



Vital Signs: Transforming Nurse Work-Flows in the Age of Burnout

How Nurse Care Team Assistants Reduce Burnout and the Skyrocketing Cost of Care

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BACKGROUND

Agile organizations have made significant progress to mitigate provider burnout, without compromising care quality. With the adoption of value-based healthcare, providers are now reimbursed for the quality of clinical care delivered and not simply for the time spent with patients. Unfortunately, the same measures to reduce burnout for providers within the new paradigm have yet to be taken for nurses—the mission-critical members of the care team who advocate for patients and their families.

Developing a nurse-centered solution, one that translates the growing evidence of nurse burnout into strategic action, and aligns performance with prevention, doesn't have to be complicated.

For years, health systems have implemented a myriad of non-clinical initiatives to support providers. Leading administrators to deploy medical scribes to reduce documentation burdens, increase efficiency, reduce costs, and make their health systems far safer. From administrative relief to Chief Wellness Officers, providers are receiving the critical support they deserve. The result has been a reduction in medical errors, improved care quality, and more satisfied patients. And with an increasingly consumer driven patient population comparison shopping for care, low satisfaction scores and negative online reviews have a substantial impact, and can lead patients to seek care with a competitor.

THE BUSINESS CASE FOR CULTURE CHANGE

Today, rising incidental over-time and increased nurse-to-patient ratios threaten productivity, subsequently costing health systems millions. While nurses comprise the largest workforce within the American healthcare industry, the profession is vastly underserved and severely vulnerable to burnout. Few low-cost resources are available to improve job satisfaction without incurring major costs.

BY THE NUMBERS

The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics projects employment of registered nurses will grow fifteen percent from 2016 to 2026, a rate faster than all occupations¹. Due to an increasingly aging population and the demands of patients managing multiple chronic illnesses, today's three million nurses across regions and specialties are in need of an innovative solution tailored to the unique workflows of nurses to safe-guard against burnout.

Organizations seeking to remain agile in an increasingly complex healthcare environment will need to close the gaps in nursing care, while managing rising overtime costs.

The ability of organizations to adequately deploy skilled nursing support is an imperative for meeting today's care quality demands. As with provider burnout, the same principles hold true. On-the-job dissatisfaction translates to turnover, increased hiring costs, and decreased levels of patient care.

Since nurses have direct and ongoing patient bedside contact, it is crucial that their work environments match their goals. In this brief we will detail new ways to evolve care team coordination to better serve nurses and impact the bottom line. We'll discuss how low-cost integrated labor in the form of Nurse Care Team Assistants yields improved patient care metrics, and supports nurses' ability to plan care.

Aligning Action with Outcomes: How Nurse CTAs Drive Improvement in Key Healthcare Delivery Areas Linked to Nursing Performance:

The advent of Nurse Care Team Assistants represents a new era of healthcare. Based on best practices from the medical scribe industry, CareThrough, a HealthChannels company has developed a framework to drive long-term, transformational results. CTAs undergo rigorous coursework to provide services to patients under the supervision of nurses. Certified to update documentation within the EMR, bathe patients, answer call bells and perform a number of administrative tasks, CTAs create culture change within the nursing units. This happens when a health system culture is properly assessed, and through a robust interview and hiring process, leadership deploys CTAs best suited to the unit culture. With CTAs offering nurses relief from day to day administrative tasks, the reduced burnout allows nurses to focus on top-of-license activities.



TRANSFORMATIVE CARE THROUGH NURSE CTAS

WHY NOW? The number of registered nurses in the US is three times that of providers. Yet 1 in 5 nurses leave the profession 12 months after earning their license. With a substantial work-force, and high attrition, reinventing processes for optimized nurse care settings has become a growing priority. With an embedded, highly trained labor force working side-by-side with nurses, health systems can leverage CTA support to reduce clinical and clerical duties while reducing overtime costs.

DRIVE NURSE SATISFACTION: CTAs support over-worked nurses confronting mandatory overtime and stressful work conditions. With CTAs clinically trained to round on patients and check for acute safety events, health systems improve care coordination without adding additional shifts. The result empowers nurses to return to the job they love—caring for patients.

RIGHT-SIZE STAFFING RATIOS: With balanced per patient staffing ratios at the point of care, patients received more preventative care. Achieving the right balance of nurses to patients represents an important step to the overall health of patients, and the hospital environment. Balanced nurse workflows also enhance Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (HCAHPS) scores, as patient's feel more supported.

REDUCED LENGTH OF STAY: Administrators struggling to design care delivery to reduce length of stay should look to nurses as a central driver and strategic partner. A nursing workflow analysis and the subsequent data findings provide the valuable insights needed to take control of high length of stay metrics.

Adding a highly-skilled labor force, embedded within the nurse care team improves health outcomes and reduces the cost of care

AN OVER-DUE SOLUTION

Many of us know from our own critical care experiences, or those of a loved one, how interactions with a nurse deeply impact the overall hospital experience. We're well aware of the ability of nurses to brighten-up a room with their compassionate smiles, and inspire even the toughest patients to adhere to a care plan, despite their demanding workload. Uniting nurses across specialties is the dedication to delivering patient-centered care.

