

A Pandemic's Toll on Nurses

January 2021

Introduction

NurseGrid is actively tracking the impact COVID-19 is having on nurses. The initial *Nursing Professionals Pulse Survey*, released April 2020, focused on personal concerns, confidence, and the shortages clinicians were incurring. In September 2020, the *Nurse Wellbeing at Risk: A National Survey* was released, chronicling the overall sense of well-being and fulfillment within the nursing profession.



The objective of the December update was to revisit our active users and trend changes in opinion since the two previous surveys. At the moment this survey was held, our healthcare organizations were absorbing the brunt of a post-Thanksgiving surge in COVID-19 that led to hospitals reaching the limitations of their patient capacity and staffing resources. The fear of an additional surge in early 2021 looms over healthcare providers and executives alike.



With a dramatic increase in burnout, more than one in five nurses say they are leaving bedside care or changing professions.

The results of this survey demonstrate the tremendous emotional toll the pandemic is having on the nursing profession as self-assessments of burnout and mental health have increased dramatically, to the extent that nearly one in five nurses plans to leave bedside nursing altogether by the end of 2021.

Nurses expressed greater confidence in treating COVID-19 patients than they did in April; however, they continue to have concerns about infecting their friends and family and supply shortages.

Some 10,017 nursing professionals responded to the December survey to communicate with healthcare leaders and all Americans the real impact this pandemic is having on their health and future. The survey was administered by NurseGrid in collaboration with the Association of periOperative Registered Nurses (AORN). Survey results were analyzed by HealthStream. We at NurseGrid, AORN, and HealthStream believe you can leverage these results for decision-making in your organization.

Our goal since April has been to shine a spotlight on issues impacting nurses during the pandemic, with the hope that by raising nurses' voices we, together, can inform and empower healthcare leaders to do all they can to further support and enhance the working conditions for our healthcare heroes.

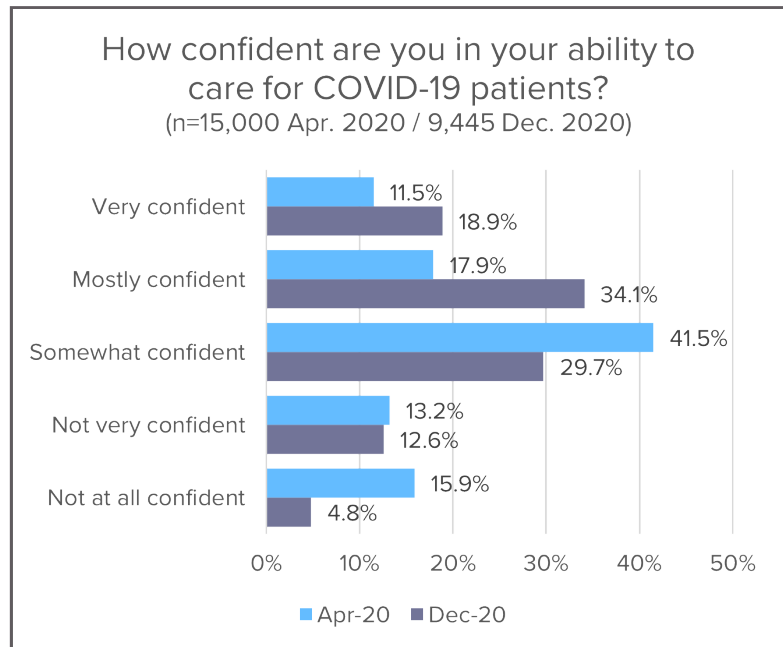
Confidence & Role

Confidence in Caring for COVID-19 Patients Has Increased

Nurses are more confident in caring for COVID-19 patients today than they were last April. Some 53.0% of nurses today say they are “very” or “mostly” confident in their ability to care for COVID-19 patients, compared to only 29.4% expressing this same level of confidence in April.

