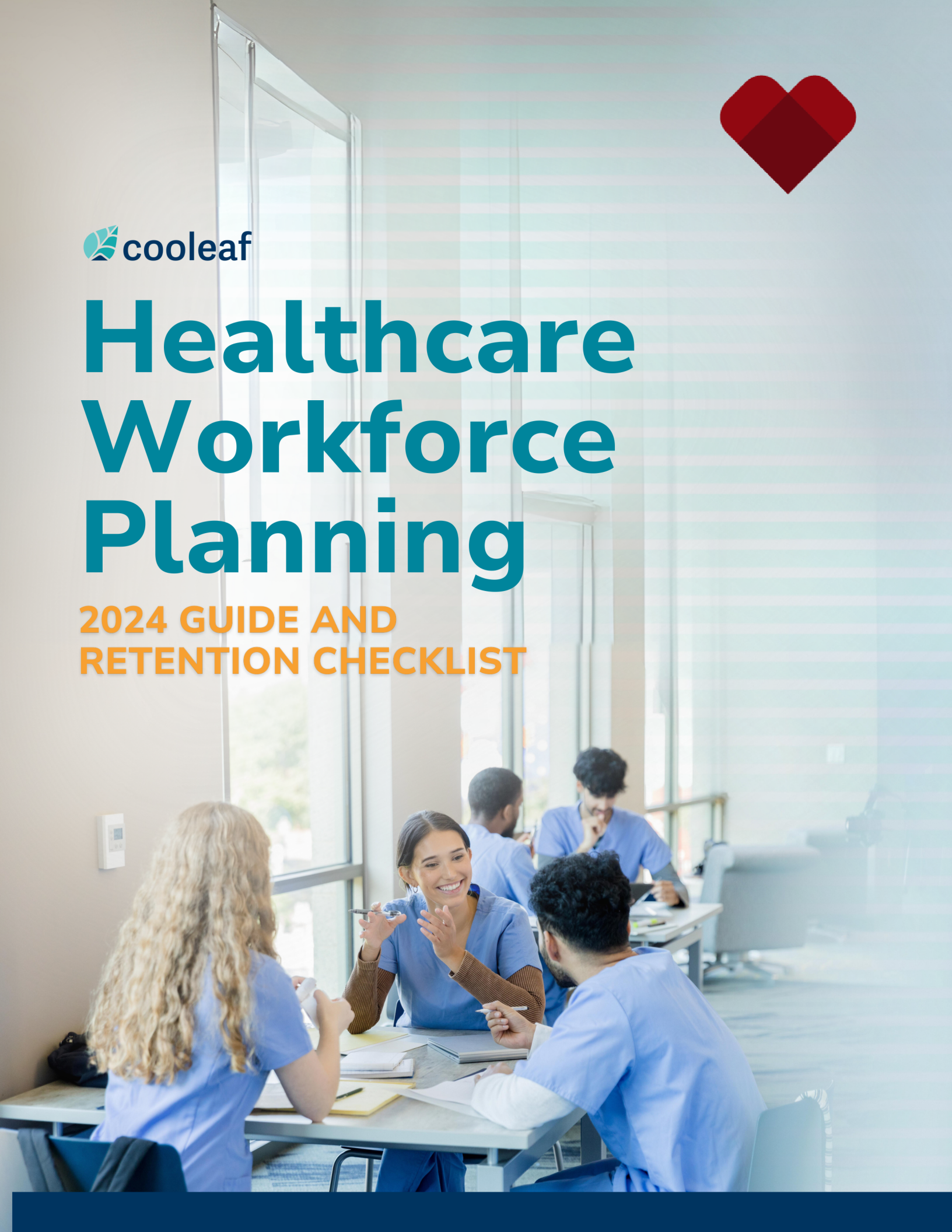




Healthcare Workforce Planning

2024 GUIDE AND
RETENTION CHECKLIST





Introduction

Employee engagement and retention is a challenge in nearly every industry today — the latest research from Gallup indicates that engagement is dropping in the workplace. But the problem is particularly acute on healthcare teams. Healthcare workers like doctors, nurses, and support staff face serious issues like harassment and violence on the job, unmanageable administrative burdens, and mental health struggles.

Healthcare workers provide an essential service to patients and communities, and retaining and engaging them is critical to the future of care in the US. But how can healthcare leaders and organizations tackle this complex, challenging issue to successfully retain and encourage their employees to stay with them and grow their careers? This in-depth guide has the data-backed retention and engagement strategies that healthcare systems today need to know.



The State of the Current Healthcare Workforce

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) conducted a [study in 2022](#) that compared the work-life quality across many categories for healthcare workers to 2018 to see the results of the Covid pandemic, and what they found was concerning. Almost half of healthcare workers surveyed said they were somewhat or very likely to look for new work. More than a third reported symptoms of

depression, and more than half reported symptoms of anxiety.