To make a long-term difference in the lives of nurses and patients, CareThrough works with nurses from rural practices to health systems with over 60,000 annual patient encounters to protect nurses from burnout. By adding Nurse Care Team Assistants (CTAs) to their workflow, health systems are better equipped to drive results as nurses feel a greater sense of purpose and commitment to their profession from strategic support.

While there isn't a "typical day" for a nurse, there do exist redundant clinical tasks. Nurse CTAs expand a care team's ability to streamline redundancies and improve upon metrics that influence positive health outcomes. From reviewing doctor's notes, administering medications, printing discharge information, and every step in between, Care Team Assistants work elbow-to-elbow with nurses in a near constant analysis of priorities.

Whether in transitional care, PCUs, or monitoring patients with intermediate care needs, often having CTAs means the difference between a patient or family member ringing a call bell and waiting minutes for a response, to having the call answered in a moment. Above all, the level of attention CTAs add to nurse workflows is reported to give nurses peace of mind, and reduce the pressure to perform when they feel burned out.

"Nurses are uniquely overloaded with a myriad of both patient-centered and administrative tasks," says Kyle Cooksey, President of CareThrough. "As an industry, we've focused heavily on providers and the effects of burnout, and rightfully so. Yet nurses are uniquely positioned to improve patient care, and have largely been overlooked for comprehensive support. With highly-skilled CTAs, we've been able to raise morale, and that directly translates to better patient care."

By enlisting the help of CTAs, health systems merge the best practices of medical scribe support with clinical nursing care. CTAs, trained to assist with clinical activities, help nurses work more efficiently by supplying the additional time needed to complete clerical and routine tasks that would often lead to overtime, including updating patient notes in the EMR.

HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF YOUR NURSE CTA PROGRAM

In addition to making rounds, nurses must document care, leading to additional hours spent at the computer, and not the patient's bedside. The tedious documentation levels contribute to increase overtime costs. Conducting a baseline study before adding a CTA allows health systems to measure the amount of time spent on documentation and other tasks. Measuring call bell response times, rates of infection, HCAHPS, and length of stay prior to launching the Nurse CTA program also helps to ensure the efficacy of the solution remains measured and based in actionable data.

THE DANGERS OF UNBALANCED STAFFING LEVELS AND MISSED CARE

From length of stay, to rates of infection, optimizing workflows with a Nurse CTA has the potential to transform clinical care, and save lives. In a landmark study, research showed that for each additional

patient over four in a nurse's workload, the risk of death increased by seven percent for surgical patients². Patients in hospitals with the highest patient-to-nurse ratio (eight patients per nurse) also saw an increase in mortality. The documented safe ratio for PCU units remains 4/5:1. On a national scale, staffing differences of this magnitude resulted in as many as 20,000 unnecessary deaths each year.

"The increase in staffing ratios has led to the prevalence of missed nursing care," says Suzanne Crincoli, RN, MSN. "As nurses, we use the term for care gaps due to delaying or overlooking critical activities. When a nurse is over-burdened with care activities, missed care is more likely to occur."

By adding a Nurse CTA, health systems can address the patient to nurse ratio and missed care without hiring additional nurses. With Nurse CTA support, monitoring patient safety, improving documentation and promoting nursing excellence is possible.

"Insights have emerged from our Nurse CTA program that will shift the way we see nurse work-flows across health systems in the future" says HealthChannels Chief Strategy Officer, Craig Newman. "It's a time to celebrate nurses with a meaningful solution to their challenges."

FULL-TURNKEY TRAINING MODEL

To fill care gaps, CareThrough utilizes a full-turnkey, proprietary training model developed by sister company, ScribeAmerica. CareThrough recruits, credentials and schedules nurse CTAs after an eight-week training course. The CTAs are then embedded within the RN team to assist with retrieving

"Once CareThrough hired and trained our nursing support, we were able to quickly pair CTAs with experienced RNs to help manage the work-load in our unit."

–Nurse Administrator

pertinent information from patient histories, answer call bells and administering care with nurse supervision.

TOP-OF LICENSE STRATEGY DRIVES RESULTS

The CareThrough track record embedding Care Navigators within overworked care teams to achieve better health outcomes for patients, and better work-life balance for clinical staff inspired the development of a Nurse CTA program. Today, nurses benefit from having a certified Nurse CTA as an extension of the care team to bathe patients, answer call bells, and explain post-operative instructions. This model frees nurses to deliver compassionate, next-generation care.

“Our goal is to bridge the divide,” says Kyle Cooksey, President at CareThrough. “And give nurse leadership access to the customized clinical support they need to feel empowered.”

“Our expertise training medical scribes and care team assistants to support providers sets us apart as a strategic partner for nursing teams,” said Craig Newman, HealthChannels’ Chief Strategy Officer. “Nurses face a mounting challenge while administrators are paying millions in overtime costs. Everyone is frustrated, we seek to change that.”

Conclusion

An often unrecognized factor in quality care delivery are the nurses who work for long hours at the patient bedside, communicating with providers and families. While health systems have made adjustments to mitigate provider burnout, nurses have largely felt the effects without a tailored care coordination solution. Transitioning the medical scribe/CTA model to Nurse Care Team Assistants through clinical training reduces ancillary burdens, and presents a new healthcare paradigm for nurse burnout that once remained a challenge with minimal solutions in sight.

With a Nurse CTA assisting with comfort rounds and gathering supplies, among other clinical activities, health systems are able to improve metrics in the areas that impact long-term organizational and patient health.