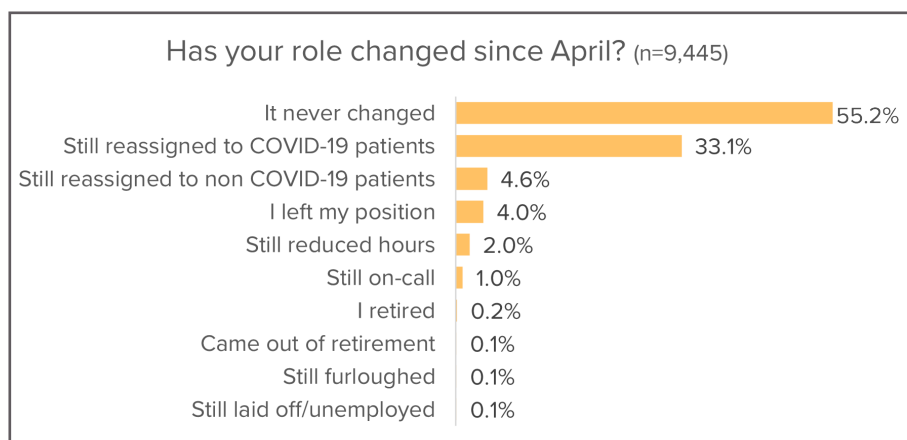
On this 5-point scale, the mean confidence score today is 3.50 compared to only 2.96 in April. The difference found between the average scores indicates that there was a true difference in confidence from April to December and not one attributable to chance.

In April, nurses of all ages expressed low confidence, with no one having any experience treating this type of patient. While deaths from COVID-19 persist, nurses have gained experience in caring for these patients and are expressing much more confidence than they did in the beginning.



Roles Remain Unchanged for Most

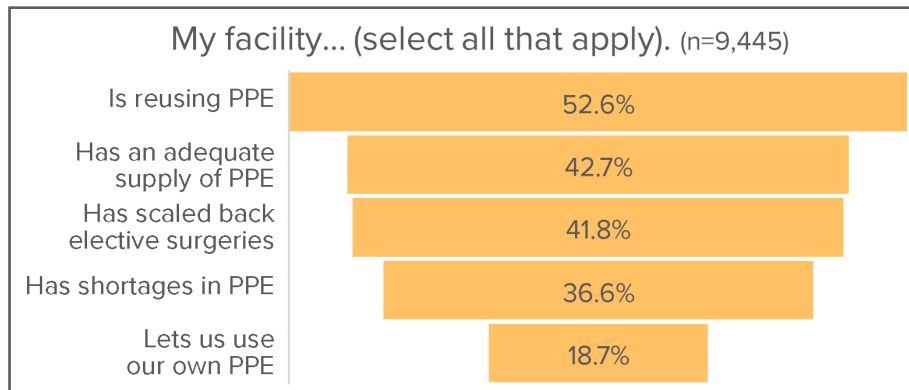
More than half of the nurses who responded to our survey (55.2%) indicate their role remains unchanged since April; however, one-third (33.1%) have remained re-assigned to COVID-19 patients during this same time period. Four percent (4.0%) say they have left their position since last April.