In another study of [more than 43,000 healthcare workers](#) from physicians to food service staff, researchers from Brigham & Women's Hospital found that more than half of all healthcare workers are burned out and overworked, and 29% intend to leave their jobs (rising to an alarming 41% for nurses).



While the staffing situation in healthcare today is pretty dire, it's expected to get even worse over the next decade if conditions don't change. When Dr. Vivek Murthy issued his [2022 Surgeon General's Advisory](#) on the crisis of burnout and wellbeing for healthcare providers today, he noted that the US is also facing a shortage of between 54,100 and 139,000 physicians by 2033.



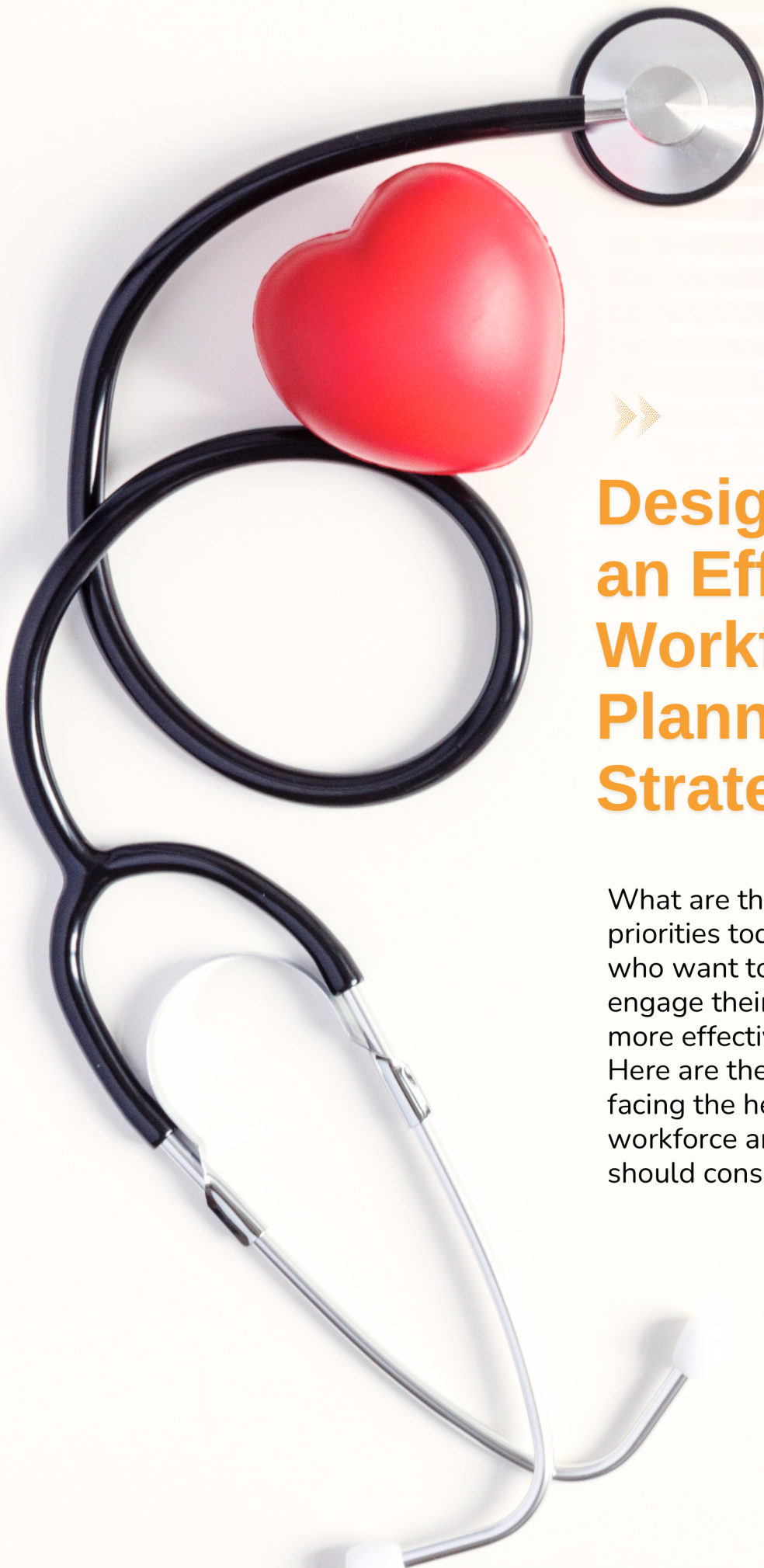


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And healthcare organizations are faced with a staffing crisis where they're not only struggling to retain healthcare professionals in their own clinics and hospitals: those workers are so unhappy that they're leaving the profession altogether. More than one-third of nurses say they're likely to leave the nursing profession for another career entirely.

