

Work to prevent burnout

By Catherine Spader, RN

From stressed out to burned out

High levels of workplace stress can fuel nursing burnout—and negative outcomes for nurses and patients. A majority of nurses report that stress increases resignations, reduces engagement, and negatively impacts patient care, according to a 2019 work-life balance survey conducted by Bright Horizons in partnership with the journal *American Nurse Today*.^{*} Addressing the stressors that contribute to burnout risk is vital to improving patient safety, job satisfaction, and nurse retention.



Who is stressed?

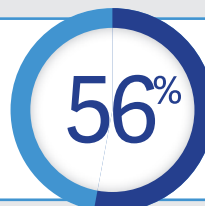
70% of nurses say their **work/workload** causes them **stress**.

39% have **cancelled or missed** a shift because they needed a **mental health day**.

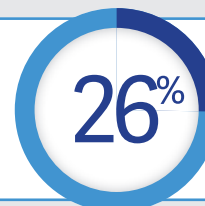
Frequency of burnout

On the whole, **one in four** nurses report **feeling burned out** one or more times per month. However, the picture is **much starker** in organizations that **lack** great work cultures.

Among nurses who **don't feel** like their organization **has a great** culture:



feel burned out **multiple** times per **week**.



feel burned out **every day**.

Burnout among the generations

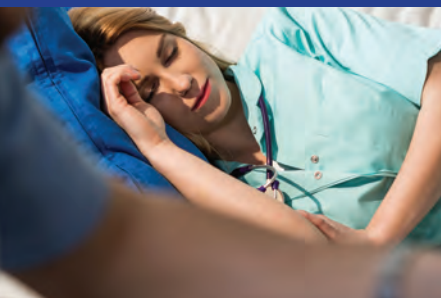
Younger nurses experience **higher rates** of **burnout** than older nurses.

25% of **millennials** experience burnout one or more times a month, and **22%** experience it multiple times a week.

26% of **Gen Xers** experience burnout one or more times a month, and **17%** experience it multiple times a week.

19% of **baby boomers** experience burnout (both monthly and weekly).

What reduces stress?



Nurses were asked to select options their employers could offer that would help them manage stress. Preferences included:

- 48%** desired a quiet or wellness room where they could rejuvenate.
- 45%** wanted more choice in their work schedules.
- 40%** chose mentorship and coaching.
- 21%** picked employee support groups.

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^{*}The survey was conducted in May 2019 and represents 1,323 nurses. Respondents represent a cross section of employment settings, educational levels, and ages, including baby boomers, Gen Xers, and millennials. Sixty percent work in a hospital, 85% work full-time, and 70% have attained a BSN or higher degree.

Staffing, environment, and burnout

Compelling evidence shows a link between nursing work environments and stress, burnout, and staff turnover. A 2017 study published in *International Nursing Review* stated, "Improving the work environment for nurses may lead to lower levels of job dissatisfaction, intention to leave, and burnout."¹

A key feature of the work environment is staffing. The 2018 Critical Care Nurse Work Environment Study found that "Appropriate staffing is the most concerning element of the health of critical care nurse work environments."² In addition, a report from Healthy Nurse, Healthy Nation™ noted that:

- More than half (**53%**) of respondents often have to work through their breaks to complete their assigned workload.
- More than a quarter (**26%**) of respondents say they are often assigned a higher workload than they are comfortable with.³

1. Nantsupawat A, Kunaviktikul W, Nantsupawat R, Wichaikhum OA, Thienthong H, Poghosyan L. Effects of nurse work environment on job dissatisfaction, burnout, intention to leave. *Int Nurs Rev.* 2017;64(1):91-98.
2. Ulrich B, Barden C, Cassidy L, Varn-Davis N. Critical care nurse work environments 2018: Findings and implications. *Crit Care Nurse.* 2019;39(2):67-84.
3. American Nurses Association. *Healthy Nurse, Healthy Nation: Year One Highlights 2017-2018.* nursingworld.org/~4ab629/globalassets/docs/ana/practice/hnhn17-18highlights.pdf.



Tips and strategies

Be **proactive** in addressing the **causes** of **burnout** by reducing chief sources of **stress** so nurses can focus on giving the **best care** and achieve job **satisfaction**.

- **Increase** nursing control over the work environment by bolstering shared governance programs and supporting members' ideas and decisions.
- **Consider** self-staffing options and budget for increased staffing when numbers and acuties rise unexpectedly.
- **Develop** support services that help reduce stress, such as an employee-driven wellness committee, a mentorship program, and group social offerings.
- **Provide** an employee assistance program and family benefits that help nurses navigate child and elder care challenges.
- **Ensure** nurses can take allotted breaks in the cafeteria or designated break room away from patient care.



"To reduce burnout, Children's Health offers an array of benefits to help address stressors outside of the work environment. In addition to healthcare and retirement benefits, we offer day-care services, including home or facility backup care for sick children or inclement weather situations. We subsidize transit passes and provide employee care funds to help staff impacted by a catastrophic event. Children's Health also partially matches dependent day-care flexible spending accounts and offers virtual doctor visits for urgent or mental health care."

—Tim Adams, Director, Benefits & Wellness Programs,
Human Resources, Children's Health, Dallas

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