PPE & Quality Care

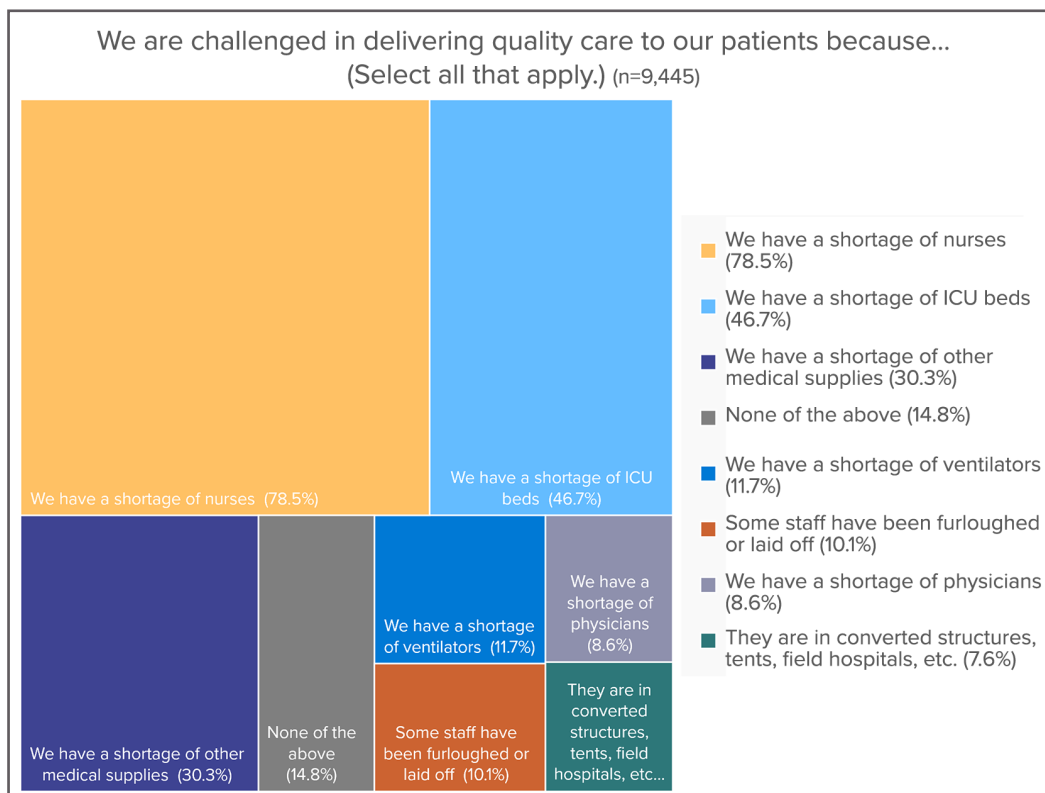
Nurses Remain Concerned about PPE

Just over four in ten nurses (42.7%) say their organization has an adequate supply of PPE, but there are several indications that many nurses are adapting by re-using PPE (52.6%) or using their own (18.7%).



Nurses Are Challenged to Provide Quality Care

Nurses identified two key challenges in providing quality patient care in today's COVID-19 environment. First, the vast majority noted a shortage of nurses (mentioned by 78.5%). The second is a shortage of ICU beds (mentioned by 46.7%). Interestingly, nurses are almost 10x more likely to mention a shortage of nurses (78.5%) than a shortage of physicians (8.6%).

