

Navigating Generational Differences in the Recruitment and Retention of Pediatric Nurses

In many respects, pediatric nursing has never been tougher.

Staffing shortages, stress and burnout, societal tensions. And then the pandemic hit.

But, in the process of compiling this report, we came across a remarkable observation from one of our chief nursing officers (CNOs) that so perfectly sums everything up. She said that, like most other pediatric health care systems, she was seeing at least 50% of her nurses expressing at least one element of burnout—high levels of burnout and exhaustion. Yet, the majority of her team is still satisfied with their jobs.

This speaks to the fact that nurses still find tremendous meaning and satisfaction in their work even in the face of burnout. Perhaps in no other industry could you see such a dichotomy.

Yes, there are headwinds. Among them, recruiting and retaining nurses across four unique generational groups with very different needs, attitudes and values. Our aim is to provide our members some insight to assist them in meeting this challenge.

In producing this report, our research included in-depth discussions with generational experts as well as nursing leaders from children's hospitals around the country to fully grasp the issues at hand and the best solutions to meet them.

We're pleased to present our findings here and hope you find them useful.

Executive Summary

The landscape of the pediatric nursing workforce today is more challenging than ever. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated existing nurse burnout and staffing shortage issues. Research shows that by 2027, 900,000 registered nurses (RNs) across all disciplines are expected to have left the profession—that's one-fifth of the entire nurse workforce.

Adding to the challenge is the fact that nurses have more career options than ever before, so pediatric nursing leaders must fully understand the complexities of the four distinct generations in the workforce today to maximize their efforts.

Generational breakdown

First, it's important to understand where each generation comes from—and what makes them tick.

Baby Boomers

Born between 1946—1964

Baby Boomers are fiercely competitive and take tremendous pride in their work. They're motivated by recognition for their accomplishments and loyalty to their organization.

Generation X

Born between 1965—1979

Generation X grew up fending for themselves and thus are resourceful and independent. They crave flexibility and work-life balance from their career.

Millennials

Born between 1980—1994

Millennials are commonly known as the most collaborative generation in history. They are the largest generational group in the nursing workforce and seek meaning from their work.

Generation Z

Born between 1995—2012

Products of financial instability, Generation Zers are extremely competitive and driven primarily by money. They want flexibility from a career and opportunities to earn higher incomes with quality work.

Recruiting the Next Generation of Nurses

Generation Z is predisposed to careers in health care—here are key strategies to attract them:

Get their attention early

Unlike previous generations, they don't use college to experiment with various industries. It's best to reach them in high school.

Show them the money

Generation Zers say pay is their number-one priority in choosing a job. Beyond salary, flexibility in a position could sway them if they can see the potential for a larger payday in the near future.

Tap into their competitive nature

Generation Zers are motivated to be a part of winning organizations. Children's hospitals can provide them opportunities they can't get anywhere else.

Equip them with top technology

Generation Zers overwhelmingly (91%) say that technological sophistication would impact their desire to work at a company.

DEI is a given

A workplace culture of diversity, equity and inclusion is an underlying expectation for Generation Zers. Seattle Children's offers a case study in building an anti-racist organization by taking traditional DEI initiatives a step further.

Retention Strategies for a Generationally Diverse Workforce

Stress and burnout for front-line health care providers is the most pressing retention challenge for nursing leaders today.

Case study: Nemours Children's Health uses a three-pronged initiative to treat and prevent burnout through individual support, practice efficiency and cultural wellness:

Embrace customization

Allow employees to customize their job role to play right into what Generation Zers crave.

Provide family-level treatment

Use some of the same ideas that children's hospitals employ to help patients and their families feel more at home to engage team members, alleviate stress and provide some convenience.

Communication is key

Ask staffers what would resonate with them and ensure generational diversity when seeking employee feedback.

Paradigm Shifts

Flexible Benefit Plans

The different generations also have very different needs when it comes to employee benefits. Children's hospitals may consider voluntary benefit plans, which allow employees to have some flexibility in personalizing their benefits and coverages.

Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) offers a case study in creating a culture for all to thrive by creating a "lattice" hierarchy (vs. the traditional ladder format) to allow flexibility in staffers' career paths.

Today's Nursing Workforce Landscape

Though the COVID-19 pandemic is mostly behind us now, its impact looms large on the nursing profession. The stress and burnout already associated with the work was amplified during the pandemic, leading to an influx of early retirements and nurses leaving the bedside altogether. The result—an existing nursing shortage exacerbated by COVID's effects to create an oncoming crisis.

But it's not all dark clouds. Nurses today have significantly more career options than ever before. And while those opportunities mean more nurses will be needed to fill the shoes of those exploring other paths in health care, the autonomy is undoubtedly good for nurses—and, ultimately, patient outcomes.

Meanwhile, as more health care organizations have embraced Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives over the years, we've seen the pediatric nursing workforce—while still dominated by white females—continue to grow more diverse.

[INFOGRAPHIC]

Analysis assembled by career-planning website Zippia shows nearly two million pediatric nurses in the United States, of which:

- 92% are female
- Two-thirds are white or Caucasian
- 11% are Black, with 9% Hispanic and 9% Asian
- The average age is 43 years old, which is slightly younger than the average for nurses across all disciplines

[INFOGRAPHIC]

Looking at a generational breakdown of all nurses, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics:

- Millennials comprise the largest group, accounting for 37% of the workforce
- Generation X makes up 30% of the nursing population
- Generation Z comprises 19%—and rising
- The Baby Boomers still represent a significant portion of the nursing profession with 14% of the total

Keeping this workforce together—not to mention trying to increase its ranks to meet rising demand—is the biggest challenge facing nursing leaders today.

National Council on State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) research shows that 100,000 registered nurses (RNs) left the workforce during the pandemic. Within the next four years, another 800,000 say they intend to leave the workforce, citing stress, burnout and retirement. In total, that represents one-fifth of the entire RN population projected to leave the bedside by 2027.

Chief nursing officers (CNOs) seeking to fill those vacancies are finding more competition for the available talent pool. Internally, nurses have more opportunities than ever before to take different career paths, including extended educational opportunities and within a wider array of specialized services that all need workers with nursing experience. While the use of travel nursing services has receded from its COVID-era high, it remains a viable—and lucrative—option for some nurses. The pandemic accelerated the demand for nurses in burgeoning specialties like telehealth and school-based health care. The aging Baby Boomer population is fueling a growing appetite for nurses in private care

facilities and home settings. And the nursing shortage itself creates a more urgent need for educators to teach the next generation of bedside nurses.

Meanwhile, the pandemic made stress and burnout a more prevalent issue for nurses. The wave of resignations and resulting staffing shortages magnifies those issues for the nurses remaining on the job. The NCSBN survey revealed more than half of responding nurses reported feeling “emotionally drained” or “used up” at least a few times every week, with nearly 30% saying they were “at the end of their rope” on multiple occasions during the week.

Generational breakdown

Most American workplaces are comprised primarily of four distinct generational groups. While generational experts may vary slightly on the age ranges they assign to each group, the underlying concept is that each generation shares a common history. The events and conditions they experience during their formative years determines how they see the world—those events shape their shared “generational personality.”

Before delving into best strategies for recruiting and retaining these diverse populations, it’s important to understand where each comes from—and what makes them tick.

Baby Boomers

Born between 1946—1964

At more than 80 million strong, Baby Boomers have been renowned—until recently—as America’s most competitive generation. The post-war population explosion meant Baby Boomers needed to fight harder to compete for jobs and advancement within their careers. It’s a group that is fiercely determined and takes tremendous pride in their work.

Not surprisingly, Baby Boomers have had to make the biggest adjustments to technology in the workplace. And while some workplaces might already be feeling the crunch of this population heading off into retirement, a larger Baby Boomer exodus is on the horizon: according to 2022 Bureau of Labor Statistics data, nearly one in six nurses across all specialties—about 14%—hail from this generation.

