Creating Healthy Work Environments: Adequate Staffing, Recruitment and Retention Strategies

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BACKGROUND
Mercy Hospital St. Louis is a 900 bed Level One Trauma Center employing over 2000 nurses. For nursing staff Mercy St. Louis competes with two other Level One Trauma Centers in its region. The realization of a nursing shortage in Missouri came to the forefront in 2016. The Missouri Hospital Association cited a deficit of 1300 nurses versus need for the state of Missouri. In reaction to that deficit, Mercy Hospital St. Louis participated in a system wide initiative to prioritize the six essential standards of a Healthy Work Environment (HWE) as defined by the American Association of Critical Care Nursing (AACN). The goal was to prioritize those activities and address the key focus areas as they relate to skilled communication, true collaboration, effective decision making, appropriate staffing, meaningful recognition, and authentic leadership.

PURPOSE
The purpose of this work was to guide Mercy Chief Nursing Officers (CNOs), using an evidence based leadership approach, to prioritize recruitment and retention strategies that best addressed their hospital and department’s needs. The reaffirmation of safe and respectful environments leading to a decrease in vacancies and lower turnover were the ultimate goals.

DESCRIPTION
Recruitment and retention strategies were organized around the AACN “Standards for Establishing and Sustaining Healthy Work Environments.” The following are the six essential standards:

**Skilled Communication** - Nurses must be as proficient in communication skills as they are in clinical skills.

**True Collaboration** - Nurses must be relentless in pursuing and fostering true collaboration.

**Effective Decision Making** - Nurses must be valued and committed partners in making policy, directing and evaluating clinical care, and leading organizational operations.

**Appropriate Staffing** - Staffing must ensure the effective match between patient needs and nurse competencies.

**Meaningful Recognition** - Nurses must be recognized and must recognize others for the value each brings to the work of the organization.

**Authentic Leadership** - Nurse leaders must fully embrace the imperative of a healthy work environment, authentically live it, and engage others in its achievement. (aacn.org)

Nurse leaders were asked to identify their greatest areas of opportunity through the following assessments:

- Utilization of the on-line HWE on-line tool
- Nursing retention and recruitment work groups in conjunction with their coworker engagement surveys.

The information obtained measured the current work environment reality and helped to prioritize efforts related to retention. This assessment was utilized at the unit, hospital, and system levels.

EVALUATION AND OUTCOMES
Evaluation:
Mercy Hospital St. Louis identified “appropriate staffing” and “meaningful recognition” as the top two hospital-wide areas of focus. Nursing leadership addressed these priorities via a thorough market review and pay adjustment, preceptor recognition, career ladder development and loan forgiveness to name a few of the initiatives.

Intermediate Care & Progressive Care units achieved the following outcomes:

- Progressive Care Units experienced a 50% decrease in turnover with a focus on “meaningful recognition” and “authentic leadership”.
- Intermediate Care showed a dramatic increase in coworker experience scores related to their direct manager. This unit’s focus was “authentic leadership”.

Hospital-wide Outcomes:
- Turnover has dropped from 14% to 12% during the initial four month period following the newly developed recruitment and retention initiatives.
- Vacancies have dropped to a low of 7% with 51 surplus nurses hired over our attrition rate in Fiscal Year 2017.
- Thus far 400 RN coworkers have applied for loan forgiveness and over 250 RN coworkers have applied for the Mercy Nursing Professional Career Ladder program.

REFERENCES


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