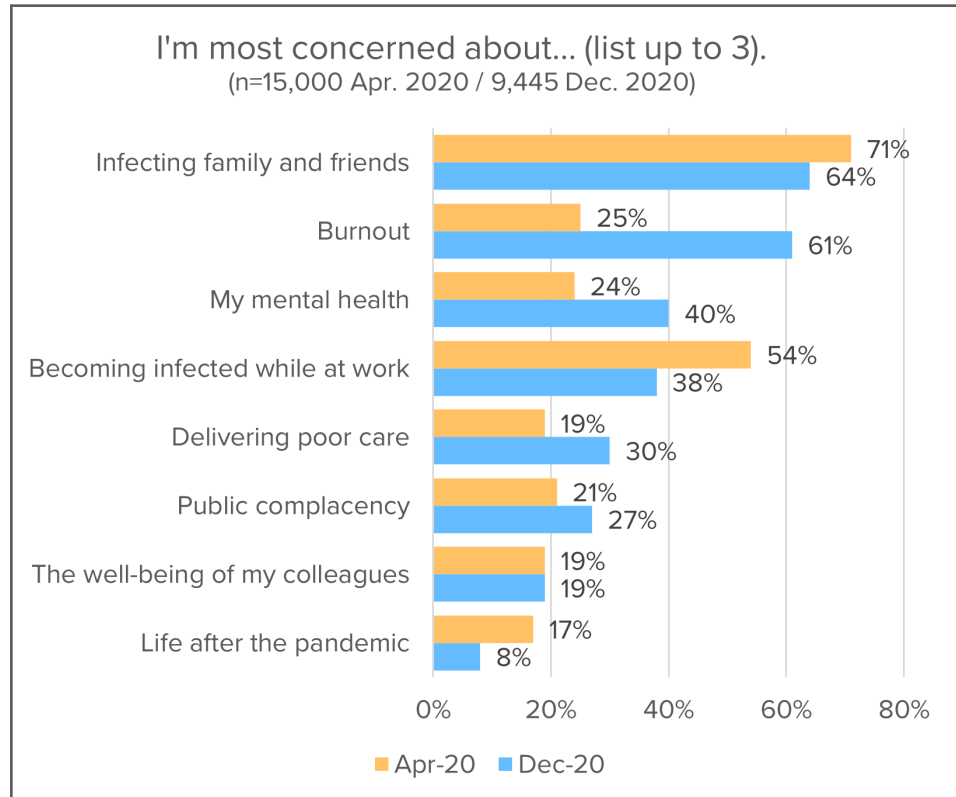


Nurse Health & Career

There Are Concerns About Burnout and Mental Health

Nurses are far more concerned about their own burnout and mental health than they were in April. The constant stress is taking its toll, with 61% expressing concern about burnout as compared to only 25% in April. Nurses are also expressing a higher level of concern about their mental health.

While confidence in caring for COVID-19 patients has grown, responses also indicate rising concern with the overall quality of care they are providing (30% in December compared to 19% in April), a trend that coincides with increased concern for mental health and burnout

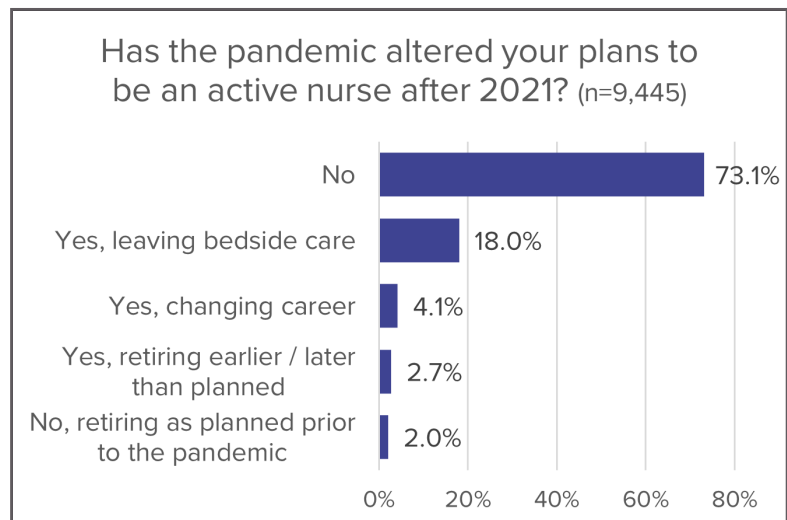


Infecting family and friends remains a top concern even though it, as well as a concern with becoming infected while at work, have lessened. Nurses are somewhat more concerned about public complacency than they were in April.

One in Five Nurses Foresee New Paths After 2021

Almost three-fourths (73.1%) of nurses say they will not alter their future career plans because of their pandemic experience. Yet, a substantial number state they will either leave bedside care (18.0%) or completely change their career (4.1%).

Given the impending nursing shortage prior to the pandemic, this is an alarming foreshadowing healthcare leaders must consider in its aftermath.



COVID-19 Vaccines

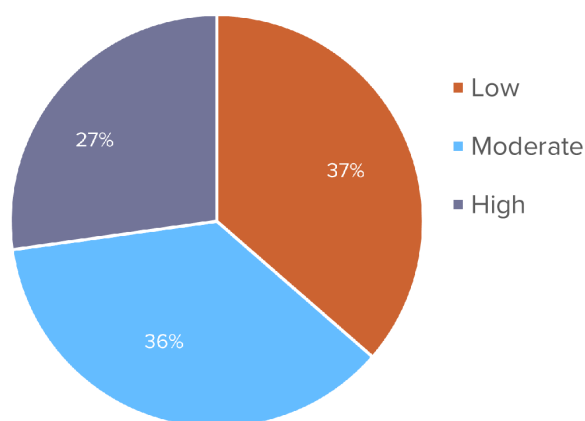
There Is Notable Discomfort in Taking the Vaccine

There is a substantial caution among nurses when it comes to taking a COVID-19 vaccine. Only 27.2% of respondents expressed a high level of comfort with taking a COVID-19 vaccine. 36.4% expressed only a moderate level of comfort, and another 36.4% expressed a low level of comfort.

Approximately half of the nurses in our survey see a number of benefits to the COVID-19 vaccine.