What motivates Baby Boomers?

The combination of competitiveness and work-borne pride means recognition moves the needle for this generation. Embracing opportunities to acknowledge their fine work and loyalty to an organization is key.

Generation X

Born between 1965—1979

While their Baby Boomer parents were out working hard, Generation X—the “latchkey kids”—were often left to fend for themselves. This created a resourceful and independent mindset among this population that they carry into their adult lives and careers.

Generation Xers are more likely to be college educated than their parents, a reflection of not only the shifting American workplace but also the priority and pride Baby Boomers placed on obtaining quality higher education for their children.

They are not technology-native, per se', but Generation X came of age as the digital revolution exploded and thus is very comfortable adapting to new technologies.

What motivates Generation Xers?

Work-life balance has always been a driving force for this group. Their upbringing of seeing their toiling parents making sacrifices for jobs that may not have paid off feeds their skepticism. Flexibility in the workplace is important to Generation X.

Millennials

Born between 1980—1994

Millennials are commonly known as the most collaborative generation in history. They work well in team settings and their thirst for collaborative efforts lends to a preference for flat organizations versus structured hierarchies.

For this generation, the impact of their work is paramount; beyond pay or advancement, millennials are driven to make a difference with meaningful work.

Millennials grew up with technology all around them and are very comfortable with new programs and processes.

What motivates Millennials?

In nursing, Millennials needn't look far to find impact in the work they do. But beyond the patients directly in their care, having opportunities to effect widespread improved outcomes through organizational changes—especially if done collaboratively—will resonate.

Generation Z

Born between 1995—2012

Generation Zers are not only digital natives, but they expect to have access to the highest-quality technology in their workplace. Born into a world where they've been able to customize nearly every aspect of their lives, they crave the same type of flexibility in their careers.

They've experienced the Great Recession and other financial turbulence during their formative years, so they are also more driven by the compensatory aspect of work than the Millennials who preceded them. And they're poised to scrap for what they want—Generation Z has supplanted Baby Boomers as the most competitive of generational groups.

What motivates Gen Zers?

Money is the primary driver, but it's not just the highest current offer that will attract Gen Zers. Raised in the "gig economy," they understand there's more than one way to attain their financial goals. Having the flexibility to customize job responsibilities and better position themselves for the next challenge can trump a bigger paycheck today.

The research behind these groupings—gathered here by father-son generational experts David and Jonah Stillman—comes from diverse panels encompassing all regional, racial, gender and socioeconomic classifications. Still, even the most thorough research on generational characteristics are

generalizations—obviously, individual members of these populations bring to the table their own unique sets of values, experiences and attitudes. But a better understanding of how each generational group interacts with each other can be an invaluable resource for employers and managers seeking to recruit and retain talent in this rapidly evolving workforce environment.

Recruiting the Next Generation of Nurses

In the battle for the oncoming generation of workers, health care has a leg up on other industries, in that Generation Z is predisposed to a healthy lifestyle. More than its preceding generations, Generation Zers have had health on their radar from an early age; they've grown up with constant messages from their parents, school and the media about the importance of being healthy, eating right and staying active. The COVID-19 pandemic has only served to underscore this generational attitude.

This is also a DIY population—71% of Generation Zers said they believe the phrase “if you want it done right, then do it yourself.” They’ve spent their lives consulting YouTube to learn how to do everything under the sun, and they consult WebMD or other online sources to self-diagnose their health. They are naturally drawn to occupations in health care.

Get their attention early

It’s imperative, however, not to squander that head start. Baby Boomers and Generation Xers used college as an opportunity to explore options in various fields and often ultimately pursued careers in industries unrelated to their original areas of study. Generation Z, however, has a much more transactional view of college. They are more likely to expedite their schooling to fast track their career or eschew traditional higher education altogether in lieu of alternate pathways.

