



Salute to **Nurses**

Nurses and the Pandemic

Nurses are wholly committed to patient care, not just by their job description, but by the ethical standards of their practice.

It's difficult, though, when caring for patients also puts them in danger, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"I vividly remember the fear that banded my co-workers and myself together and a sense of uncertainty that was felt throughout the medical center," Rachel Bresilla at Boston's Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center told Harvard University. "The unknown was frightening, but the urgency the pandemic placed on health care workers all over the world didn't allow us to sit in that fear or uncertainty for too long. ... The year 2020 undoubtedly marked us all in a unique, defining way. For me, it's the year I silenced fear, rose to the challenge, persevered, and embodied the year of the nurse."

Still, two years after COVID-19's first appearance, nurses are struggling to balance their own well-being with that of their patients. Words like compassion fatigue are starting to pop up, and more and more nurses are leaving the profession after a two-year battle with coronavirus.

Two-thirds of nurses surveyed by the American Association of Critical Care Nurses said their pandemic experiences have them consid-



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ering a career change. Nearly a quarter — 21% — of nurses polled by the American Nurses Foundation said they planned to resign within the next six months while another 29% said they might.

This is on top of an already

historic shortage in nurses. The Bureau of Labor Statistics says the number of registered nurses needed will climb steadily, with a projected 175,900 openings for RNs every year through 2029. And that was before the pandemic, when a crush of

over-65 patients was the industry's biggest worry.

"The hospital where I work part-time as a direct-care ICU nurse hired many travelers and/or agency staff," Heather Josey Thomas told the University of St. Augustine for

Health Services. "They also offered a huge COVID differential, essentially doubling everyone's hourly salary, but eventually, even that couldn't entice people to come in to work extra shifts because we were just so tired."

Tuition Help for Nurses

Nursing schools around the country are scrambling to bring new nurses into the workforce as the country faces a historic shortage of registered nurses.

Here's what it takes to become a nurse and some programs that could help you pay for school.

NURSING EDUCATION

It takes between two and four years to finish a nursing degree, Nurse Journal says, and while an associate degree is the minimum requirement, many employers only hire those with at least a bachelor's degree. Registered nurses must also pass the NCLEX-RN exam and become licensed in their state. You may also want to become board certified, which may mean additional years of clinical experience.

PAYING FOR NURSING SCHOOL

There are many programs to help those interested in becoming a registered nurse pay for their education. Johnson & Johnson provides a search tool to help you find scholarships and other financial assistance to help you pay for nursing school.

Pinched by the nursing shortage, health care employers may also foot the bill for qualified candidates. Johns



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Hopkins University hospitals, for instance, offer an employee nursing grant that will pay \$10,000 for students who work at one of their affiliate hospitals and are admitted to the MSN-HSM and MSN/MPH master's programs.

You may also qualify for federal aid, grants, work-study programs and other tuition reimbursement programs to help pay your way through

school. Talk to your chosen program's financial aid advisors to learn more about the opportunities that may be open to you.

LOAN FORGIVENESS

If you took out loans to pay for nursing school already, there may also be loan forgiveness programs available to help you get out of debt. Nurses who work for a non-

profit or the government may qualify for Public Service Loan Forgiveness, a program through the federal government that forgives loans after so many eligible payments.

The Nurse Corps Loan Repayment Program will also pay up to 60% of your unpaid nursing student loans in return for two years of full-time employment. Nurses who work a third year may be able

to get even more debt forgiven. Another program, the NHSC Loan Repayment Program, will forgive loans for nurses who work for two years in a health professional shortage area.

All of these programs have strict qualifications, however, so make sure you read the fine print before banking on any of them to take care of your tuition.

Nursing Shortage Outlook

The American Nursing Association projects that the U.S. will need 1.1 million new registered nurses this year alone.

Over the past 10 years, the average age of employed RNs has crept up, meaning that the nursing workforce will soon face a wave of retirements coupled with the health care needs of an aging population.

This is on top of stresses from the COVID-19 pandemic that have many nurses considering packing up their stethoscopes for good.

“We have been calling for help for years, and now, we’re experiencing a full-blown crisis. We are in a crisis so dire that even the National Guard has had to step in to help care for residents in certain states,” Mark Parkinson, president and CEO of the American Health Care Association/National Center for Assisted Living told Skilled Nursing News. “The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and exacerbated long-standing challenges.”

Some health care facilities are battling the shortage by making working conditions better for their nurses, and not just by increasing pay. Improving workplace culture and offering benefits nurses want are on the table, as are creative ways of thinking about work.

