

# Seven Staffing Strategies that Value, Protect and Optimize Nurses



## Nurses are the most respected profession

Early last year, there was a worldwide spirit of excitement and festivity surrounding the nursing profession after the World Health Organization declared 2020 'The Year of the Nurse.' However, as COVID-19 began to surge, there was no time for celebration. Instead, we found ourselves relying on nurses to carry us through the challenges of the pandemic.

Nurses have earned widespread admiration, with the pandemic increasing the respect many Americans feel for the nursing profession. According to a Gallup poll, nurses are the most trusted professionals in the United States for the 19th year in a row. This year, nurses received the highest score ever, with 89% of respondents rating nurses as having high or very high honesty and ethical standards<sup>1</sup>.

“ I am extremely proud of my fellow nurses. Nurses have been tested in every way imaginable during 2020. Through it all, nurses have consistently proven they are resilient, selfless, and compassionate, risking their health and safety for the common good. Therefore, nurses are undoubtedly deserving of the public’s unwavering trust.”<sup>2</sup>

— Ernest Grant, PHD, RN, FAAN, President of the American Nurses Association



## Nursing shortages threaten healthcare delivery

The pandemic has reinforced how important nurses are to our health and wellbeing. The high demand for nursing care has also highlighted the consequences of having too few nurses. Before COVID-19, our country was already facing both existing regional and forecasted national nursing shortages, **with a projected deficit of over 900,000 nurses in the United States by 2030<sup>3</sup>**.

Staffing issues have been amplified by COVID-19 as caregivers fall ill or need to quarantine due to exposure to the virus.

With nursing shortages and staffing issues threatening healthcare organizations nationwide, nurse recruitment and retention is an important priority. Focusing on staffing strategies that empower your nurses can have a significant impact on nurse satisfaction, which attracts new nurses and reduces turnover.

Deficit of **918,232** nurses by 2030



## Staffing strategies that value, protect and optimize nurses

Your workforce is your most valuable resource, and taking steps to boost staff morale and engagement cannot wait. As the pandemic continues to strain healthcare organizations and the demands evolve to include distribution of the vaccine, it's critical to resolve your staffing challenges now. **With shortages looming and nurses continuing** to face challenges in their day-to-day work, there has never been a better time to implement nurse staffing processes that create a better work/life balance and improve nurses' work environment. While time and financial resources may be limited, your healthcare system can focus on initiatives that require minimal effort and offer maximum reward.

Here are seven staffing practices that help nurses achieve more schedule predictability and flexibility as well as improve their safety and satisfaction at work.



## Strategy #1 – Make staffing and scheduling a collaborative process

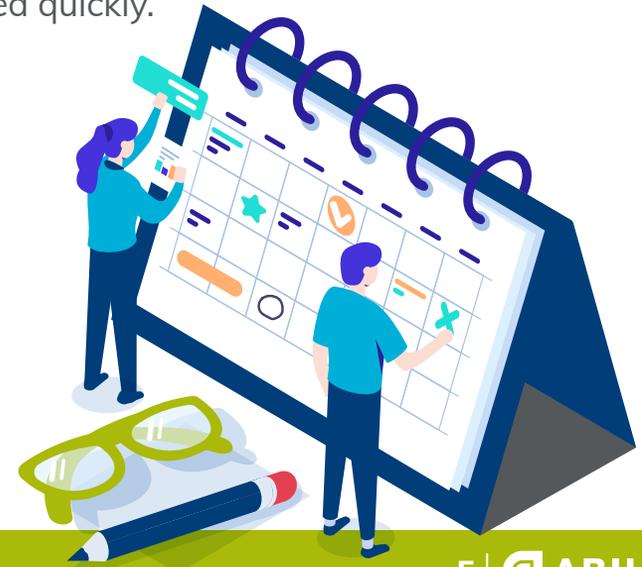
According to the American Nurses Association's Principles of Nurse Staffing, this is a core component for appropriate nurse staffing: "Registered nurses are full partners **working with other healthcare professionals** in the collaborative, interprofessional delivery of safe, quality health care."<sup>4</sup> In other words, staffing should be done **with** nurses, not **to** them. With a collaborative approach, nurses can be engaged in creating a staffing plan that meets patient care needs and accommodates

their personal schedule. Instead of seeing their schedule as a source of dissatisfaction, nurses are involved with being a part of the solution.

That collaboration is facilitated by staffing tools that enable tactics like self-scheduling and efficient communication between the staffing office, unit managers and nurses when there are open shifts that must be filled quickly.

“ ABILITY SMARTFORCE at Summit Medical Group streamlines staffing, improves communication, contributes to greater efficiency and ultimately, produces more time for patient care. ”

— Karen Graham, chief operating officer, Summit Medical Group



## Strategy #2 – Make it easy to access and act upon critical staffing information

In order to achieve collaborative staffing success, key stakeholders need visibility into important staffing data. Unit managers need to determine if their unit's staffing is appropriate; staffing coordinators need to see open shifts and staffing levels across the enterprise; and nurses need to know their schedule and view open shifts they are qualified to work.

A full-featured mobile app provides quick access to data and makes it easy to take appropriate action. Employees appreciate the **ability to view their schedule** and make changes on the go. Department leaders can review and approve schedule requests and make updates, wherever they are. As one pharmacy team leader at a large health system in the West shares, "I can use the mobile app for 99% of my staffing tasks. I do all of my day-to-day staffing tasks on my phone; creating schedules is the only thing I do on my computer."



