

IMPROVING COMPETITIVE BEDSIDE NURSING THROUGH FLEXIBLE WORK STRUCTURES

TRENDWATCH CASE STUDY

Allegheny Health Network | Pittsburgh, PA

Allegheny Health Network (AHN) improves the vacancy rate in a competitive bedside nursing market by creating a flexible work structure.

Overview

Pittsburgh is a competitive nursing market with high demand for bedside nurses. With new opportunities for nurses that offer more flexible schedules, such as home health and telehealth, traditional hospital nursing schedules and burnout led to a high vacancy rate.

The RetuRN to Practice initiative focuses on the needs of nurses who have left bedside nursing as a result of inflexible work schedules, most of whom are either out of practice altogether or working in ambulatory care. AHN designed the program around three assumptions: (1) the hospital always needs nurses; (2) there are nurses who want to work but on their own scheduling terms; and (3) there are nurses who want to work in more than one patient-facing setting (i.e., bedside and ambulatory).

Nurses in the initiative can choose when and how much they want to work with few restrictions. Nurses must work a minimum of eight hours per pay period in increments no smaller than two hours. AHN places nurses in departments based on a nurse's interests, the hospital's needs and the nurse's chosen schedule. To facilitate the transition back to nursing, AHN provides a refresher training program. In exchange for this flexibility, the nurses accept a lower hourly wage and no benefits.

Impact

Before the program, AHN experienced a 14% turnover rate for bedside nurses. AHN launched RetuRN to Practice in 2018 with 30 nurses, all of whom are still employed. Since then, they have hired another 30 RetuRN to Practice nurses, with a 90% retention rate. The nurses have also generally increased their work hours over time. Nurses in the initiative fill a vital need at a lower cost than permanent staff. Beyond addressing AHN's staffing needs, the nurses bring intellectual capital that allows them to serve as mentors to less experienced nurses.

Future Goals

Moving forward, RetuRN to Practice will expand to include retired nurses. The program is also starting to work with the nurses with a goal to transition them back to permanent (part- or full-time) employees. RetuRN to Practice expects to grow alongside traditional recruitment and retention methods, like online staffing and international recruitment.