Some industries are already embracing this trend by lifting college degree requirements for entry-level positions. Obviously, many health care positions—including nursing—will always require extensive schooling. The key to tapping into this generation’s interest, then, is to get on their radar early and provide incentives to choose a path toward a career in nursing. Some children’s hospitals, for example, are building a pipeline of future nurses by instituting scholarship programs that provide upfront tuition for students interested in attending nursing school.

Show them the money

Because of the events of their formative years, Generation Zers say pay is their number-one priority in choosing a job. That mindset was only cemented by COVID-19; more than 40% of Generation Z respondents say their income was directly impacted by the pandemic. The younger generation has more options than its predecessors, so they can afford to be selective. Hiring managers should be prepared to sell these candidates on their company as much as the applicant is attempting to sell themselves to elicit a job offer.

By its nature, nursing does not typically lend itself to the kind of flexible work options that other industries can offer, so the key is transparency. Honest conversations upfront around job responsibilities and expectations, promotion tracks, competitiveness of pay and how that can improve with outstanding work are all things that will move the needle for a Generation Z candidate—and can ultimately improve retention down the line.

While this attitude could be misinterpreted for entitlement, it’s just a reflection of a population grounded in events where they’ve seen financial security taken away in an instant, so their instinct is

one of survival mode. While Millennials are more apt to seek out meaning and fulfillment in their careers, Generation Zers are focused on assuring their livelihood—they’re content to find personal satisfaction in other aspects of their lives.

Tap into their competitive nature

Beyond the individual drive to land the most sought-after assignments or jobs in the highest-paying specialties, Generation Zers are motivated to be part of winning organizations. As leaders on the forefront of medical innovation, children’s hospitals are uniquely positioned to attract top young talent by providing them opportunities to do amazing work they simply cannot do anywhere else. Given the competition for talent in today’s workforce—both within health care as well as other industries—it’s crucial for children’s hospitals to capitalize on this advantage in recruitment.

Equip them with top technology

Generation Zers are digital natives. The preceding generations—even Millennials—were digital pioneers. Generation Z was immersed from birth with digital technology while the older groups adapted to it. As a result, Generation Zers simply expect technology to be present in every aspect of their lives. But it’s not just enough for a company to have technology; Generation Zers are choosing jobs based on whether a potential employer’s technology is smart, innovative and driving change. A recent Stillman-conducted study found 91% of Generation Zers said that technological sophistication would impact their desire to work at a company. The importance of technology cannot be overstated.

[PULLOUT STATISTIC]

91% of Generation Zers say that technological sophistication would impact their desire to work at a company

DEI is a given

Much like cutting-edge technology, a workplace culture of diversity, equity and inclusion is an underlying expectation for Generation Zers. While older generations may have considered solid DEI programs or resources a nice benefit for a company to offer, it’s a must-have for the younger generation.

Adhering to strict DEI hiring policies may be challenging in a time when simply filling open positions can be an uphill battle, but they’re important to building a culture aligned with an organization’s mission and values. (*See the adjacent case study for more on how one children’s hospital is taking its DEI initiatives a step further.*)

Case Study: Seattle Children’s Building an Anti-Racist Organization

In 2019, leaders at Seattle Children’s committed to creating an anti-racist health care organization. In doing so, they strived to expand beyond traditional diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) initiatives toward an “active, ongoing process of identifying, challenging and changing the values, structures and behaviors that perpetuate systemic racism.”

In practice, that means addressing the gaps in traditional DEI strategies that can lead to further perpetuating inequities or disparities in employee recruitment and retention, as well as access to care and patient outcomes. It’s prompted a thorough examination of all organizational policies and procedures through an anti-racist lens. For example, a traditional human resources complaint may typically involve an HR investigation with minimal follow-up with the original complainant. But what

about the potential harm to interpersonal relationships that may have occurred in the process? What about others who may have been affected by the transgression but didn't lodge a complaint?

