

Keys for Creating Nurse Work Environments for Healthier (and Happier) Patients



EXECUTIVE BRIEF

The National Database of Nursing Quality Indicators discovered a clear correlation between satisfaction levels of nurses and clinical outcomes for patients. But there are road blocks to the best work environments for nurses. Demanding schedules, uncomfortable equipment and time-consuming EHRs can all stand in the way of nurse satisfaction and ultimately, the patient experience. Fostering the best work environment by using ergonomic principles and caring for the whole nurse supports healthy and happy caregivers, strong nurse-patient connections, and the best care.

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Satisfied Nurses Lead to Better Clinical Outcomes

Source: National Database of Nursing Quality Indicators 2013

5–20%

Quality of care increased

87%

Infection rate decreased

17%

Injury falls decreased

59%

Hospital-acquired pressure ulcers decreased

SUPPORT THE WHOLE NURSE

Nursing is a physical job. It involves manual patient handling, spending long stretches standing, performing repetitive tasks, and often working in less than ideal physical environments, which can lead to cumulative trauma disorders (CTDs) such as carpal tunnel syndrome, low back pain, and other musculo-skeletal disorders (MSDs). Nurses and nursing assistants have some of the highest rates of MSDs and CTDs of any workers from across all industries [1]. Alleviating MSDs, CTDs and low back pain involves improving the ergonomics of nursing workstations by balancing sit-stand times, creating physical spaces that promote good posture and reducing fatigue-causing conditions.

Nurses also experience mental strain as they care for their patients' needs both physically and mentally. Mental resilience in the face of suffering patients and their family members can be difficult to maintain, even among the most experienced healthcare practitioners. Nurses who have access to properly-designed equipment and the right amount of rest have the ability to manage self-care and more effectively cope with mental strain on the job.

Create Ergonomic Workspaces

There is arguably no environment where ergonomics is more important than in a healthcare facility, where poorly designed equipment has the potential to harm those who heal. Ergonomic improvements can include customizing workstation desk heights for each worker, setting proper monitor viewing heights and distances from the viewer, and upgrading older workstations that were not designed to accommodate computer use [1]. When nurses are more comfortable in their physical space, they can do their job more efficiently, communicate with other nurses and physicians more easily and complete tasks with fewer interruptions [2].

When assessing the current physical environment and planning for improvements, organizations should consider sit-stand heights, ease of adjustment, storage, security, weight and mobility. Consulting with an ergonomics expert can help educate decision-makers about which system is the best fit for their organization. With the right workstations, caregivers can work comfortably and efficiently to better serve their patients.

Find the Time Balance

Throughout the workday, nurses are pulled in multiple directions, and how they allocate their time has profound effects on both work satisfaction and patient care. It's not uncommon for nurses to work extended shifts of 12 hours or more with up to one-third of their time spent on documentation, rivaling or surpassing the amount of time spent on direct patient care [3,4]. Research suggests more than 25% of a nurse's time is spent walking the hospital floor [5]. Nurses prefer to spend as much time as possible working with patients, but administrative and other duties fight for their attention. To make the most of a busy day, nurses need to efficiently move between patient rooms, supply cabinets and the nursing station. Hospitals should carefully consider the placement of critical resources, including medication administration, to assist nurses in balancing a demanding schedule.

Streamline EHR Practices

EHRs improve healthcare by offering greater connectivity, transparency, decentralization, mobility and access to vast amounts of data, but they can be difficult to implement and navigate. One informal survey discovered that a majority of nurses were now staying past their scheduled shifts to complete daily documentation [6].

This has increased labor costs for hospitals forced to pay overtime. In other instances, nurses have “clocked-out” and are documenting on their own time, negatively affecting work-life balance and contributing to fatigue.

Equipping healthcare environments with well-designed, properly located workstations gives nurses access to EHR when and where they need, conserving their precious energy and reducing patient wait-time [7]. Placing free-standing or wall-mounted terminals throughout the unit can decrease nurses' walking time, which increases the amount of time nurses can spend with patients. Mobile workstations can save time by allowing nurses to work where they are instead of moving between stations. Compact wall-mounted workstations in the patient room or in the unit hallway serve as convenient touchdown points for accessing or entering information for brief periods.

Medication Carts Make Work Easier and Reduce Medication Incidents/Accidents

Source: Rochais et al. 2012

80%

Nurses who agreed medication carts made work easier

64%

Nurses agreed medication carts reduce risk of medication incidents/accidents

¹ The Joint Commission (2015). *Sentinel Event Alert*.

² U.S. Department of Labor Occupational Safety and Health Administration. (2000). *Ergonomics: The Study of Work*.

³ Shifting Shifts, Originally Published in *Nursing Leadership*, 17(3): 1–4 July 2004.

⁴ Philipsen, N., Carruthers, W., Chi, G., Ensey, D., Shmorhun, A., & Valdez, R. (2014). A Mixed-Methods Assessment of Time Spent Documenting by Nurses Using an Electronic Medical Records System. *2014 Systems and Information Engineering Design Symposium (SIEDS)*.

⁵ Westbrook, J. I., Duffield, C., Li, L., & Creswick, N. J. (2011). How Much Time Do Nurses Have for Patients? A Longitudinal Study Quantifying Hospital Nurses' Patterns of Task Time Distribution and Interactions with Health Professionals. *BMC Health Services Research*, 11(1), 319.

⁶ Yi, L., & Seo, H. (2012). The Effect of Hospital Unit Layout on Nurse Walking Behavior. *HERD: Health Environments Research & Design Journal*, 6(1), 66-82.

⁷ RN Work Project (2016). *Newly Licensed Registered Nurses: Facts and Figures* [Infographic].

CONCLUSION

Driven by advances in technology, the future of healthcare will foster greater connectivity, transparency, decentralization, mobility and access to vast amounts of data, which will help shape the next generation of care. To usher in this new era, organizations need to place caregiver well-being and workflows at the forefront. As everyday heroes, they walk with patients through pivotal, life-changing moments. To ensure they can provide exceptional patient care, caregivers need comfortable workstations that allow them to complete documentation efficiently and the best work environments to do their changing work.

Access to equipment that addresses concerns about allocation of time, EHR use, and physical and mental toll can pave the way for stronger, more meaningful patient-nurse connections where both caregivers and patients thrive.

For more information about creating working environments for healthier (and happier) patients, download the Ergotron white paper created in conjunction with HBI, [Honoring the Nurse-Patient Connection](#), or visit healthcare.ergotron.com.

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