

FEATURE

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[L TO R] TERI BRUENING, VICE PRESIDENT OF PATIENT CARE SERVICES & CHIEF NURSING OFFICER AND PAULA PITTMAN, VICE PRESIDENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES



TRUST AND COMPASSION

HOW METHODIST HOSPITAL IS
COMBATING NURSE SHORTAGE

The COVID-19 pandemic was particularly felt by nurses. A report by the National Council of State Boards of Nursing claimed over 610,000 nurses are hoping to leave the field within the next two years.

Here in Nebraska, Vivian Health reported that approximately 27,760 registered nurses were employed in the state of Nebraska in 2020 compared to 19,870 in 2022. The Nebraska Center for Nursing projects Nebraska will experience a workforce shortage of 5,436 nurses in 2025, with nearly 1,000 nurses between the ages of 24 and 55 “very likely” to leave their employment over the next 12 months. Coupled with the turnover rate, which can be anywhere from 8.8% to 37%, the statistics sound grim.

Health systems around the metro are working to help retain nurses, and Methodist is one that has found several methods to alleviate the issue. As Methodist Health System Vice President of Human Resources Paula Pittman explained, “We have rededicated our retention efforts and adopted a dynamic and multifaceted approach to both immediate and long term workforce needs.”

She cited collaboration as a key aspect, and that they maintain good partnerships with their H.R. and customer departments.

Vice President of patient care services & Chief nursing officer Teri Bruening stressed Methodist’s “robust” orientation programs for new nurses and the ability for a new employee to shadow a more established nurse have been integral in finding the right person to bring on board. One of the newest initiatives is a reversal of an exit interview.

“Our new initiative is to focus on stay interviews,” Pittman said. “At 30, 60, or 90 days, we want to catch our nurses and other employees before they become a risk of leaving the organization and really find out what is keeping them engaged here, what other levers can we pull to make sure that we retain them, and ensure they’re engaged and connected to our mission and culture.”

Recognition goes a long way. It can be formal—like their DAISY, Clinical Excellence, and The Dove awards— or simply getting positive feedback from a fellow medical professional.

“One of the doctors sent me an e-mail talking about the quality of the nurses at Methodist Hospital, and that doctors know that it’s the nurses who are the backbone of medical organizations,” Bruening noted. “They appreciate that.”

Another strategy Methodist Hospital is implementing, Pittman pointed out, is “a commitment to a continuous evaluation of those workforce needs and the needs of our employees in this ever-changing landscape, and just trying to be sensitive to that.”

Another recent method of retention is the newly-established RISE program, which stands for “Resilience In Stressful Events,” and has proven to be beneficial for nurses who are on the front lines every day.

“It’s run by our staff’s peers,” Bruening explained. “So after a stressful event—it could be a mom who hemorrhages, a code, or a family member who starts to blow up—they can call the RISE peer responder 24/7 to have somebody to talk to about it. Nurses are pretty famous about saying they are ‘OK’ when they’re really not OK. We’ve become more aware and attentive to the emotional needs of our staff.”

Like with any profession, there are challenges, but there are also rewards. Nursing can be a transformative career.

“At the end of a long day, most of us nurses leave wanting to know we made a difference,” Bruening said. “Part of the way we support that at Methodist is a positive work environment. Our staffing ratios are really very good. Having that positive work environment, having the resources they need—whether it’s RISE, equipment or supplies, staffing and that supervisor that they can go to share whatever with—helps them to provide excellent patient care.

“Nursing is about compassion. Certainly there’s the science of nursing, but it’s really the art of nursing, and that compassion, that draws us to this profession.”

For Pittman, it’s even more personal. When her mother was diagnosed with ovarian cancer, she was treated at Methodist, and Pittman saw firsthand what a difference a skilled nurse can make.

“She eventually passed away, but there’s not a day that goes by that I am not eternally grateful for the care my mom received and our family received,” she said. “Those nurses saved me.”

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