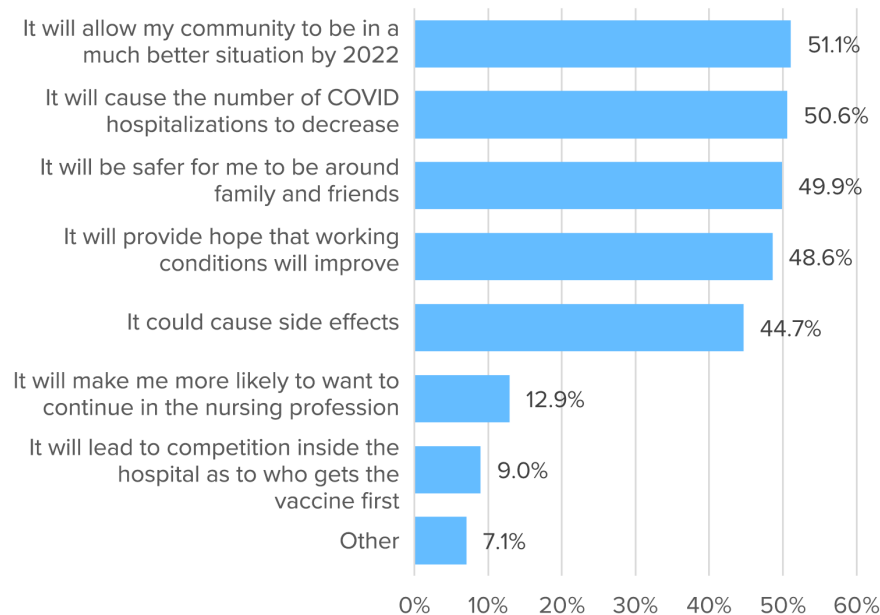
They believe it will improve the situation in their communities by 2022, lead to a decrease in hospitalizations, make it safer to be around family and friends, and provide hope that working conditions will improve.

On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being LOW and 10 being HIGH, how would you rate your comfort with taking a COVID-19 vaccine?
(n=9,445) (Low = 1-3 / Moderate = 4-7 / High = 8-10)



What impact do you believe the COVID-19 vaccine will have? (Select all that apply.)

(n=9,445)



44.7% of nurses surveyed expressed concern that the vaccine will cause side effects, compared to 59% of Americans, according to the KFF COVID-19 Vaccine Monitor project.

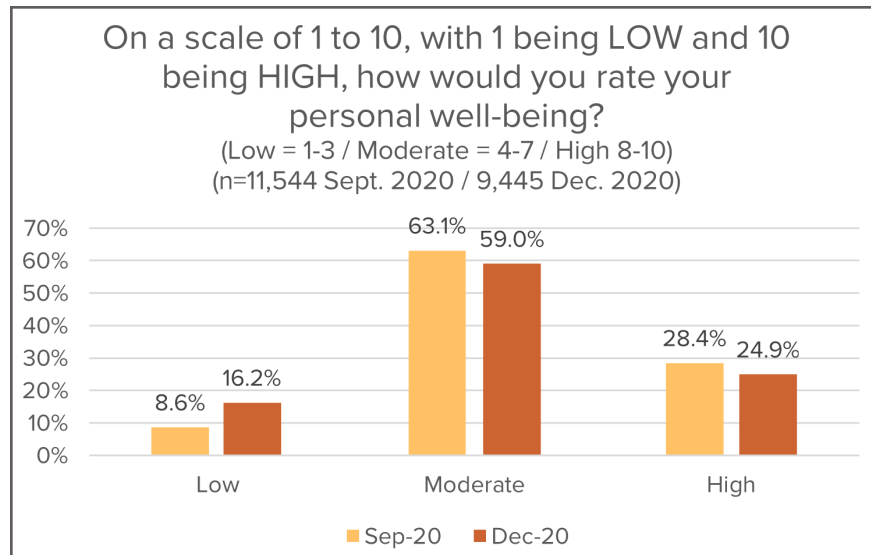
In comparison, 2019-2020 flu vaccination coverage among health care personnel was 80.6% per the CDC, indicating hesitation is confined to the COVID-19 vaccines.

