

Trends and Implications with Nursing Engagement

PRC National Nursing Engagement Report Utilizing the PRC Nursing Quality Assessment Inventory





Dear Healthcare Leader,

Nurses comprise the backbone of the healthcare system. While physicians lead the diagnosis and treatment of patients, and ancillary roles provide all types of support for those treatments, nurses occupy a distinct position in the healthcare hierarchy—they assess in the moment, provide nursing diagnoses, carry out treatment plans, relay feedback to all other hospital roles, and connect directly with patients and their families. It's hard to maintain self-compassion in this type of high-stress work environment, let alone constantly carry the emotional capacity to express compassion and empathy to others.

To best provide a high level of service to their patients, nurses need interpersonal and workplace support from both their leaders and their teammates. The impressions and needs of these unique individuals deserve our study so they can work in a way that elevates their ability to best provide care.

In order to understand which work conditions lead to engaged work culture, we set out to identify the different perceptions nurses have of their work environment and leadership, as well as how those perceptions affected their levels of engagement. We hope that the enclosed results will assist you in your everyday work as you care for those who care for your patients.

Warm Regards,

Cynthia King, PhD, MA

Director, Client Organizational Development
PRC

Leigh Ann Bradley, PhD, MSN, MA, BS-CHE, RN

Executive Coach & National Speaker
PRC Excellence Accelerator
Powered by Healthcare Experience Foundation

Does Nursing Engagement Matter?

Understanding the elements contributing to nurse engagement is one of the most pressing issues for today's healthcare leaders. Whether from the perspective of losing and replacing high-performing nurses, retaining the wrong nurses, or the quality, safety, and patient experience costs to excellent care, engagement and its corollaries are big business with significant implications. By 2026, the demand for nurses will have grown by 15%. This growing need concerns many healthcare leaders because just as the need for nursing increases, the industry concurrently faces serious personnel shortages across the field. The nursing shortage is due to several factors including, but not limited to, the growing demand for healthcare services in general, fueled in part by an increasingly elderly population. Not only is the healthcare industry experiencing high turnover rates, but the demand for healthcare providers has also surpassed the supply of qualified, educated candidates.

The financial impacts of this shortage are significant, considering the costs of termination and reduced team productivity, recruiting, and training. During periods of turnover, diminished morale and disrupted job duties become the norm. Further, retaining a nurse who is incompatible with the team or unable or unwilling to perform to the standards of excellence makes the achievement of "Always" nearly impossible. PRC found that 50% of nurses reporting burnout have no plans to leave their organization. They are physically "clocking in," but are emotionally "clocked out," displaying a lack of confidence in their work and an inability to be present. These nurses have lost touch with their patients and those behaviors are reflected in how patients perceive their quality of care.

In this era of healthcare change, our challenge becomes one of providing excellent patient care in the midst of the current realities. To do so, nurse engagement was assessed using the PRC Nursing Quality Assessment Inventory (NQAI) at the national level. PRC identifies Key Drivers of Excellence® as the areas that are the most influential to nurses' engagement level. The findings support a relationship between engagement and nurses' perceptions of the following key drivers: Autonomy, RN to RN Teamwork and Collaboration, and Leadership Access & Responsiveness. Nurses who trusted their leaders and their teams were more likely to exhibit specific characteristics associated with engagement, such as innovative thinking, ownership in their work, and a strengthened level of commitment. In addition, engaged nurses are less likely to be at risk for burnout than unengaged nurses.

Key Drivers of Engagement

The top three key drivers predicting nurses' engagement were:

1 Autonomy

2 RN to RN Teamwork & Collaboration

3 Leadership Access & Responsiveness

50%

of nurses reporting burnout have no plan to leave





PRC National Nursing Engagement Report

PRC partners with healthcare organizations across the United States to help them become the best place to work by retaining high-quality nurses via developing an engaging work culture. To better understand nurses' perceptions of their workplace and elements associated with an engaged culture, PRC recruited hospitals across the nation to participate in a study designed to measure the drivers of nurse engagement. The study was comprised of seven quality indicators assessing Registered Nurses' perceptions of their nurse practice, leadership, teams, and resources along with engagement to assess retention and burnout risk. As a result of the initial findings, PRC further studied the data to understand the relationship between engagement levels with the recruited hospitals and their Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (HCAHPS) scores.