“Employers must respond to nurse burnout and retention



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challenges because they have a duty of care for their workforce, and because it is in their own interests,” the International Centre on Nurse Migration said in a new study on nurse retention. “Employers and organizations must take responsibility and provide supportive conditions,

and policy interventions should be focused on improved work environments; ensuring adequate staffing levels; and providing attractive working conditions, pay and career opportunities.”

Communication between the nursing workforce and employers is key to fixing the problem,

Becky Hultberg, president and CEO of the Oregon Association of Hospital and Health Systems, told KGW8.

“We have asked so much of our health care workers as a society over the last two years and some people have simply said, ‘it’s enough.’ I think it’s going to require efforts by hos-

pitals, by state partners, by federal partners and by the community to fix the current staffing shortage.”

In Hultberg’s state, universities are ramping up nursing school admissions and, while they have students there, are teaching them to advocate for their own well-being.

A Healthy Work Environment

For nearly every indicator, the American Nursing Association says, America's nurses are less healthy than the average American.

They're more likely to be overweight, stressed out and tired. Workplace violence, injuries on the job and the 24/7 demands of the health care environment push many nurses to the breaking point.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics says that registered nurses have the fourth-highest rate of injuries and illnesses that result in days away from work when compared to all other occupations. Yes, even lumberjacks.

To improve the health of America's 4 million registered nurses, the ANA launched the Healthy Nurse, Healthy Nation movement five years ago. Its mission is to connect and engage nurses and organizations to help nurses get more exercise, rest, nutrition, a better quality of life and be more safe on the job. It's a free program, open to everyone in the industry. There are more than 230,000 participants and more than 580 partner organizations.

It was particularly vital during the COVID-19 pandemic, which tried nurses' health like never before.

"We encourage employers, professional associations and



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schools of nursing to share and amplify the vital HNHN resources that help nurses combat burnout, manage stress and overcome trauma," ANA President Ernest J. Grant, RN, FAAN, said. "Together, we can ensure our nursing workforce is at its peak health and wellness."

One of the things the program does is to match nurses with mental health resources,

offering things like a free subscription to Headspace PLUS and other apps to improve the mental health and resilience of nurses across the country. It also organizes challenges for nurses to participate in for healthy eating, exercise and more.

"Nurses' physical and mental well-being have never been more important — to the profession and to every one of us

who counts on nurses for health care and leadership," said Kate Judge, executive director of the American Nurses Foundation.

Matthew S. Howard is a nurse who participates in the HNHN challenge. He said he walks the dog and connects with family and friends regularly, even virtually, to improve his well-being.

"A healthy mental lifestyle is

so important to me right now," he said.

Sonya L. Clayton, another participant, said she carves out quiet time to help her mental health.

"At night, I try to have at least 30 minutes of quiet time reading or doing something calming," she said. "I also talk to my prayer partner every day, and that connection is so reassuring."

Ways to Support Nurses

That nurses are health care heroes is abundantly clear after two years of pandemic.

The toll is just as clear — many nurses are stressed, burned out and strongly considering leaving the profession. So what can you do to show your appreciation? Keep reading to learn more.

FOLLOW THE RULES

Nurses witnessed firsthand the rapid spread of the novel coronavirus, so you can do your part and help keep their patient load low by taking the recommended precautions in your area. Wear masks if officials ask you to, get vaccinated if you can and follow social distancing guidelines when they're in place.

CONTACT YOUR COMMUNITY LEADERS

Get in touch with government, religious and community leaders in your area to organize events to show your appreciation for health care workers. Perhaps you can feed them a meal or two, buy them gift cards and spa days, or do something else to show them how much you appreciate their sacrifices over the last couple of years.

BE AN ADVOCATE

Support policies and legislation that benefits public health and health care profes-



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sionals. These changes will last long after the COVID-19 pandemic. Industry associations like the American Nurses Association and others can help you explore the issues important to health care workers.

TALK TO NURSES

Reach out to family and friends that are nurses and ask them if they need help. Or

volunteer to do things without asking, such as bringing their families meals, taking care of children, running errands and more. You may be giving a stressed-out health care worker the break they need to keep them going another day.

GIVE

Nonprofits are raising money for COVID-19-related issues, including caring for

the country's health care workers.

Some organizations you can look into supporting include the Center for Disaster Philanthropy's COVID-19 Response Fund, the COVID-19 Frontline Health Worker Fund, the COVID-19 Solidarity Response Fund for WHO, the CDC Foundation Coronavirus Emergency Fund and Project HOPE.