Well-Being & Fulfillment

Overall Indicators of Health and Well-Being Are Less Positive

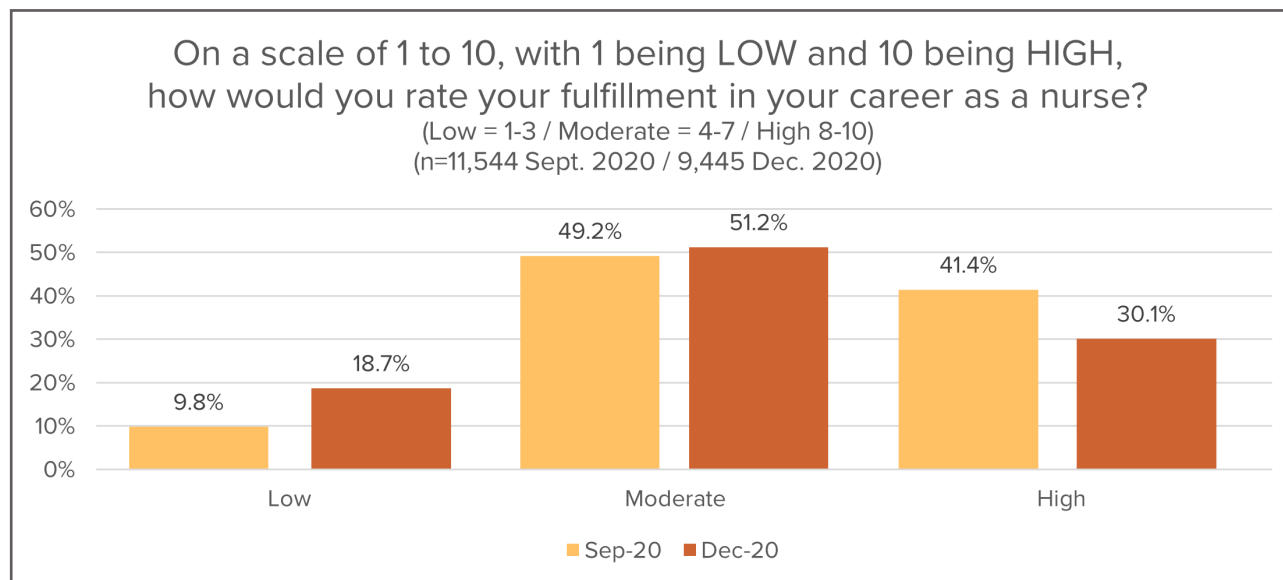
Nurses rate their personal well-being lower in December than they did in September. The average well-being score in September was 6.37 compared to only 5.87 in December.

Similarly, ratings of career fulfillment were lower in December than they were in September. The mean score in September was 6.79 compared to only 5.95 in December.



In September, 41.4% of nurses reported high job fulfillment, but this number slipped to 30.1% in December.

When comparing the average scores from September to December for each question, the scores show a statistically significant difference. The variations between the average scores indicate that there was a true change in well-being from September to December and not one attributable to chance.



Observations

1. **As the pandemic has progressed, concerns among nurses have shifted.** In April, concerns centered around shortages of PPE and ventilators. As COVID-19 spread throughout the US, conditions that were limited to large metropolitan areas in April became more pervasive. Healthcare organizations and their staff are approaching crisis as the top concerns expressed by nurses in December have shifted to the shortage of nurses and an inadequate number of ICU beds.
2. **While shortages of nurses and beds are preeminent concerns, the industry must not ignore the PPE shortages that still exist.** Only 42.7% of nurses surveyed report an ample supply of protective gear. A significant segment of nurses are protecting themselves by re-using hospital PPE or bringing their own equipment.
3. **The mental and physical breaking point for nurses has intensified over the last three months.** Where 25% noted they were suffering from high levels of burnout in September, an alarming 61% have reported high burnout levels in December. Significantly higher mental health concerns are also noted in December.
4. **The fallout from these traumatic conditions may impair the healthcare industry beyond 2021 .** More than 20% of nurses report they are leaving bedside care, or the profession entirely, by 2021—an exodus the industry can ill-afford as the pre-pandemic nurse shortage looms. The devastation of long-term taxing environments will ultimately influence career longevity, work engagement, and patient care.
5. **Support for COVID-19 vaccines appears low.** Just over one-fourth of nurses say they are highly comfortable taking the vaccine, though about half are convinced of positive ramifications from the vaccines for their communities and work conditions.