Methodology

SUBJECTS

To better understand nurses' perceptions of their workplace and key elements that are associated with an engaged culture, PRC recruited 37 nationally representative hospital facilities to participate in a nursing study. There were 1,923 Registered Nurses that participated in the study.

SURVEY INSTRUMENT

The survey instrument, NQAI, was developed to help nurse leaders retain fully engaged nurses by providing insightful suggestions and recommendations for adaptive nursing solutions that support nurses within their teams and nursing careers. It consists of 34 questions, excluding demographic questions.



MEASURES



PRC ENGAGEMENT INDEX

The PRC Engagement Index consists of four questions that assess a nurse's beliefs about

their intellectual and emotional commitment to their hospital or healthcare facility. Responses are calculated on a 5-point scale from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree." The engagement statements are valued equally and averaged to create a mean score. Each mean score is then clustered to represent Fully Engaged, Engaged, and Unengaged Nurses.

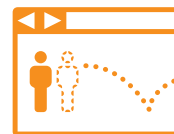
Three Key Drivers

Using multiple regression analysis of survey responses, the top three key drivers predicting nurses' engagement were identified. Autonomy, RN to RN Teamwork and Collaboration, and Leadership Access & Responsiveness were found to have the greatest impact on a nurse's level of engagement. In addition, connections between the drivers of engagement and retention, burnout, and HCAHPS scores were examined and the implications explored.



BURNOUT

The burnout assessment consisted of three questions: emotional exhaustion, disconnect to patients, and lack of confidence in their ability to overcome the challenges of their work. An additional question addressed their general and overall level of burnout. The 5-point rating scale ranged from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree."



RETENTION

Retention was assessed using one question asking participants to rate their likelihood to remain at their workplace for the next two years. The 5-point rating scale ranged from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree."

NURSE QUALITY INDICATORS

The Nurse Quality Indicators consisted of 25 questions broken down into seven dimensions. This assessed the following dimensions:

- Fundamentals of Quality Nursing Care
- Autonomy
- RN to RN Teamwork and Collaboration
- Adequacy of Resources & Staffing
- Interpersonal Relationships
- Leadership Access & Responsiveness
- Professional Development

Each Quality Indicator has three questions in each dimension except for Fundamentals of Quality Nursing Care, which has seven. The 5-point rating scale was, "Excellent," "Very Good," "Good," "Fair," and "Poor."

Profile of a Fully Engaged Nurse

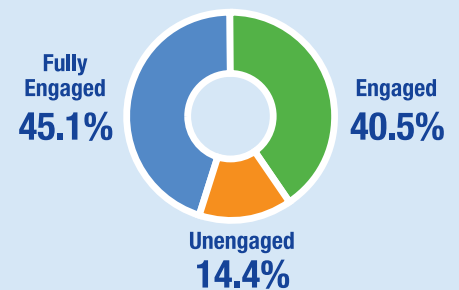
PRC defines and measures engagement as a self-focused attribute and a psychological construct comprised of nurses' beliefs about their intellectual and emotional commitment to their workplace. According to the Baldrige Performance Excellence Program, work engagement is defined as:

“Workforce engagement refers to the extent of workforce commitment, both emotional and intellectual, to accomplishing the work, mission, and vision of the organization. In general, members of the workforce feel engaged when they find personal meaning and motivation in their work and when they receive positive interpersonal and workplace support.”

Fully Engaged Nurses are emotionally and intellectually connected to their hospitals. They care about the success of their workplace, as demonstrated by interactions with patients, leaders, and teammates. They positively influence patient care with fewer voluntary absences, resulting in effective and efficient teamwork when providing patient care. These are the nurses who volunteer, mentor other nurses, and advocate for their hospital, all of which result in increased market share. These nurses are not satisfied with the status quo and are always looking for new solutions to old problems.



PRC Engagement Index



Fully Engaged

Fully Engaged Nurses are innovative thinkers invested in the success of their hospital.

Engaged

Engaged Nurses play it safe within the parameters of their job. They like their hospital, but they don't love it.

Unengaged

Unengaged Nurses do the bare minimum. They are ambivalent to the success of their hospital.