These issues of burnout, turnover, overwork, mental health, and disengagement aren't just a problem for healthcare organizations looking to sustainably staff their hospitals and clinics. They're also impacting the ability of healthcare organizations to provide excellent patient care, which is the core of their mission.

So what can be done about the current state of the employee experience, employee turnover, and worker shortages in the healthcare industry? This guide has actionable, practical steps for healthcare leaders to tackle in their own organizations.



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Designing an Effective Workforce Planning Strategy

What are the biggest priorities today for leaders who want to retain and engage their healthcare staff more effectively in 2024? Here are the top issues facing the healthcare workforce and what leaders should consider.

“Work overload also **triples the risk of burnout** for healthcare workers, **and doubles their intent to leave** their jobs in the next two years.



Aggressively Fill Staffing Shortages

This first step is much easier said than done, but it's also the most critical to improve healthcare employee retention as well as patient outcomes.

Eight out of ten healthcare executives surveyed by [Experian Health](#) report that the patient experience is worse because of staffing shortages, and [a stunning 99% of clinicians](#) share that concern. Work overload also [triples the risk of burnout](#) for healthcare workers, and doubles their intent to leave their jobs in the next two years.

The shortage of healthcare workers is due to many complex factors, including the shift to relying more on contract workers who cost more and need more training than full-time staff. But expecting your current employees to cover indefinitely for team members who have left the organization has lasting repercussions. It's [harder to prevent burnout](#) as clinicians can't take enough truly restorative time off, and their workdays and patient and admin loads grow heavier.

Cost pressures are absolutely a concern for healthcare organizations right now. But when considering how much you'll spend to fully staff your organization, also consider the cost of losing even more experienced healthcare workers and the cost of replacing them too if you continue with lower staffing levels.

The American Hospital Organization has [some excellent resources](#) on how to think creatively about staffing and retention if you want further guidance after reading this guide.



Address Patient Safety and Satisfaction

The CDC study noted that the percentage of healthcare workers who reported harassment on the job nearly doubled from 2018 to 2022. A 2022 American College of Emergency Physicians survey of E.R. doctors found that 55% of ER doctors had been physically assaulted on the job, and 85% had been seriously threatened.

The situation is even worse for ER nurses, as more than 70% report sustaining physical assaults at work. And the harassment situation in healthcare was already bad before the

pandemic: the rate of injuries from workplace violence against healthcare workers grew by almost two-thirds from 2011-2018.

Any plan to better retain healthcare workers must take the harassment and violence they encounter seriously, which requires creating stronger policies against it and strategies to deal with it more effectively. When healthcare providers feel they work in a safe and secure environment, they're more likely to stick around.

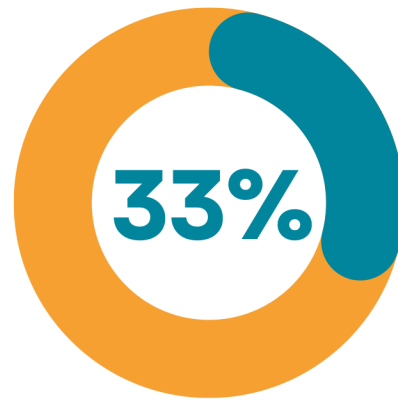
CDC Study 2022



of ER doctors had been physically assaulted on the job



of ER nurses physically assaulted on the job



Healthcare workers say it isn't possible to change roles



Healthcare workers who say there are opportunities to advance



Provide Additional Staff Training

Talent mobility and career opportunities are surprisingly scarce in the healthcare industry. 42% of healthcare workers surveyed by [Deloitte](#) find it difficult to change roles inside their organizations, 33% say it isn't possible, and only 25% say those opportunities are available to them.

Providing employees — at all levels — with more opportunities for building the skills they need to help them grow as professionals is critical. Plus, mapping out more career paths and opportunities for everyone should be a top priority.

Don't ignore the potential for lateral moves or cross-team or cross-role training either, as this can be a great way to both fill needed gaps and give employees exposure and opportunities that may inspire them.

In addition, providing more training and career opportunities shows employees that you care in a very powerful way — you're helping them build a brighter future. And in general, healthcare workers are a population that thrives on learning and growing their skills, so the investment here will be worthwhile in terms of employee satisfaction and retention.