Conclusion

Nurses' sense of well-being and career fulfillment have declined as the pandemic rages on. The fallout from the trauma they will have incurred for more than a year will be extraordinary. Without immediate relief, it is highly likely these indicators will continue to erode and cause additional nurses to question their role in nursing and possibly their career path. The protracted nature of this pandemic demands that leadership do all it can to address the working conditions and mental health needs of our nursing workforce. While it may prove difficult to address all of these issues during the crisis, administrative leaders **MUST** develop a plan for individualized care and support to handle the aftermath of an ailing, traumatized staff at scale.

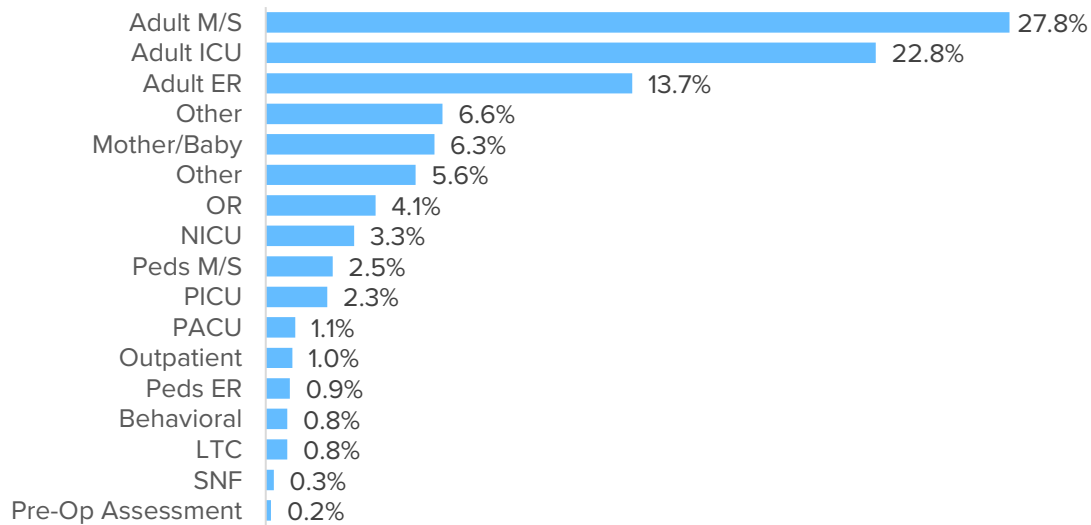
ABOUT THE SURVEY

The information in this report is based on responses from 9,445 nurses collected from December 9 – 18, 2020.

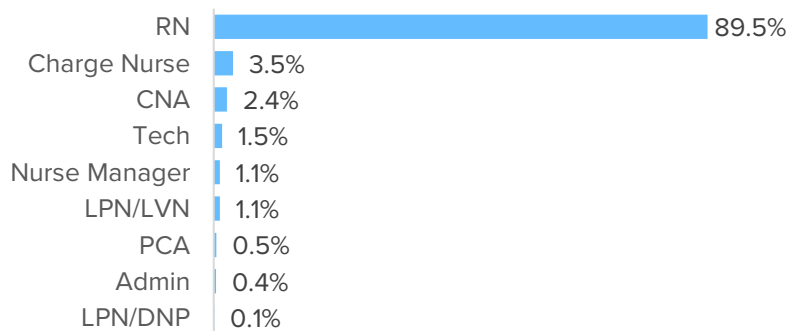
Demographics

Survey Respondents (n=9,445)

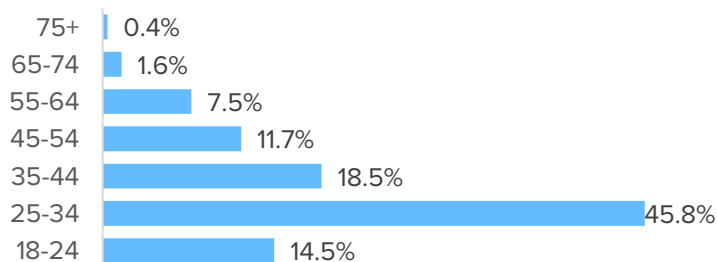
UNIT



ROLE



AGE



APPENDIX

Yellow highlights in the following tables indicate areas where meaningful differences exist.

