Generation Z in Nursing: Unmet Needs and the Urgency of Retention

Lori Murray, DNP, RN, Gero-BC, CNE, Jamie Morris, MS, RN, Gina Matlock, MS, APRN-CNP and Andrea Thompson, EdD, RN, CNEcl, Fran and Earl Ziegler College of Nursing, University of Oklahoma Health

While the nursing workforce currently comprises four generations, the retention of its newest members is a significant concern. A recent 2025 Press Ganey report revealed that 24% of Generation Z (Gen Z) Registered Nurses (RNs) (born 1997–2012) left their role last year, representing the highest turnover rate among all generations. This reflects data from a 2024 national report, which noted a decrease in the overall percentage of Gen Z nurses in the workforce since 2022 (Smiley et al., 2025). The findings suggest a pattern of Gen Z nurses entering the field only to leave soon after, highlighting an urgent need for organizations to strengthen their retention strategies.

During the next 5 years, 40% of nurses plan to leave the profession citing retirement as the primary reason, closely followed by stress and burnout (Smiley et al., 2025). Demand for RNs is expected to increase by 5% from 2024 to 2034 (BLS, 2025). To improve nurse retention, nurse leaders must focus on meeting the needs of Gen Z nurses. The goal of this article is to address the urgency of providing evidence-based strategies to promote long-term retention of this vital generation.

Literature Review

Key insights to engage and retain Gen Z nurses revealed they prefer collaborative environments and opportunities for professional growth and development (Al-Moteri et al., 2025). While many hospitals across the nation offer different learning models or clinical ladders for professional development, they may not be meeting Gen Z's preferences for learning opportunities. A 2025 scoping review found that Gen Z learners favor visual and observational methods, collaborative projects, and interactive lectures (Dodson & Thompson-Hairston, 2025). In addition, Al-Moteri et al. discovered that Gen Z nurses prefer teamwork and limiting overreliance on technology (2025).

Understanding Gen Z's preferred learning methodologies can be translated into the workforce by providing professional development tailored to their needs. During a yearlong transition to practice residency program, nurse leaders conducted seminars and emphasized the use of creative learning strategies specific to Gen-Z nurses. The organizational culture also emphasized partnerships with nurse leaders, human resources, and professional development staff to create highly supportive work environments for new graduate RNs. By incorporating this type of support, the organization decreased their vacancy rate from over 20% to less than 4% (Tellson & Shemek, 2025).

In addition to fostering a supportive work environment that is collaborative and growth-oriented, research shows that leaders must also foster a sense of belonging to ensure Gen Z nurses feel connected, valued, and respected (Patten, 2025). Meeting these needs requires all generational cohorts to contribute through respectful communication and constructive feedback, which supports the development of new RNs.

Stronger collaborative relationships between different generations and organizational leaders are crucial for bridging the social and developmental gaps that influence how Gen Z employees learn and grow professionally. Leaders can help foster an environment that is more inclusive and understanding of Gen Z's unique communication styles and learning preferences as they are entering the workforce while also providing clearly defined career paths with opportunities for professional advancement.

Recommendations for Nurse Leaders

Components of a Supportive Work Environment for Gen Z Nurses:

- Foster a Growth Mindset Culture
- Offer Professional Development Opportunities
- Interactive Seminars
- Short Videos/Storytelling Hands on skills
- Establish Clear Career Paths
- Clinical Advancement Programs
- Leadership Development Programs
- Create Partnership/Mentorship Initiatives
- Nurse Leaders
- Human Resources Personnel
- Residency/Professional Development Staff
- Prioritize Wellness and Belonging
- Provide Respectful and Transparent Communication
- Offer Frequent Constructive Feedback
- Facilitate Collaborative Practice and Teamwork
- Ensure a Safe, Inclusive Environment
- Access to Mental Health Resources

Conclusion

The high turnover rate of Gen Z nurses is an urgent issue that needs to be addressed by nurse leaders and other generational cohorts of RNs. Nurse leaders should promote organizational cultures that create supportive work environments meeting the needs of Gen Z nurses. Despite being the first generation to grow up with the internet, research shows that Gen Z's learning preferences are less dependent on technology than originally thought as

they prefer more collaborative in-person learning opportunities over technology-heavy methods. While many health systems may be implementing the above strategies to help with Gen Z nursing promotion, they may not be providing them in the way that Gen Z nurses find most effective. Addressing this disconnect in how opportunities are presented is crucial for health systems aiming to retain Gen Z nurses. Using the evidence-based strategies presented in this article can help to foster a sense of belonging and growth among Gen Z nurses leading to retention and assisting with nursing workforce demands. ■

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