



Nurse Well-being in the Face of an Ongoing Pandemic: A Survey

September 2021

Introduction

Since the spring of 2020, NurseGrid™ has actively been tracking the impact COVID-19 has had on nurses through a series of surveys. The initial Nursing Professionals Pulse Survey, released in April 2020, focused on personal concerns, confidence, and the equipment shortages clinicians were incurring. Additional Pulse surveys were conducted in September 2020 and January 2021, tracking these issues as well as new items such as the overall sense of well-being and fulfillment within the nursing profession.

The objective of this September 2021 update is to revisit these issues with active users of NurseGrid and trend changes in opinion since the three previous surveys. When this survey was conducted, healthcare organizations were absorbing the brunt of a Delta variant surge in COVID-19 that has led to hospitals reaching the limitations of their patient capacity and staffing resources to care for patients, who are mostly unvaccinated. As a result, hopes of an early end to the pandemic in mid-2021 have been dashed, and the fear of a continued surge through the remainder of 2021 looms over healthcare providers and executives alike.

Over 10,000 nursing professionals in all 50 states responded to the survey in late August and early September 2021 to communicate perspectives on their well-being, COVID-19, and the toll the pandemic has on themselves and their colleagues. The survey was administered by NurseGrid, the leading mobile app for nurses. The survey results were analyzed by HealthStream™, NurseGrid's parent company.

Our goal since April 2020 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 in their efforts to further support our frontline caregivers.

Key Takeaways

1. Nursing Shortage is Top Concern for Quality of Care

Almost all nurses (91.5%) are worried about the current shortage of nurses—especially younger nurses and those working in units where COVID-19 patients are treated. Other areas of distress are the shortage of beds and the high levels of burnout and mental health issues among care providers. A majority of nurses (76.7%) report working more shifts or hours than they did a year ago.

2. COVID-19 Alters Career Plans

Fifty-eight percent of nurses say they will remain in patient care at the end of 2021; however, four in ten nurses (38.6%) are now planning to leave at the end of 2021, up from 24.8% in January 2021. In addition, one in four (24.6%) say they will leave bedside care, 9.0% say they will change their career, and 5.0% say they will retire earlier than planned.

3. Career Fulfillment Is Declining

Career satisfaction among nurses has declined over the past year. Some 41.4% of nurses gave high ratings to their level of fulfillment in September 2020 compared to 26.0% by September 2021. Younger nurses (18-34) are the most vulnerable to feelings of burnout and a lack of career fulfillment.

4. Many Nurses Resent the Unvaccinated

Many nurses resent both co-workers who are not vaccinated (46.5%) as well as unvaccinated patients (40.7%).

5. Nurse Confidence and Manager Support Can Be Improved

Even though a little more than half of nurses (54.7%) report management has taken action to support nursing staff, there are still areas for improvement. And despite a year and a half of experience treating COVID-19 patients, just under half (48.5%) say they are more confident dealing with new or varying clinical situations.

Overview of Findings

1. Nursing Shortage is Top Concern for Quality of Care

91.5%

of respondents say they are experiencing a shortage of nurses. This number has increased from 78.5% in January 2021.

56.1%

shortage of beds that nurses report in September 2021 compared to January of this year (46.7%).

77.2%

of respondents acknowledge high levels of burnout and mental health issues.