YOUR HEALTH

Be proactive in your own health care. While COVID cases spike, people are still dealing with common health ailments such as heart attacks, stroke and the flu, which can also land them in the hospital. Get flu and other vaccines when your doctor recommends, take your medications and follow medical advice to keep yourself as healthy as you can.

Types of Nurses

We're familiar with nurses on hospital floors and at our doctor's offices, but there are many different kinds of nurses in different practices around the country. Here's a sampling of some of the specialty nursing fields.

CARDIAC NURSE

Gwynedd Mercy University expects a 16% job growth rate for cardiac nurses. These nurses help patients with heart-related problems, including assisting with surgical procedures such as bypass, angioplasty or pacemaker surgery. It requires an associate degree or bachelor's degree, a registered nursing license and a state nursing license.

CERTIFIED REGISTERED NURSE ANESTHETIST

These highly trained nurses help with anesthesia during surgeries. They are some of the highest-paid and highest-trained nurses in the medical field. You must have a master's degree, a registered nursing license, at least one year in an acute care setting and a CRNA certification.

CRITICAL CARE NURSE

These are registered nurses that are specially trained for emergency situations. As a critical care nurse, you can expect to tend to serious wounds and monitor life-support systems in major traumatic events. This job requires an associate or bachelor's degree along with a registered nursing license and a certification in advanced cardiac life support.

FAMILY NURSE PRACTITIONER

These specially trained nurses provide primary health care services across the generations. They diagnose and treat illnesses, perform physical exams, do diagnostic testing, prescribe medications and more.

You'll need a master's degree in nursing and a registered nursing license along with 500 faculty-supervised clinical hours.

PERIOPERATIVE NURSE

Also known as a surgical or operating room nurse, these nurses focus on pre- and post-operative patient care. They manage the operating room, including conditions in the room, tools for operations, applying bandages and controlling bleeding. You will need an associate or bachelor's degree, a registered nursing license, and CNOR and Certified Nurse First Assistant certifications.

NURSE EDUCATOR

These nurses are responsible for teaching the next generation of health care workers, either in general nursing classes or in specific areas of nursing. You should choose this specialized field if you would like to help others work in the medical field and shape the industry's future. You'll need a master's degree and a registered nursing license as well as passing the certified nurse educator exam.



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Nurses Groups to Know

Nurses are represented by a variety of groups that advocate for the profession, provide education and networking, and more.

Here are some of the nursing associations you should get to know.

AMERICAN NURSES ASSOCIATION

One of the largest nursing associations out there, the ANA is 4 million strong. It offers nurses the opportunity to unite across state lines to advance careers, get education and support the profession as a whole. The organization does advocacy work at all levels of government and supports several initiatives to promote well-being among America's nurses. Learn more at www.nursingworld.org.

ALLIANCE OF NURSES FOR HEALTHY ENVIRONMENTS

The ANHE promotes healthy people and environments by educating and leading the nursing profession, advancing research, using evidence-based practice and influencing policy.

It's a younger group, having just started in 2008, and seeks to understand the relationship between health care and environmental health. Learn more at www.envirn.org.

AMERICAN ACADEMY OF NURSING

This group and its 2,800 members, known as Fellows, create and execute evidenced-based and policy-related initiatives to advance health care. The Fellows represent nursing's most accomplished leaders, including nurses in education, management, practice and research. They also include association executives, university presidents, chancellors, political appointees, vice presidents for nursing and more. Learn more at www.aannet.org.

AMERICAN BOARD OF NURSING SPECIALITIES

This group focuses on improving patient outcomes and consumer protection by promoting speciality nursing certifications. The member organizations that make up ABNS represent nearly a million registered nurses worldwide. Learn more at www.nursingcertification.org.

ASSOCIATION FOR NURSING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

This group, now 30 years old,

advances nursing professional development in support of better patient outcomes. Professional development should be based on standards and research, and is critical to quality patient and organizational outcomes, the group says. Learn more at www.anpd.org.

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF HISPANIC NURSES

Since 1975, this group has celebrated the culture, caring and spirit of Hispanic nurses. It has more than 40 local chapters across the country that lead,

promote and advocate for educational, professional and leadership opportunities for Hispanic nurses. Learn more at www.nahnnet.org.

National Black Nurses Association Inc.

This group is the professional voice of more than 200,000 Black registered nurses, licensed vocational/practical nurses, nursing students and retired nurses in the U.S., eastern Caribbean and Africa. It has more than 100 chapters and also provides community-based health care services. Learn more at www.nbna.org.



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