"Because many times traditional HR is confidential, you don't disclose anything and everybody goes back to their corner," says Myra Gregorian, M.A., senior vice president and chief people officer, Seattle Children's. "But it really makes for a difficult dynamic if the restorative work isn't done."

Find Diverse Voices for Interview Process

From a hiring perspective, an anti-racism focus includes ensuring diversity on both sides of the interview table. Seattle Children's keeps job openings active until a 30% racially and ethnically diverse candidate pool is achieved. Beyond that, the hospital widely utilizes staffers from outside the hiring departments to participate in the interview process; they've found these "external" viewpoints often more readily illuminate behavior or attitudes inconsistent with the organization's core values. The extra feedback also helps ensure candidates aren't eliminated simply because they might not be a "good fit"—language Gregorian and her team are working to eliminate from the hiring process altogether.

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"When you say someone's 'not a good fit,' that has often been a way to prevent folks who have different perspectives or experiences into an environment and protecting a milieu that doesn't have a history of supporting diversity and inclusion. We try to lead with, 'Tell me why, tell me more about what those challenges and barriers are.'"

Alicia Tieder, MSW, LICSW, senior director of Health Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, Seattle Children's

Seattle Children's maintains a dashboard available to everyone in the organization to track its progress toward becoming an anti-racist organization. It displays both outcome and process measures, including executive commitment to diversity, workplace culture indices and overall employee diversity.

"We have tried to be very deliberate with making sure this is not just a training initiative and that we are actually moving the needle on our health equity and anti-racism work," Gregorian says. "We are after real change, and we are at a place where transparency with our workforce is not just a nice-to-have but a must-have."

Retention Strategies for a Generationally Diverse Workforce

Stress and burnout for front-line health care providers is the most pressing retention challenge for nursing leaders today.

Although not a new phenomenon, employee burnout has become a more prevalent issue in the last several years. Financial and staffing issues in hospitals, along with external stressors in our communities and—most notably—the COVID-19 pandemic, have pushed many nurses to their limits.

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A quarter to half of nurses reported feeling "emotionally drained" (50.8%), "used up" (56.4%), "fatigued" (49.7%), "burned out" (45.1%) or "at the end of their rope" (29.4%) a few times a week or every day

2022 NCSBN study

Addressing these concerns is a top priority for health care organizations. Not only does nurse wellness impact the ongoing staffing shortages, but it also directly affects patient safety and outcomes. (See the adjacent case study for more on how a children's health system is working to enhance employee wellness and prevent burnout.)

Case Study: Nemours Children's Health Making Investments in its Employees

When Nemours Children's Health appointed Maureen "Mo" Leffler as its first enterprise-wide CWO—chief wellness officer—in July 2020, it marked an important step toward acknowledging and addressing the issues of employee stress and burnout within the health system.

"The emphasis on treating the emotional distress or the mental health care needs of health care workers is at the forefront, and it's really essential that we do that," says Leffler, D.O., M.P.H. "We know depression and anxiety are high in our workforce right now and are associated with occupational harms like burnout. Treating the distress that exists is essential for our health care workers—we have an ethical obligation to do so."

To meet that obligation, Leffler and her team launched a three-pronged employee wellness effort centered around:

- **Individual Support.** Nemours provides a robust array of resources for self-care, including free access to fitness centers, meditation and weight-loss services and a wellness portal with a mobile app.
- **Practice Efficiency.** Investments in staffing models and EHR optimization efforts, among other process-related improvements, allow front-line providers to spend more time with their patients. It's good for patient outcomes and good for the providers as well. "If we can get our team members doing what they care most about for 20% of their time, based on research, we can reduce burnout," Leffler says.
- **Cultural Wellness.** Fostering an organization-wide culture of well-being, featuring a peer support program, an onsite well-being psychologist and well-being rounding.