4 in 10

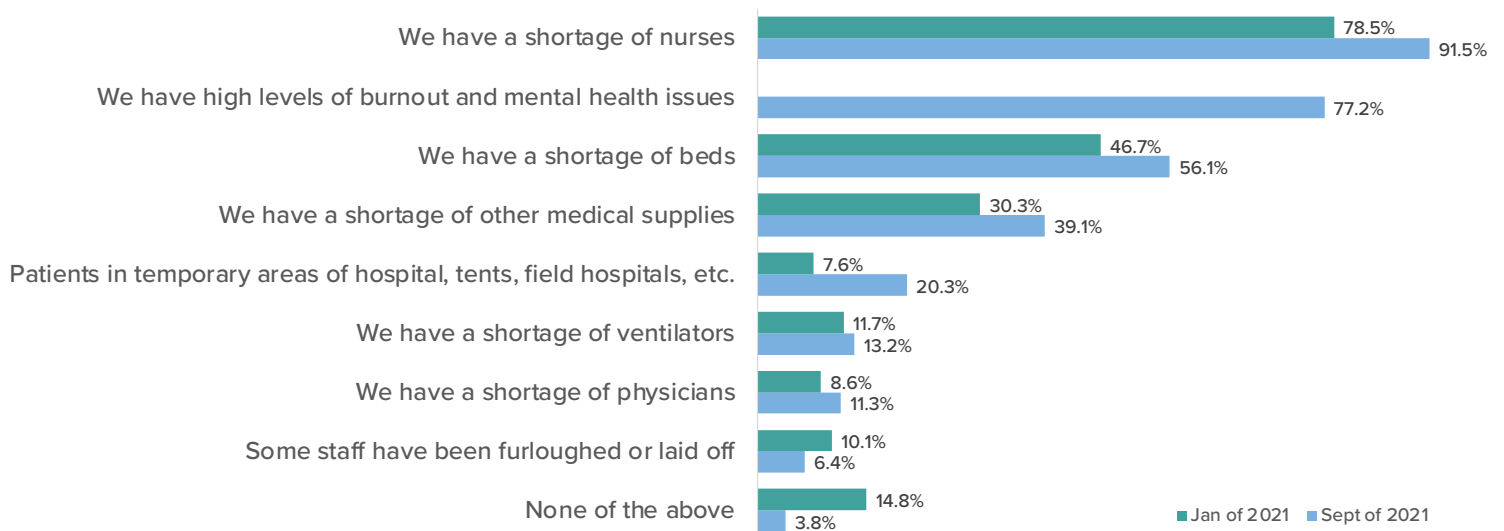
nurses (39.1%) said they had a shortage of medical supplies in September 2021 compared to 30.3% in January 2021.

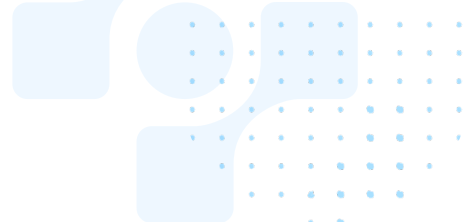
1 in 5

nurses (20.3%) are working in facilities where patients are housed in temporary areas of the hospital, tents, field hospitals, etc.

WE ARE PREVENTED FROM DELIVERING QUALITY CARE TO OUR PATIENTS BECAUSE...

(Select all that apply. Base = 9993)



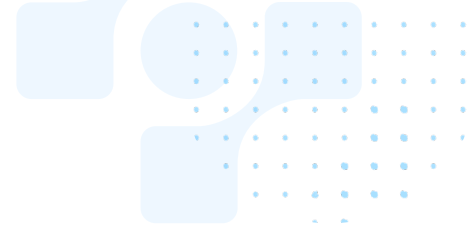


Nurses in all departments are likely to say there is a shortage of nurses; however, nurses working in units where the most critical patients are seen, and where COVID-19 patients are treated are most likely to say nurses are in short supply.

Unit	# of Respondents	% saying there is a shortage of nurses
Peds ER	85	94.4%
SNF	33	94.3%
Peds Med/Surg	210	94.2%
PIC U	188	94.0%
Adult ICU	1,897	93.4%
Adult ER	1,274	92.4%
Adult Med/Surg	2,512	91.9%
Other	1,673	91.6%
Mother/Baby	521	89.4%
NICU	358	87.3%
Behavioral	95	81.9%
OR	72	81.8%
PACU	63	78.8%
Long-Term Care	62	72.9%
Outpatient	40	67.8%

Younger nurses (age 18-34) are more likely than older nurses to say there is a shortage of nurses.

Age Range	# of Respondents	% saying there is a shortage of nurses
18 – 24	1,040	94.0%
25 – 34	4,271	94.9%
35 – 44	1,897	90.6%
45 – 54	1,180	86.1%
55 – 64	605	79.5%
65+	92	79.3%



The District of Columbia, New Mexico, Delaware, and Kansas are the states cited as most likely to have a shortage of nurses; those in Maryland, Mississippi and Wisconsin are less likely to say there is a shortage. (Based on findings from states with at least 20 respondents.)

