

CASE STUDY

How Parkview Health Developed an Emeritus-RN Program to Retain Experienced Nurses

Article by Workforce Best Practice Collaborative

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Overview

The challenge

As retirement age nurses retire and are backfilled with novice nurses, many organizations are experiencing a decline in overall workforce experience. With no alternative to traditional 12-hour nursing shifts, many experienced RNs prematurely leave the workforce despite a desire to continue working.

The organization

Parkview Health is a large, Midwestern 8-hospital, 11-clinical campus health system that serves northeast Indiana and northwest Ohio.

The approach

Parkview Health created an Emeritus RN (E-RN) Program to bring retired nurses back to the workforce and transition nurses on the cusp of retirement into a new, flexible role. The E-RN role enables Parkview to retain valuable organizational expertise by restructuring job responsibilities away from physical work and offering flexible work arrangements.

The results

Since implementing the program, Parkview has successfully retained experienced RNs, boosted engagement across their workforce, and significantly reduced first-year turnover.

Solution

Anticipating potential retirements of more than 200 nurses by 2025 and a gradual erosion of nursing expertise, Parkview's Chief Nursing Executive approached the staff engagement council to explore solutions. The council created the Emeritus-RN Program with the initial goal of recruiting retired nurses back to the organization. The program has since evolved; the second phase of the program to focus on retaining nurses nearing retirement. This publication details three key components of the E-RN program.

01 Identify responsibilities that optimize the expertise of experienced nurses

02 Advertise the position to high-value staff

03 Re-introduce E-RNs to the workforce

IDENTIFY RESPONSIBILITIES THAT OPTIMIZE THE EXPERTISE OF EXPERIENCED NURSES

01 Identify responsibilities that optimize the expertise of experienced nurses

The goal of Parkview's E-RN program was to create a new, less physically demanding role designed to attract and retain retired and near-retirement RNs.

Parkview developed a series of guidelines to meet this objective.

Position description, compensation, work requirements

- Work hours are flexible to meet the emeritus nurse needs, roles can range from 0.2 to 0.8 FTE
- Four hours per pay period as the suggested minimum to work
- Functional roles are developed or targeted to emphasize the use of their nursing knowledge with limited physical requirements.
- Compensation is commensurate with years of experience and hours worked. E-RNs are treated as per-diem positions with no other additional benefits


Discussions with leadership identified several key opportunities to deploy E-RNs across four key functional roles: nurse mentorship and support, nursing quality, patient experience, and patient flow. Parkview's full program menu is detailed on the following page.

STEP ONE: IDENTIFY RESPONSIBILITIES THAT OPTIMIZE THE EXPERTISE OF EXPERIENCED NURSES

Parkview Health's E-RN Initial Program Menu

Emeritus Nurse Program Menu	
Nurse Mentoring and Support Education Mentoring Support Groups Lunch Coverage	Nursing Quality Audits Quality Improvement Projects Safety Specialists Joint Commission/Regulatory Readiness
Patient Experience Discharge Calls Greeting/Welcoming New Patients Thank-You Cards Hourly Rounding Rounding on Boarding Patients and Families	Patient Flow Admissions Discharges Caring for Boarding Patients Long Length-of-Stay Team Patient Transport

Once a Parkview nurse, always a Parkview nurse.


 PARKVIEW


Using feedback from the initial cohort of E-RNs, leaders, and nursing staff the current E-RN responsibilities have been streamlined and now focus on functions deemed most beneficial for the organization: mentoring new RNs, patient rounding, and discharge phone calls.


ADVERTISE THE POSITION TO HIGH-VALUE STAFF


02 Advertise the position to high-value staff


After scoping the E-RN role, Parkview's nursing leadership next focused on recruiting high-value staff to fill the position. Their process is detailed below:

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1 Nurse unit managers create targeted list of high-value staff who have retired in past three years. **The three year cut-off was selected due to the fact that nurses who had left the organization earlier would require significant re-training.**
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2 Information session scheduled to gauge program interest; prospective candidates receive invitation to attend
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3 Information session held to explain the E-RN role and application process to prospective hires
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4 Formal applications submitted; candidates indicate desired number of weekly hours and specific responsibilities of greatest interest (from program menu)
- 

5 E-RNs selected based on unit needs and availability. E-RN preferences considered and offers extended to 21 nurses, additional 19 nurses placed on a waitlist

STEP TWO: ADVERTISE THE POSITION TO HIGH –VALUE STAFF

Broadening the candidate pool

Building on this initial success, Parkview has now focuses on proactively transitioning high-performing nurses nearing retirement to the E-RN role. Nurse unit managers identify high performing nurses nearing retirement on their units and elevate the names of these individuals to HR. HR and nursing unit managers then reach out to these staff members prior to their retirement to discuss a potential transition to the E-RN role. During this initial conversation, nurse managers share information about the role and solicit feedback on which job responsibilities would be most engaging to the individual. If a nurse indicates interest in a transition into an E-RN role, they are either offered a position (if available) or placed on a wait list until an opening on an appropriate unit occurs.

REINTRODUCE E-RNS TO THE WORKFORCE

03 Reintroduce E-RNs to the workforce

Parkview's E-RNs play a key role in boosting employee wellbeing and promoting a positive organizational culture, using their long experience in the workplace to identify symptoms of burnout and stress in younger nurses and reinforce organizational values. To ensure seamless reintegration to the workforce, Parkview leaders require all E-RNs to participate in new nurse orientation. This participation is essential not only because it serves to bring retired nurses up-to-speed on clinical protocols and best practices, but also because it serves as a platform for introducing the E-RNs to the existing Parkview workforce. The orientation process immediately connects E-RNs to new graduates and enables them to form informal mentorship relationships early on. New nurses have responded well to Parkview's E-RNs and have reported feeling more comfortable performing in their role and voicing concerns to the E-RN in their facility.

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“The thing that we always forget when we talk about retaining organizational knowledge and expertise is how our most experienced staff are the ones that have built and carried that culture. Every culture is only a generation away from extinction, and that's why it's vital that we use our experienced nurses to both preserve and pass on that culture.”

Judith Boerger, Chief Nurse Executive
Parkview Health

Source: Boerger, J., Custer, H., LaCross, E., and Powers, J. "The Emeritus Nurse: Retired, Rehired, and Revolutionary." The Journal of Nursing Administration, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/31658213>, 23 October 2019; Advisory Board interviews and analysis.

Results

Parkview's E-RN program has had a positive impact on turnover, engagement, organizational culture, patient experience, and cost savings.

\$200K In savings from the first cohort of E-RNs who helped reduce first year nurse turnover by 4 people

65% Satisfaction from the first cohort of E-RNs

26% Increase in patient experience scores

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