally won't be an option (unless they are doing a nonclinical job such as utilization review). However, there are other ways to offer flexible work. Part-time, weekend option, shared shifts are all options that can be considered.

Summary

Nurses are the backbone of most healthcare organizations. As one CEO told me, the main product of the hospital is nursing care. While there are ancillary and diagnostic services, the basic product is nursing. It is critical that HR continues to monitor what is important to nurses and responds accordingly.

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