USE FOR PURSUIT OF MAGNET RECOGNITION PROGRAM OR PATHWAY TO EXCELLENCE® DESIGNATION

The NQAI assists organizations as they navigate their journey. With seven Nurse Quality Indicators comprised of 25 artfully constructed questions pre-approved by the American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC), it becomes easy to gain a current perspective on nurses' perceptions of their working environment and ways to improve it.

Engagement Items

Percentage of respondents who selected “Strongly Agree”

I am committed to investing my thoughts and ideas into my hospital

59.4%

I care about the success of my hospital

73.7%

I feel a sense of ownership in my hospital

57.1%

My work at my hospital is rewarding

60.3%

Unlike other professions, Registered Nurses typically score high on PRC’s Engagement Index (90th percentile ranking compared to all healthcare workers in the PRC database). Because Registered Nurses have committed to their professions through extensive training, they come into the profession wanting to change lives and make a difference. When given the support and resources to be successful in providing care, their engagement increases.

The majority of nurses (73.7%) care about the success of their hospital. They show up and gown up; they generally want to do a good job. Yet, only 57.1% feel a sense of ownership in their hospitals, leaving leaders to expect 100% quality to be delivered by about half of the nursing workforce.

Overall, these **Fully Engaged Nurses** are dedicated to the organization, remaining with you through good and bad times, and reducing turnover.

What We Learned

THE KEY DRIVERS

Three key drivers emerged from the survey: Autonomy, RN to RN Teamwork and Collaboration, and Access to Responsiveness by Leaders. These drivers reveal much about those who feel fully engaged.

Nurses are more likely to be fully engaged if they believe they are active participants in decision making about their patients' care and that their opinions are valued by leadership.

- They believe their input is considered when the organization makes decisions
- They have a sense of control over their nursing practice
- They see themselves as allowed to make job-related decisions

Nurses are more likely to be fully engaged when they feel like they are part of a supportive team and all teammates are respected.

- They feel they are part of an RN team
- They can rely on the other members of their RN team
- They show respect to each other as RNs

Nurses are more likely to be fully engaged if leadership is accessible, responsive to their needs, and viewed as trustworthy.

- They trust Nursing Administrators
- They see the CNO as accessible to nurses
- They feel Nursing Administration is visible

Trust is a foundational component in building an engaged workforce. When nurses trust their team and leaders, and in turn are trusted in decision making, they become more engaged.

Top 3 Drivers of Engagement

1 **Autonomy**
($r=.54$)

2 **RN to RN Teamwork and Collaboration**
($r=.50$)

3 **Leadership Access & Responsiveness**
($r=.49$)

**All correlations are significant at the .01 level

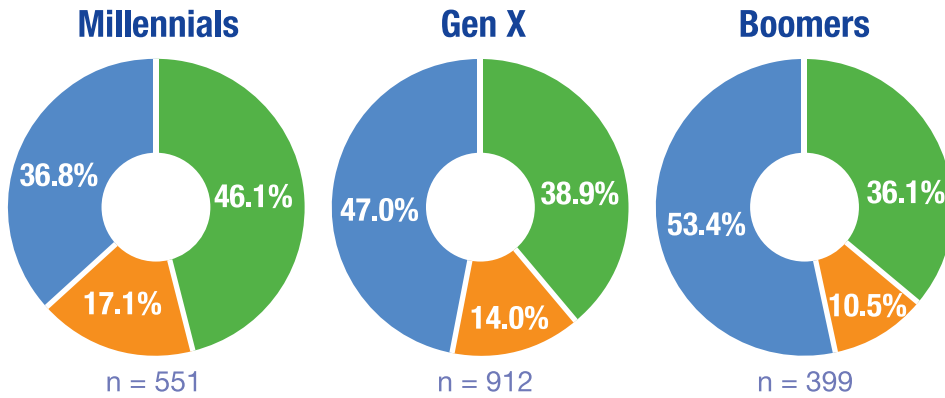
EXCELLENCE AS THE STANDARD

The Nurse Quality Indicators use "Excellent" as the top box and rank on a percentage of top box responses. Excellence is a high standard. Previous PRC research has demonstrated that nurses who believe their work environment is "Excellent" are four times more likely to recommend than nurses who say it is "Very Good." A focus on excellence provides hospital leadership the necessary information to improve nurse engagement and loyalty.