Ultimately, the aim is to go from a model of treating stress and burnout after it's become an issue to a primarily prevention-based model. In that scenario, according to Leffler, the organization is providing the rest, nutrition, self-care opportunities and proper work burden so that staffers can avoid stressors—"pebbles in the shoes"—that can grow to the point of burnout.

[PULLOUT QUOTE]

"We are committed to providing a diversity of resources for self-care to get rid of the pebbles in the shoes that drive burnout."

Maureen "Mo" Leffler, D.O., M.P.H., chief wellness officer, Nemours Children's Health

From a generational standpoint, wellness-based initiatives make sense in hiring and keeping the newest generation of caregivers. Where Baby Boomers and Generation X were more likely to boast about maintaining long shifts and the hours they've logged, the younger generations aren't on board—and are more likely to be in tune with maintaining a healthy balance.

Leffler isn't sure if it's a generational divide or just an overall shift in mindset across all age groups, but she says she's noticing a greater willingness among staffers to acknowledge emotional distress, seek and

provide support and practice self-compassion. And she also sees how impactful having a culture of well-being can be for Nemours.

"I think it's incredibly important for retention," Leffler says. "Health care's hard right now, and people have a lot of opportunities to move around; doubling down on our commitment to them as humans is another reason to stay with an organization."

Embrace customization

Jonah Stillman shares an anecdote from a client that allows its employees to design their own job titles, such as, "I.T. Wizard" or "Duke of Solutions." The company's CEO says it helps boost retention rates because employees love to talk about their jobs.

Perhaps letting a phlebotomist call themselves the "Maven of Blood Draws" is a bridge too far, but consider where in your organization customization might work. Perhaps it's allowing an employee to expand their formal job role to take on additional responsibilities not traditionally included in their position. Conversely, another staffer may want to hyper-specialize a role that makes sense for the organization.

This type of customization plays right into what Generation Zers crave, but it would likely appeal to others as well. And it's a creative way to keep valued employees in the fold.

Provide family-level treatment

Children's hospitals are constantly innovating ways to help patients and their families feel more at home and provide whatever they can to make their visits easier. Seeking out similar methods to engage team members, alleviate stress and provide some convenience in their lives can be powerful retention tools.

For example, Nationwide Children's Hospital provides free tax-preparation assistance for patient families and offers the service to staffers as well. Some children's hospitals offer onsite daycare services or discounts to nearby facilities. And, like many pediatric institutions, Children's Hospital & Medical Center in Omaha, Nebraska, uses therapy dogs to comfort patients. Recently, the hospital added Howie, a 1-year-old Golden Retriever, as a therapy dog dedicated to working with stressed staff members.

Communication is key

What resonates with one organization may fall flat with another, so the most important thing to do is gauge what will move the needle with your team by simply asking. Not every retention tool is a life-changer. One CNO reports that a staff survey revealed many were unhappy with the old chairs in the facility. Voilà—new ergonomic chairs at all workstations—and it was a "big win" that showed an appreciative staff that leadership listened and cared about their needs.

Similarly, ensure generational diversity when seeking employee feedback. We know each generation has its unique motivating factors, so focus groups should have balanced representation across each age group.

Paradigm Shifts

Following are two additional strategies that can be used to enhance recruitment and retention of nursing staff. Though they represent more substantial departures from traditional modes of thinking, they are designed to appeal to team members across all generational groups.

Flexible Benefit Plans

We've reviewed the differing attitudes and preferences held by each generation in the workplace; it's to be expected that each would also have very different needs when it comes to employee benefits. Given that generation groupings align with life stages, their benefit preferences may be even more homogenous than their previously discussed sets of values.

