

SPOTLIGHT ON NURSING

A Plan for Action: The Development of a Statewide Initiative to Improve Nurse Wellbeing in Hawai'i

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The Spotlight on Nursing is a recurring column from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa Nancy Atmospera-Walch School of Nursing (NAWSON). It is edited by Holly B. Fontenot PhD, APRN, WHNP-BC, FAAN, FNAP; Research Director for Department of Nursing, Frances A. Matsuda Chair in Women's Health, and Professor for NAWSON, and HJH&SW Contributing Editor; and Joanne R. Loos PhD, Science Writer for NAWSON.

Abbreviations

ANF = American Nurses Foundation

HSCN = Hawai'i State Center for Nursing

RRW = Recruitment, Retention, and Wellbeing

The wellbeing of nurses has become a priority for health care institutions. The COVID-19 pandemic drew attention to the physical and emotional toll that the profession takes on nurses and causes many to consider leaving the profession. A Google search for the term “nursing wellbeing” returns 129 million results. This reflects the significant concern that has arisen about the wellbeing of nurses. This article describes how and why the Hawai'i State Center for Nursing (HSCN) is working with its partners and stakeholders to develop a statewide approach to addressing nursing wellbeing as a factor affecting workforce recruitment and retention.

A Crisis of Nursing Wellbeing

The American Nurses Foundation (ANF) conducted a 3-year national study examining the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on nurses. In November 2022, ANF conducted the third year of the study.¹ Findings indicate that the majority of the nation's nurses feel stressed, frustrated, exhausted, overwhelmed, undervalued, overworked, and anxious. In addition, the proportion of nurses reporting these negative feelings was higher in November than in January of the same year.² Also in 2022, the Surgeon General of the United States named health worker burnout a national priority.³

While national organizations were studying the impact of the pandemic on nurses across the country, HSCN, a state agency mandated by law to monitor trends in the local nursing workforce and support the recruitment and retention of nurses in Hawai'i, was doing the same for nurses in the state. To learn about the impact of the pandemic on local nurses, HSCN used its 2021 Nursing Workforce Supply Survey to collect data about nursing wellbeing. Similar to national findings, most Hawai'i nurses

reported that working during the pandemic caused them to feel stressed. Nearly half reported feeling anxious, and about 40% reported they felt exhausted, overworked, and unprepared.⁴

To support employers with their pandemic-related challenges, HSCN began convening regular meetings with nurse executives throughout the state. Early in the pandemic, meetings focused on how HSCN could support health care facilities with the procurement of personal protective equipment or the recruitment of staff to help care for an influx of patients with COVID-19. As the course of the pandemic changed, so did the conversations in these meetings. Rather than focusing on pandemic-related logistics, the nurse executives expressed concern about their nurses' wellbeing and their frustrations with the lack of clear plans for how to address the problem.

HSCN took the growing body of data and the nurse executives' concern as a call to action to strategically address the crisis of nursing wellbeing in Hawai'i. As a result, in October of 2022, HSCN's Advisory Board endorsed addressing nursing wellbeing as a factor impacting workforce recruitment and retention as an organizational strategic priority. Consistent with the strategic priority, HSCN has produced a report⁴ and an infographic,⁵ and has offered several continuing nursing education events related to nursing wellbeing. However, the principal activity HSCN has undertaken is to develop clear recommendations to address the wellbeing of all of Hawai'i's nurses.

Developing a Plan of Action

Defining the Parameters for Statewide Recommendations

HSCN defined 4 primary criteria for the development of a set of recommendations to improve nursing wellbeing in Hawai'i:

1. Have an impact beyond individual employers or organizations. All nurses deserve wellbeing support regardless of their employers' or organizations' ability to implement wellbeing interventions at work. Recommendations should

focus on multi-employer collaborations or state- or county-level policy changes.

2. Be actionable. Rather than providing abstract suggestions without a clear way to implement them, recommendations should be for specific individuals or organizations to perform specific activities.

3. Be measurable. Recommendations should be accompanied by a reasonable way to measure their outcomes to ensure that less effectual interventions are retired to make way for more impactful ones.

4. Include a combination of short- and long-term activities with short- and long-range outcomes. The recommendations should combine to yield a culture of wellbeing in Hawai'i. To accomplish a culture shift, some activities should be done early with the expectation of rapid outcomes. Other activities should have longer or later implementation times with slower, persistent outcomes.