Trends and Dispelling the Myths

BY GENERATION

● Fully Engaged ● Engaged ● Unengaged



KEY FINDING:

It is no secret that Millennials have different expectations from leadership and their work environments than previous generations have had. For example, Millennials show a lower percentage of Fully Engaged Nurses (36.8%). As future nurse leaders, it is imperative that employers fully engage Millennial nurses.



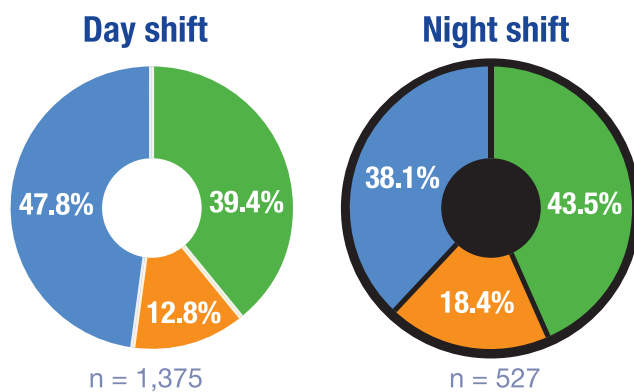
36.8%

Millennials show a lower percentage of Fully Engaged Nurses



BY SHIFT

● Fully Engaged ● Engaged ● Unengaged



KEY FINDING:

Day Shift Nurses are more Fully Engaged and less Unengaged than Night Shift Nurses. As a best practice to address these discrepancies, leadership can find ways for Night Shift Nurses to experience opportunities to interact with administration and participate in team-building activities.

INTENT TO STAY

While traditional research has explored reasons nurses choose to leave their jobs, PRC looks at key drivers that support nurses in their practice, offering solutions designed to engage nurses to stay in their current role.

BY PRACTICE SETTING

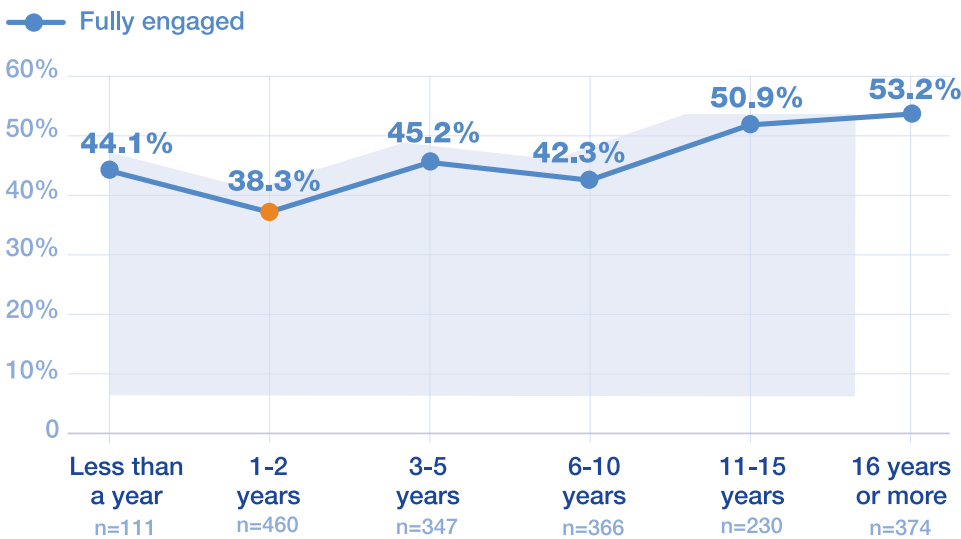
	Emergency Department	Inpatient Setting	Outpatient Diagnostic	Outpatient Surgery	Other
● Fully engaged	41.0%	45.6%	56.9%	47.8%	41.7%
● Engaged	41.0%	39.8%	36.1%	40.2%	44.0%
● Unengaged	18.0%	14.7%	6.9%	12.0%	14.3%
n =	244	981	72	291	307

KEY FINDING:

Nearly 20% of nurses working in Emergency Department settings were unengaged and fewer were fully engaged. As the front door for most hospitals, nurses in the Emergency Department have the opportunity to present the first impression of the organization to most patients. Additionally, nurses working in outpatient clinics demonstrate higher engagement scores than those working in inpatient settings.