Find Ways to Offer More Flexibility

While healthcare might not seem like a field where flexible work arrangements are practical or desirable, that's changing fast with new employee demands as well as tech solutions. Having a good work/life balance now comes in second at the top of healthcare workers' drivers of job satisfaction (just one percent underneath the top driver, fulfilling work). That's a significant increase from 2017, when work/life balance was fifth in their priorities.

With some creative thinking and a willingness to approach care work differently, there are actually more flexible work models possible for healthcare employees. The Covid-19 pandemic saw the rapid rise of telehealth, which is still a viable model for many appointments and can make healthcare more accessible for the elderly and rural populations. You can also consider flextime, condensed work weeks, job-sharing, and mixed-work models depending on what suits the needs of your patients and clinicians best.





Reduce Administrative Burdens

No one undergoes years of schooling and training, endures the long working days, and deals with working nights and weekends because they want to do hours of paperwork a day — it's because they care about working with and helping people. Of course, some admin tasks have always been a part of the healthcare workplace.

But in the past decade, the time spent on admin tasks vs. patient care has become unsustainable. Outpatient clinicians currently spend one to two hours per night on administrative work, in addition to spending two hours on the electronic health record and desk work for every hour they spend caring for patients in a day.

These administrative burdens are especially frustrating because in many cases, they're unnecessary given the advanced technology that healthcare organizations have access to today. And when many organizations do start to onboard those new tools, they're implemented with the goals of administrators and insurers in mind, not patients and healthcare workers.

Investing in the right technology to help ease the burden that paperwork and electronic health record (EHR) entries put on clinicians frees them up to spend more time on patient care. That's not just better for the patient experience, but also for engagement levels — you're enabling your people to do more of the work they truly love.





Offer Employee Wellbeing and Stress Reduction Resources

Nearly a quarter of doctors said they were depressed in a 2023 study. And one in ten doctors said they'd attempted suicide in a 2022 study, with female doctors twice as likely to die by suicide as male doctors.

The mental health crisis among clinicians is very real and extremely serious, but many healthcare organizations are not treating it with the purpose and urgency it requires. Only 31% of physicians say their workplace culture prioritizes physician well-being, a 5% decrease from the previous year.

In response, many healthcare organizations have attempted to provide typical employee wellness programs, like yoga classes, gym memberships, or meditation guidance. But those are not what move the needle on physician and nurse wellbeing.

However wonderful the benefits of yoga and meditation are, they're also not a substitute for significant structural changes in how healthcare organizations treat their workers. Adequate staffing, the ability to take regular and restorative time-off, reduced administrative burdens, and

more time to do the work they love are the true solutions — everything else is just a bonus.

In fact, the top thing the Physicians Foundation survey says is helpful in improving physician mental wellbeing is reduced administrative burdens: 80% of physicians and 85% of residents agree. Other helpful elements include:



Confidential therapy, counseling or support phone lines

64% of physicians and 80% of residents agree



Peer-to-peer support groups

57% of physicians and 72% of residents



Change/removal of credentialing application and medical licensure questions

59% of physicians and 64% of residents



Give All Healthcare Workers a Voice

The best way to know what your healthcare employees want and need from your organization so they're satisfied, well, and committed to their roles is simply to ask them. Allow them to have a voice in decision-making that affects them, ask them for their feedback on programs, and treat them like the valued professionals they are.

If they feel their voices and opinions are valued by your organization, that's a big boost to their engagement levels and their trust in your leadership. And that benefits everyone.



Takeaways

In its ideal state, working in healthcare is a highly rewarding and fulfilling calling, not just an occupation. And healthcare workers get into the field out of a desire to help heal others and provide excellent care, no matter what their role is.

Enabling healthcare providers to spend most of their valuable time in the role of carer and healer instead of as an administrator, and treating them as the skilled, committed professionals they are, are truly the best ways to retain and engage healthcare workers.

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Healthcare Workforce Retention Checklist

- Does your organization have adequate staffing levels so clinicians are working reasonable hours, with a reasonable workload, and can take regular time off? What would need to change to boost your staffing levels to a more sustainable level?
- Do you provide all employees with a safe working environment where they feel secure? What changes do you need to make to ensure their physical and mental safety?
- Do you provide employees at all levels with multiple potential pathways for growth and advancement in their careers? What additional trainings and development plans can you put into place?
- Do you offer healthcare employees with a variety of resources to help them manage their wellbeing, like peer-to-peer support groups, confidential counseling, and the ability to seek help without putting their credentials and licenses at risk?
- Do you proactively enable clinicians to do the work they love — caring for patients — by reducing their administrative burden and unnecessary admin work? What technology could you put in place to help lighten this admin load?
- Do you offer employees as much flexibility as possible to enable them to better balance work and life?
- Do you give employees at every level a voice in important decisions and regularly ask them for their feedback? Do you know how they feel on major issues, including retention and engagement?