According to research from The Society for Human Resource Management, here are some benefits that best align with each generation's unique needs:

Baby Boomers:

- Retirement planning or investment advice
- Long-term care insurance
- Lifetime income solutions, such as in-plan annuities
- 401(k) matching contributions
- Dental plan

Generation X:

- Supplemental insurance that may help cover costs linked to hospital stays or serious illnesses
- Work-from-home days, flexible schedules
- Full-service employee assistance programs
- Wellness programs

Millennials:

- Low-cost, quality health care
- Paid sick days
- Work-from-home days
- Flexible schedules

Generation Z:

- Telemedicine programs or virtual mental health counseling
- Loan payment aid or tuition reimbursement
- Comprehensive health insurance
- Vision, dental, maternity and well-being benefits
- Employee assistance programs

With the wide variance in needs, there's not likely a one-size-fits-all solution. Children's hospitals may consider voluntary benefit plans, which allow employees to have some flexibility in personalizing their benefits and coverages.

Thorough communication with staffers is key to understand their needs and ensure they are fully apprised of their options. It's also crucial for leadership to be abreast of employment laws to be certain that variable benefit offerings are in line with Equal Employment Opportunity Commission rules and guidelines.

Case Study: Creating a Culture for All to Thrive Professionally at CHOP

Ironically, the first step Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) took in building a career framework that appealed to all generations in its workforce was to disregard—with reason—generational generalizations.

“That doesn't mean we discounted any work or research that's been done on generations; there's helpful research and it provides guideposts,” says Paula Agosto, RN, M.H.A., senior vice president and chief nursing officer, CHOP. “But when it came down to creating a professional environment for growth, the one big takeaway we got from the staff was that they want individual opportunity, individual respect and individual appreciation.”

Ladders Become Lattices

The traditional clinical “ladder” system of career advancement in nursing means that any movement along the path that wasn't directly upward could be seen as a negative. Pursuing an advanced degree could impact one's Clinical Nurse level and nurses who hadn't advanced to a certain point may feel as if they'd failed; Agosto recalls one career nurse apologizing upon her retirement for not reaching Clinical Nurse III.

[PULLOUT QUOTE]

“This was a woman who worked in critical care at the bedside for 40 years—she's a god as far as I'm concerned. But because of this ladder notion, she left disappointed and feeling like she had let me down.”

Paula Agosto, RN, M.H.A., senior vice president and chief nursing officer, CHOP

CHOP replaced the ladder structure with the PEAK (Professional Excellence & Advancing Knowledge) program that enables clinical nurses to pursue a variety of educational and professional development opportunities based on their individualized goals and passions. Career summits can still be scaled, but there's also encouragement to accept new challenges at any level of the organization.

“We went from talking about ladders to lattices, and that really gives voice to the notion that we value internal mobility,” says Joanne McCool, vice president, human resources, CHOP. “People coming into the workforce now want mobility that can be up, down and across.”

That flexibility carries over even into the nature of CHOP's relationship with its staff. Although a product of staffing changes influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic, the organization now embraces fluidity in its employee relationships—for example, from full-time employee to per diem and vice versa. It's required CHOP to become more nimble in its operational structure, and it's enabled the hospital to meet the desires of the current workforce.

Nurse Managers as Coaches

CHOP's Shared Governance structure is a major driver of these changes. Today's workers expect to have more input on their roles and CHOP is leaning into that, according to McCool. Heavy investments in shared governance and two-way employee communications are paving the way for new ideas. That means more opportunities for staffers—like an internal organizational gig economy—and a rethinking of not only what they can expect from their career but what they expect from their leaders.

"It's changing the job of the nurse manager from 80% functional expertise to a talent agent, a coach and a mentor," McCool says. "You need to know who your players are, what their strengths are, how you are using them and if they need more training or some mentorship," Agosto adds. "That's what I think leadership is now—you're a coach/leader of your team more than anything else, which means you have to listen."

In a competitive labor market, every advantage counts. Having insight into the underlying personality traits of the generational groups you're courting—and being equipped with strategies to best capitalize on this knowledge—is invaluable.

By owning a better understanding of the unique values and work habits of each generational group, you are better prepared to motivate these different populations. Using the recruitment and retention techniques provided—along with examples already in progress by your peer institutions—should aid your efforts.

We look forward to joining you in welcoming the next generation of pediatric nurses to this vital, amazing career.