Unit	# of Respondents	% saying there is a shortage of nurses	Unit	# of Respondents	% saying there is a shortage of nurses
Vermont	8*	100.0%	Indiana	172	92.0%
District of Columbia (DC)	63	98.4%	Massachusetts	257	91.5%
New Mexico	55	98.2%	Maine	32	91.4%
Delaware	32	97.0%	Michigan	223	91.4%
Kansas	81	96.4%	Georgia	284	91.3%
Utah	70	95.9%	Arizona	231	91.3%
South Carolina	134	95.7%	Arkansas	52	91.2%
Washington	286	95.7%	Oklahoma	81	91.0%
Oregon	163	95.3%	Florida	670	90.8%
Rhode Island	39	95.1%	Illinois	280	90.3%
Pennsylvania	352	94.6%	Virginia	184	90.2%
Ohio	314	94.3%	New Hampshire	44	89.8%
Nevada	75	93.8%	Hawaii	43	89.6%
Alaska	44	93.6%	California	1,093	89.0%
Missouri	130	93.5%	Nebraska	40	88.9%
Iowa	57	93.4%	Texas	805	88.7%
Idaho	41	93.2%	Kentucky	103	88.0%
Montana	54	93.1%	Minnesota	58	87.9%
Tennessee	218	92.8%	Wyoming	29	87.9%
Louisiana	63	92.6%	Connecticut	183	87.6%
Colorado	239	92.6%	Wisconsin	63	87.5%
New Jersey	249	92.6%	Mississippi	26	86.7%
Alabama	180	92.3%	South Dakota	16*	84.2%
New York	660	92.3%	Maryland	169	84.1%
North Carolina	263	92.3%	North Dakota	10*	83.3%
West Virginia	69	92.0%			

NOTE: Asterisk indicates a sample size of less than 20, which is below the threshold to say the results are representative.

Nurses Working More Hours in 2021

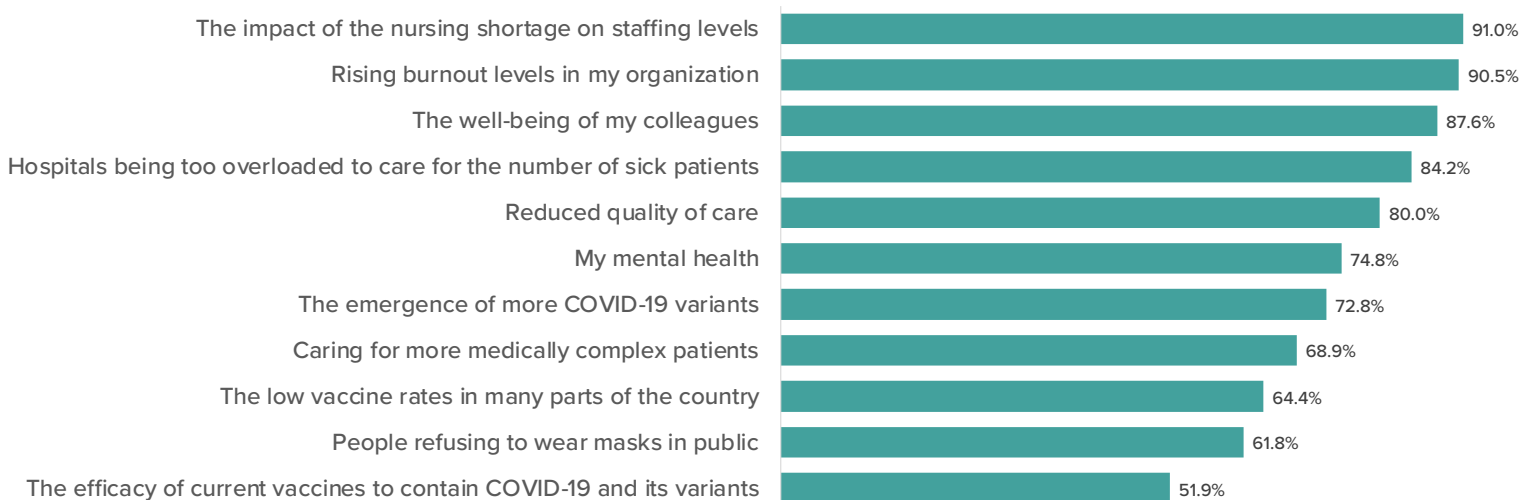


Nurses Are Distressed

Nurses are concerned about a wide variety of topics. In the table below, a majority of nurses express a high level of concern (a rating of 8-10) on every item. Items at the top of the list include:

- The impact of the nursing shortage on staffing levels (91.0%)
- Rising burnout levels in my organization (90.5%)
- The well-being of my colleagues (87.6%)
- Hospitals being too overloaded to care for the number of sick patients (84.2%)
- Reduced quality of care (80.0%)

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE, HOW CONCERNED ARE YOU WITH THE FOLLOWING ISSUES?
Please rate each on a scale of 1 (NOT AT ALL CONCERNED) to 10 (EXTREMELY CONCERNED). (Base = 9993)
% ANSWERING 8, 9 OR 10...