Nearly **20%** of nurses working in **Emergency Department** settings were **unengaged**

BY YEARS OF SERVICE



KEY FINDING:

Generally, when PRC assesses the entire organization, the results demonstrate a dip in the engagement at the three-to-five-year mark. When assessing only Registered Nurses using the NQAI, the decline occurs following the first year. This dip in engagement mirrors high turnover rates in years one to three. Unfortunately, these nurses are at risk not only for leaving an organization, but also for leaving the profession entirely. Investigating onboarding and precepting practices, leader mentoring, peer coaching, and job fit are best practice approaches to addressing this engagement decline and turnover.

BY EDUCATIONAL LEVEL

KEY FINDING:

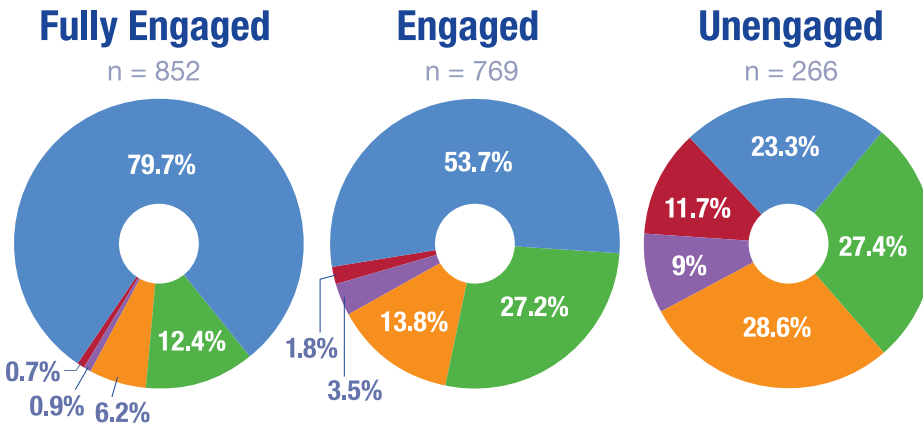
There is no significant difference in the level of engagement between nurses with Associate degrees and those with Bachelor's degrees, with fewer than 1% separating the two groups for all engagement categories. This is not surprising because, regardless of educational level, engagement occurs when nurses feel supported in their nursing practice and are able to provide excellent patient care.



Engagement as a Protective Factor for Retention

I intend to continue working at hospital name for at least two more years.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree



KEY FINDING:

Overall, 82% of Registered Nurses plan to remain in their organizations for the next two years. In fact, the majority of Fully Engaged Nurses have no plans to leave. This supports findings from PRC's Exit Interviewing Studies in which the majority of Fully Engaged Nurses leave because of uncontrollable factors such as retirement, spousal relocation, or family illness. Interestingly, over 50% of Unengaged Nurses also do not plan to leave, presenting leadership opportunities for performance management. Of those planning to leave, Millennials are more at risk than other generations.



82%

of Registered Nurses plan to remain in their organizations for the next two years