## Strategy #3 – Use a solution that is intuitive and delivers quick results

Your managers, staffing coordinators and front-line nurses appreciate using technology that saves time and makes their lives easier. Staffing solutions that are cumbersome, complex and confusing are often not well-utilized as staff develop manual workarounds instead.

When staffing tools streamline workflows and improve processes, your staff are more likely to embrace the technology and your entire organization achieves better results.

It's also important to use technology that can be deployed quickly. A fast and easy implementation minimizes disruptions and produces rapid results. That's just what your healthcare organization needs to deliver on the surging demands you and your staff are facing.

“ ABILITY SMARTFORCE is very user friendly and easy to learn. We went from online live to 200 employees fully trained in one week. ”

— Sterling Bronson, Salt Lake Behavioral Health, UHS



## Strategy #4 – Use technology to foresee and adapt to staffing ups and downs

Technology that provides an accurate predictive census can help your nurse managers make staffing decisions more proactively. **Data-driven decisions** can be made earlier in the scheduling process so there is less uncertainty throughout the entire staffing workflow. That provides nurses with both schedule predictability and flexibility.

In addition to delivering more schedule stability, predictive census tools enable the staffing team to offer nurses more flexibility. With less day-to-day staffing flux, the staffing team has more time to accommodate requests for time off and shift trades.

When your staffing team does not have advance insight into staffing demand changes, the lack of clarity leads

to frequent schedule fluctuations and last-minute scrambling to fill open shifts. The inconvenience of fielding calls from nurse managers and staffing coordinators who are desperately trying to fill open shifts day in and day out can take a mental toll on staff nurses. They want to help, but the disruption caused by frequent calls and schedule changes is a huge dissatisfier and can lead to burnout.



## Strategy #5 – Focus on matching nurses with patient needs

Effective nurse/patient matches require a deep understanding of the skills, competencies and experience of the nurses **who will be providing the care**. When the staffing team uses technology to check credentials, utilize nurse ratio matrixes and make resource recommendations, two important nurse satisfiers are realized.

First, your nurses can work to the top of their license, putting their skills to use. This is an important component of job satisfaction, especially for nurses who prioritize career development.

Second, workloads are more safe and equitable. That helps ensure that nurse staffing is at safe levels and the workload is balanced between the staffed nurses based on the care needs of each patient.



## Strategy #6 – Streamline the open shift management process

Without the right workflow and technology, the open shift management process can be extremely inefficient as the staffing team spends their time frantically making last-minute staffing changes. As a result, staff nurses are battered with repeated requests to pick up extra shifts. With a better strategy and supporting technology, the majority of that chaos can be avoided.

When technology enables the entire team to participate in the scheduling process, open shift management is streamlined for everyone. It's easier for leaders to spot open shifts proactively, identify staff who are qualified to fill the open shifts and send out push notifications to those qualified staff, alerting them about the available shifts. With more advance notice, staff can pick the shifts that fit their schedule, giving them a better work/life balance.

“ ABILITY SMARTFORCE has been the greatest resource tool to assist with our scheduling and staffing. What used to take me hours each day managing the schedule now takes me minutes. ”

— Sterling Bronson, Salt Lake Behavioral Health, UHS



## Strategy #7 – Make the staffing process more efficient for nurse managers

During patient surges, the best thing your nurse managers can do is spend more time with their staff and their patients. The last thing they need pulling them away is time-consuming, labor-intensive staffing and scheduling tasks. **Powerful staffing technology** can save your nurse managers hours of time each and every week, enabling them to focus more on patient care and leading their team.

“ The time our managers spend on scheduling has been reduced from 15-20 hours per week to 3-4 hours per week with ABILITY SMARTFORCE Scheduler. Reducing the time spent on scheduling tasks by 75-80% gives our managers back a week of time every month to focus on other things that make a difference, like quality of care. ”

— Mike Easley, CIO, American Senior Communities



## Are you ready to empower your nurses?

There is no doubt that your healthcare organization is rising to meet the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. On the front lines of that battle are your nurses. While the burdens are heavy now, the shadow of looming nursing shortages cannot be ignored. **ABILITY** can help.

Our team has decades of healthcare experience and can help you quickly implement impactful staffing practices that provide your nurses with more control over their schedule. Those empowerment strategies can help your team face the challenges of today and build organizational resilience that will deliver both short-term and long-term success for your entire healthcare organization.

**ABILITY** is a leading information technology company helping healthcare organizations simplify administrative and clinical complexity by enabling data-driven improvements in healthcare.

Through specialized, easy-to-use applications and data analytics that work together, organizations rely on **ABILITY** to help optimize staffing, as well as care quality and reimbursement.

*Our product specialists are nurses who can show you these staffing practices in action. Learn how your organization can quickly start seeing powerful results. Get in touch 844-210-2656*





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2. "The American Public Continues to Rank Nurses as The Most Honest and Ethical Professionals in Annual Gallup Poll," American Nurses Association, December 22, 2020, <https://www.nursingworld.org/news/news-releases/2020/nurses-ranked-most-honest-and-ethical-professionals/>
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