Forming a Working Group

HSCN leveraged its role as a statewide convener to form the Recruitment, Retention, and Wellbeing (RRW) working group. Invited members were selected to ensure that the plan to improve nursing wellbeing in Hawai'i included perspectives from across the nursing profession. Members included nurses from acute care, post-acute/long-term care, public health, nursing professional organizations, and nursing labor unions. Deans and faculty were invited to represent nursing in academia. Invitees also included nurses from Neighbor Islands to ensure representative voices from across our island geography. To add regulatory, policy, and interprofessional perspectives to the group, HSCN invited the executive officers of the Hawai'i Board of Nursing, the policy analyst from the Healthcare Association of Hawai'i, and the director of the Hawai'i/Pacific Basin Area Health Education Center. Additionally, HSCN Advisory Board members were encouraged to join the working group to provide insight and to help ensure that the work was in keeping with the Advisory Board's vision for the strategic initiative.

Members of the RRW working group were invited to participate in virtual meetings as they were available. Members who were unable to attend were encouraged to participate via email submissions which were added to the discussion by HSCN staff.

Taking an Evidence-Based Approach

The RRW working group's first task was to consult existing academic/scientific literature, commissioned reports, and local news stories about nursing wellbeing. The hope was that existing research would provide tested approaches to improving wellbeing that Hawai'i could adopt. The working group summarized literature⁶ describing burnout, compassion fatigue,

moral distress, and the consequences they pose for nurses, patients, and health care employers. Despite the large and growing body of literature related to nursing wellbeing, there was no clear evidence of effective interventions or guidance on how to implement them on a large scale.

Concurrent to the RRW working group's efforts, the Nurse Staffing Think Tank Recommendations and Priorities⁷ was released. The Nurse Staffing Think Tank is a group of 5 nursing organizations that came together to try to address the sources and consequences of inadequate nursing staffing. The result of their work was a set of actionable recommendations and measurable outcomes for 5 categories that influence nursing staffing and, by extension, nursing wellbeing. The working group compared Hawai'i's identified key issues to the Nurse Staffing Think Tank's priorities and found a high degree of overlap. The document provided not only priority topic areas on which recommendations should focus but also model for a comprehensive set of recommendations.

Early Accomplishments and Future Work

Since its inception in June 2022, the working group has accomplished 3 notable goals including:

1. Summarized current research on nursing wellbeing and burnout and made this summary available on the HSCN Wellbeing Initiatives webpage (<https://www.hawaiiicenterfor nursing.org/wellbeing/>).
2. Identified 4 priority areas for interventions: healthy work environments, work schedule flexibility, innovative care delivery models, and total compensation.
3. Identified a planning framework developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Environmental Public Health Leadership Institute⁸ to help produce actions and measurable outcomes.

The framework will guide the development of a statewide strategy to address nurses' wellbeing, stress, burnout, and their intention to leave their current jobs. Using the framework, the working group will define objectives and measurable outcomes which will be consolidated into a set of achievable recommendations to support the mission of establishing Hawai'i as the best place for nurses to work. Recommendations being developed by the working group include events and activities that can be implemented through the collaborative efforts of employers, state agencies, nursing professional organizations, and other health care stakeholders. These recommendations will address state and county-level public and private sector needs, with a release scheduled for the fall of 2023. Anticipated outcomes will have long- and short-term impacts aimed to improve the wellbeing of and work environments for nurses working in Hawai'i. Future work will focus on prioritizing actions and events to optimize

impacts. Further work will include identifying national, state, and local data resources to measure outcomes. The working group will also identify data gaps and make recommendations for additional data collection strategies to ensure that anticipated outcomes are accomplished.

Conclusion

This statewide strategy to address nurses' wellbeing is a response to a call to action that was created utilizing both national and state level data and resources, as well as eliciting local stakeholder feedback via the working group. The feedback and guidance from the working group has been crucial to the development of an approach to addressing nursing wellbeing that is guided by, framed by, and responsive to Hawai'i's unique needs. The collaborative working group model is an effective way to develop strategic initiatives and can be adopted to facilitate shared decision-making. Moreover, through synergy, the working group model supports partnerships, promotes engagement, and can produce impactful results.

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