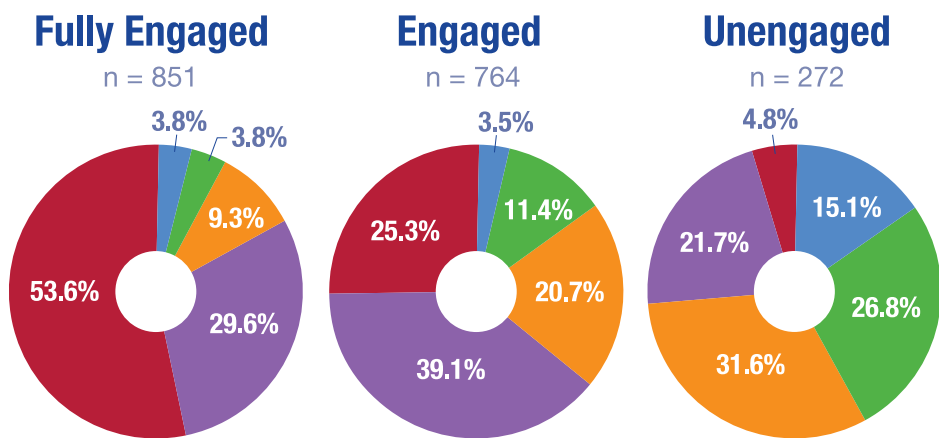
Clues to Burnout

Unengaged Nurses may or may not lead to turnover, but they definitely curb the hospital's ability to achieve excellence. These are the nurses who look for a shift to end, are focused on the next break, who call off during times of stress, and for whom a patient is a diagnosis or a task. Failing to hire and retain our best nurses jeopardizes morale, patient experiences of care, and quality and safety outcomes, all of which directly impact the bottom line.

Fully Engaged Nurses are less likely to be at risk for burnout because they have the resources and support necessary to be successful in their work.

Overall, I am burned out from working at hospital name

● Strongly Agree
 ● Agree
 ● Neither agree nor Disagree
 ● Disagree
 ● Strongly Disagree




KEY FINDING:

Overall, 15.6% reported feelings of burnout, with 41% of Unengaged Nurses report feeling burned out. Whereas, less than 8% of Fully Engaged Nurses report feeling the same. Nurses who experience burnout demonstrate a diminished capacity to care for themselves and their patients.

Their personal resources were depleted, resulting in an inability to muster the resources to find a new job. Nurses in this state find themselves in survival mode and are not actively trying to improve their own futures.

97% of nurses who were burned out, yet planned to remain in their organization, reported experiencing feelings of emotional exhaustion.



41%
of **Unengaged** Nurses report **feeling burned out**

Improve Your Patient Experience by Investing in Your Nurses

In previous research, PRC has found that nurse engagement and patient experience have a direct relationship that, when viewed collectively, provides meaningful insight into patient care and hospital overall work environments. Of the 37 hospital facilities participating in the NQAI, 26 had HCAHPS data collected during the time period Registered Nurses took the NQAI.

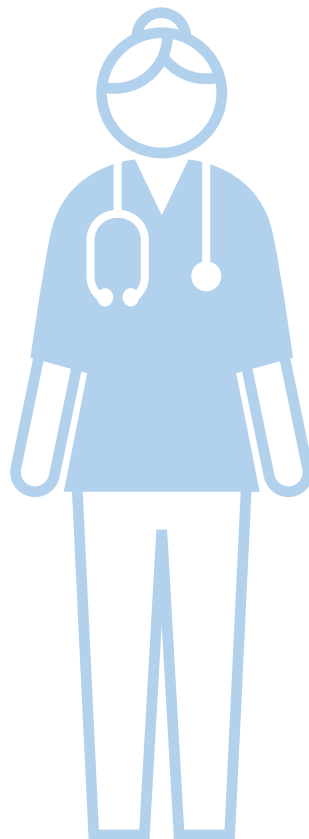
KEY FINDING:

There were several significant correlations between the majority of HCAHPS dimensions and facility level nurse engagement, with two of the most significant being Responsive to Patient Needs and Care Transitions. Nurses who are more fully engaged exhibit behaviors that help them connect with their patients. They are more empathetic in their interactions and are more present. As a result, they are more aware of their patients' needs and respond in a timely fashion. Able to anticipate patients' needs, they work to create an intentional and caring experience.

HCAHPS Publicly Reported Measures	Correlation Coefficient
Care Transition	r = .42*
Discharge Instructions	r = .38*
Hospital Environment	r = .46*
Nurses Communication	r = .39*
Overall Hospital Rating	r = .39*
Quiet	r = .42*
Responsiveness to Patient Needs	r = .46*

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Nurses who are more Fully Engaged **exhibit behaviors** that **help them connect** with their patients.



The Key Drivers identified earlier (Autonomy, RN to RN Teamwork and Collaboration, and Access and Responsiveness of Nursing Administration) make it possible for these nurses to be emotionally present for patients and their families. By being Fully Engaged in their practice, they, in turn, have the personal resources to care for their patients.

