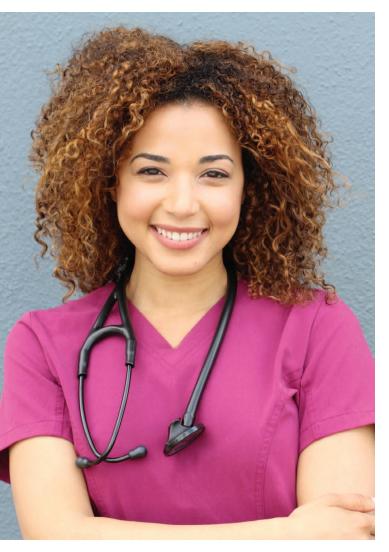# A new generation of nurses is here

Strategies for working with Generation Z.

By Jennifer Chicca, MS, RN, and Teresa Shellenbarger, PhD, RN, CNE, ANEF

TODAY'S NURSING WORKFORCE is rich with diversity that's beneficial to healthcare. However, challenges exist as various groups learn to collaborate and work through differences. Through conversation, previous generations—Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y (Millennials)—have learned how the economy, society, and culture influence their behaviors and attitudes. Now Generation Z is entering the nursing

workforce. (See *A word of caution*.) This truly digital-native generation has unique characteristics that warrant consideration as they'll impact the nursing profession and healthcare.

Gen Z characteristics

Generation Z (also known as iGen, net Generation, iGeneration, Gen Next, Gen Wii, Post Gen, Multi-Gen, Homeland Generation, and Plurals) includes anyone born from about 1995 to 2012. It begins at approximately the same time the internet became publicly available, making it the first generation to have never known a time without the internet. These digital natives spend most of their day consuming and using technology. As a result, they're individualistic and can have underdeveloped social and relationship skills that may lead to anxiety, insecurity, and depression. Their use of the internet may lead to a short attention span and a desire for immediacy and convenience.

Members of Generation Z have grown up in uncertain times, forcing them to deal with issues of public violence and economic difficulty. These factors have led many of them to be pragmatic, cautious, and concerned with emotional, physical, and financial security. When they support an issue, they're more likely to engage in sedentary activism by using social media.

In addition, this generation is diverse and has grown without overt segregation. Many are open-minded, diverse, and comfortable with differences, and they may have difficulty understanding how or why racism still exists.

More experienced staff nurses, preceptors, managers, and educators will need to keep these characteristics in mind as they develop strategies to engage their Generation Z colleagues. (See *Tips for supporting Generation Z nurses*.)

Feedback, feedback, feedback

Generation Z nurses prefer a nurturing and reassuring environment that includes frequent feedback, delivered supportively, to help them build skills and confidence. Keep your feedback short, succinct, and prompt,

and mix positive statements with areas for improvement. Offer feedback privately and kindly. For example, if you observe a Generation Z nurse giving medications, your feedback could include:

You did an excellent job thoroughly checking each medication using the five rights and using the computer documentation system. However, I noticed you had your back turned to the patient. Try facing and engaging the patient during medication administration. Then the patient is involved, feels cared for, and has an opportunity to ask questions.

Or perhaps you're a nurse educator observing a Generation Z nurse who's new to precepting. You might offer this feedback:

I noticed that you corrected the new hire in front of the patient and family. Although I appreciate that you immediately intervened and were focused on patient safety, you may have embarrassed the new hire and decreased his credibility with the patient and family. I suggest coming up with a code word, such as 'pause,' so when new hires hear it, they know to stop what they're doing so you can take over and then debrief privately later.

Encourage Generation Z nurses to self-assess in the same way—reviewing their strengths and then their areas for improvement. Be available and anticipate questions. Never make a colleague or staff member feel silly for asking questions. In fact, thank them for asking.

Inspire some risk

Generation Z nurses may need help taking social and professional "risks" in the workplace. These risks can include joining unit- or hospital-based committees focused on an area of interest, participating in quality-improvement projects, and precepting and mentoring new hires. Involve them in decision-making and other processes and facilitate their participation. For example, explain and demonstrate proper group and interpersonal skills, such as using active listening, providing constructive criticism, and respecting others' perspectives.

Generation Z nurses' reliance on technology may lead to interpersonal skill challenges that, when coupled with a stressful work environment, require support and guidance. Include them in social activities, such as eating lunch together or getting a cup of coffee. Be alert for signs of increasing stress and encourage exercise, yoga, meditation, and other self-care activities. Encourage these younger nurses to connect with other new staff, even using the social media outlets that they favor.

A technology "spin"

Can nursing professionals incorporate technology into

A word of caution

Generation Z is just beginning to enter the nursing workforce, and information about this group continues to develop. Some characteristics have emerged, but watch for additional literature and data about this group as time goes on.

Keep in mind the stereotypical nature of discussions about generations. Characteristics of groups are conversation starters, not absolutes. Some authors even question the merit of generational cohorts. Particular individuals, settings, organizations, and contextual factors must be considered. Use a variety of approaches to support and guide nurses.

their interactions to engage Generation Z? Yes, but with a "spin."

Technology spins don't need to be challenging to engage these nurses. Some examples include:
- creating videos for a YouTube channel detailing unit news or changes
- developing infographics using free programs to grab visual attention for upcoming meetings or events
- using audience-response systems for polling staff or electronic gaming templates for friendly competitions
- gathering ideas electronically using technology such as VUE or iBrainstormer.

Remind Generation Z and all nurses about proper technology use. Outline social media and confidentiality policies and champion proper scientific inquiry when using technology to conduct research for activities or projects. Also teach information literacy skills such as digital source credibility, relevance, and accuracy.

Take the time

Take the time to learn about the Generation Z nurses—individually and as a group—as they start to enter the profession. Your efforts to create a reassuring environment, provide frequent feedback, support appropriate risk-taking, and find opportunities to use tech-

Tips for supporting Generation Z nurses

Each new generation of nurses has unique characteristics that should be taken into account to ensure professional success and good patient outcomes. Many Generation Z nurses will thrive best when provided with frequent feedback, are inspired to take professional and social risks, and are encouraged to use technology when appropriate.

Feedback
- Create a nurturing and reassuring environment where feedback is offered frequently.

- Keep feedback short, prompt, and succinct.
- Mix positive feedback with areas for improvement and encourage colleagues and staff to self-assess in the same way.
- Encourage and thank nurses who ask questions.

Risk
- Help Generation Z nurses take professional and social risks at work.
- Explain and demonstrate proper group and interpersonal skills.
- Encourage limiting screen time and

getting actively involved at work.
- Involve nurses in committees, activities, and projects of interest.
- Promote socialization and self-care.

Technology
- Encourage the use of technology for colleague-colleague interactions, such as during meetings and educational staff development, as appropriate.
- Replace traditional print materials with engaging technology.
- Champion proper online scientific inquiry and appropriate social media use.

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nology will support their transition into the workforce. Working to understand and develop Generation Z nurses may increase staff retention and satisfaction and create collaborative relationships that are critical to the future of nursing and healthcare. ★

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