Results by Role

(Percentage who gave a High—8-10 Rating—to Question 8 about well-being, Question 9 about fulfillment, or Question 10 about comfort with the vaccine.)

	Sample Size	Q8 Well-being	Q9 Fulfillment	Q10 Vaccine
CNA	225	29.8%	40.4%	22.2%
LPN/LVN	104	36.5%	45.2%	14.6%
RN	8401	24.3%	29.1%	27.3%
LPN/DNP	9	44.4%	44.4%	55.6%
Tech	143	26.6%	32.6%	22.4%
PCA	45	37.8%	36.4%	22.7%
Charge Nurse	327	27.5%	33.6%	27.8%
Nurse Manager	99	36.4%	45.5%	33.3%
Admin	34	47.1%	55.9%	32.4%
Total	9387	25.0%	30.1%	27.1%

Results by Unit

(Percentage who gave a High—8-10 Rating—to Question 8 about well-being, Question 9 about fulfillment, or Question 10 about comfort with the vaccine.)

	Sample Size	Q8 Well-being	Q9 Fulfillment	Q10 Vaccine
Adult ICU	2140	21.2%	27.2%	28.7%
PICU	215	25.6%	28.4%	29.3%
NICU	306	33.0%	46.1%	33.7%
Adult M/S	2607	23.0%	26.5%	26.9%
Peds M/S	235	25.5%	29.8%	28.9%
Adult ER	1289	23.7%	27.6%	27.1%
Peds ER	83	31.3%	30.1%	28.9%
OR	386	34.5%	44.0%	28.8%
PACU	102	36.3%	29.4%	15.7%
LTC	77	45.5%	54.5%	23.7%
SNF	28	17.9%	50.0%	21.4%
Outpatient	94	39.4%	43.6%	28.7%
Behavioral	77	28.6%	37.7%	19.5%
Mother/Baby	593	29.0%	39.3%	23.4%
Other	616	23.9%	26.6%	25.2%
Pre-OP Assessment	17	41.2%	47.1%	41.2%
Other	522	28.4%	32.1%	24.7%
Total	9387	25.0%	30.1%	27.1%

Results by Age

(Percentage who gave a High—8-10 Rating—to Question 8 about well-being, Question 9 about fulfillment, or Question 10 about comfort with the vaccine.)

	Sample Size	Q8 Well-being	Q9 Fulfillment	Q10 Vaccine
18-24	1361	15.1%	22.6%	26.0%
25-34	4303	20.0%	24.5%	25.8%
35-44	1733	28.9%	34.2%	27.1%
45-54	1098	37.4%	43.0%	28.6%
55-64	705	41.8%	45.5%	34.0%
65-74	152	42.8%	46.7%	32.9%
75+	35	17.1%	25.7%	25.7%
Total	9387	25.0%	30.1%	27.1%

About NurseGrid

NurseGrid is the number one rated mobile app for nurses, with 4.9 stars and over 60,000 ratings. Launched in 2016, NurseGrid has become a viral hit among nurses, with hundreds of thousands of nursing professionals relying on NurseGrid's mobile app to access their schedules, see who they are working with, connect with their colleagues, and more. Healthcare organizations use NurseGrid to distribute and update schedules, manage open shifts and shift swaps, and to engage their nursing staff. NurseGrid is available for download in the Apple App Store and Google Play store.

About AORN

The Association of periOperative Registered Nurses (AORN) was founded in 1949 to establish a national community for operating room nurses who sought to share best practices for patients undergoing surgery. Today, we unite and empower perioperative nurses, healthcare organizations, and industry partners to support safe surgery for every patient, every time. AORN defines, supports, and advocates for patient and staff safety through exemplary practice in all phases of perioperative nursing care using evidence-based guidelines, continuing education and clinical practice resources.