Connections Between Readmission and Engagement

One of the goals for hospitals is to lower re-hospitalization rates by ensuring patients have the proper education and understanding of their responsibilities, involvement, and steps to take after leaving the hospital. Those patients who interacted with higher engaged nurses were more likely to respond “Always” when asked about their care transitions, their needs being met, and understanding their discharge instructions. With increased understanding, patients feel more at ease and more likely to comply with their responsibilities, medications, and steps to take after leaving, leading to better health outcomes. With a hospitalization, patients are often overwhelmed with what they are experiencing both physically and mentally and are not in the best state to receive, remember, or proactively ask for necessary post-care information. Hospitals need to help empower their nurses and providers with the tools to elicit that proper communication and the ability to build relationships with their patients.

PRC Nurse Engagement and Development Offerings

The NQAI can be administrated as a standalone study or as an add-on to the PRC Engagement Survey. In this scenario, those participants identified as Registered Nurses are asked an additional 25 questions on the survey pertaining to the seven dimensions.

PRC provides direction with the key driver analysis. Key Drivers of Excellence® are those areas most influential to nurses’ engagement. They provide hospitals with a more specific place in which to focus improvement efforts through action planning. Action planning allows leaders to focus on areas of the survey demonstrating the greatest impact in making their hospital an excellent place to work while increasing engagement. Since Key Drivers of Excellence® are the most important factors driving nurses’ perceptions, PRC recommends developing action plans that address these issues. Nurses who participate in creating these goals, as opposed to having the goals dictated, will be more motivated to achieve those goals. Research has shown that when teammate goals match employer goals, emotional and intellectual commitment to their jobs increase.

Key Drivers of Engagement

1 Autonomy

2 RN to RN Teamwork & Collaboration

3 Leadership Access & Responsiveness



IMPLICATIONS FOR USE

The NQAI provides useful information on the nursing workforce that can be used to make important decisions regarding engagement, including improved engagement, retention, and burnout mitigation, as well as whether or not an organization is planning to apply to the Magnet Recognition Program®. NQAI provides leaders with insights in creating an engaging work culture that buffers the effects of a high-stress job.

About PRC

PRC is the most trusted leader in healthcare survey research through an uncompromised commitment to Quality, Service, Collaboration, Innovation, and Growth. Using high-quality survey research, PRC gives a voice to customers of healthcare organizations. We partner with these organizations, providing meaningful information and resources to support their efforts in improving healthcare for all, and in becoming better places for patients to be treated, physicians to practice medicine, and employees to work. PRC drives excellence in healthcare by facilitating millions of interviews, delivering insightful reports, and consulting and collaborating on best-in-class solutions. PRC has focused on our dedication to excellence in healthcare as the driving force behind our firm's business ethics.

REFERENCES

<https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/registered-nurses.htm>

Baldrige Performance Excellence Program http://www.baldrige21.com/BALDRIGE_GLOSSARY/BN/Workforce_Engagement.html



Cynthia King, PhD, MA
Director, Client Organizational Development

Dr. King's passion lies in data research and her findings that support employee improvement. Cynthia's research background, along with her dedication to improving overall employee relations, make her a strong asset at PRC.

As Director of Client Organization Development, she leads the Employee Engagement division and is responsible for the development of the Engagement Index used to help healthcare organizations find effective and efficient ways to engage employees and caregivers in their overall culture. Considered an expert in Action Planning for Excellence, she is an accomplished speaker and published author. She received a PhD in Educational Psychology with a specialization in Learning Cognition, Motivation and Instruction and a MA in Program Evaluation from the University of Texas at Austin.



Leigh Ann Bradley PhD, MSN/FNP, MA, BS-CHE, RN
Executive Coach & National Speaker,
PRC Excellence Accelerator, Powered by Healthcare Experience Foundation

Dr. Bradley has an astonishing ability to assess and diagnose cultural and behavioral issues within organizations. This skill derives from her unexpected background in chemical engineering, nursing, psychology, counseling, and research. With experience as a clinician, as well as an administrator, she knows first-hand the challenges that healthcare leaders face today.

Leigh Ann's proficiency gives her incredible insight to help organizations move toward high performance. As a proud PRC partner and a critical member of the Excellence Accelerator team, she is highly sought out as a coach who employs empathy, intelligence, and humility to drive results.