2. COVID-19 Alters Career Plans

January of 2021, most nurses (73.1%) said that the pandemic had not altered their career plans. However, by Sept. of 2021, that number had dropped to

58.0%

24.6%

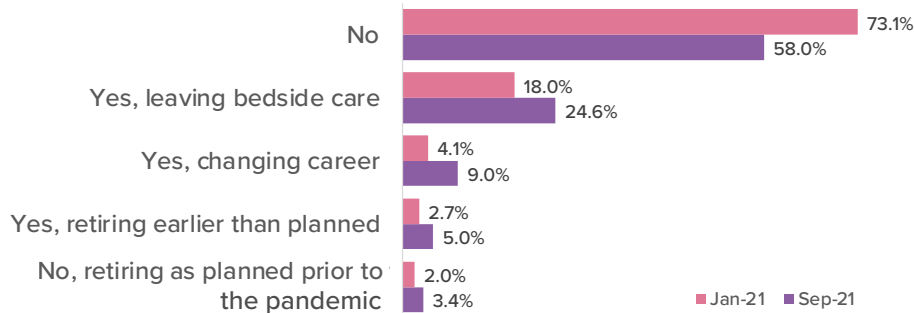
of nurses say they are currently leaving bedside care after this year.

9.0%

say they are changing their career, and 5.0% are retiring earlier than planned.

HAS THE PANDEMIC ALTERED YOUR PLANS TO BE AN ACTIVE NURSE AFTER 2021?

(Base = 9939)



Nurses working in these units are most likely to say they are leaving bedside care at the end of 2021: Adult ICU, Adult Med/Surg, Pre-Op Assessment, PICU and Peds Med/Surg.

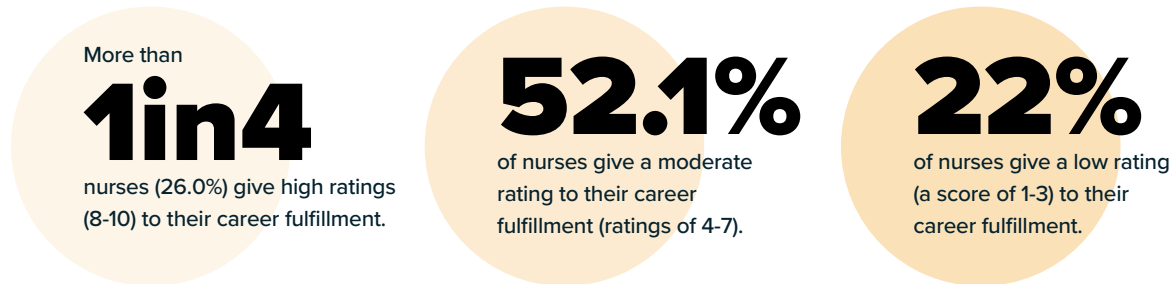
Younger nurses age 18 – 24 (27.4%) and age 25 – 34 (30.6%) are most likely to say they will leave bedside care after 2021.

Unit	# of Respondents	% saying they are leaving bedside care
Adult ICU	577	28.4%
Adult Med/Surg	751	27.5%
PICU	53	26.5%
Peds Med/Surg	59	26.5%
Other	429	23.5%
Peds ER	21	23.3%
Adult ER	293	21.2%
Mother/Baby	113	19.4%
NICU	62	15.1%

Age Range	# of Respondents	% saying they are leaving bedside care
18 – 24	303	27.4%
25 – 34	1,379	30.6%
35 – 44	444	21.2%
45 – 54	228	16.6%
55 – 64	59	7.8%
65+	10*	8.6%

NOTE: Asterisk indicates a sample size of less than 20, which is below the threshold to say the results are representative.

3. Career Fulfillment is Declining



Nurse ratings of career fulfillment have fallen steadily since the first Pulse survey conducted in September 2020. The percentage of nurses who gave a high rating to their career fulfillment (a rating of 8-10).

RATING OF FULFILLMENT IN CAREER AS A NURSE OVER TIME

	Low Rating of %1-3	Medium Rating of %4-7	High Rating of %8 - 10	Mean Score
September 2020	9.8%	49.2%	41.4%	6.79
January 2021	18.7%	51.2%	30.1%	5.95
September 2021	22.0%	52.1%	26.0%	5.67

As with assessments of well-being, nurse ratings of career fulfillment are lowest among nurses in the younger age ranges and increases among those age 45+.

RATING OF FULFILLMENT IN CAREER AS A NURSE BY AGE GROUP

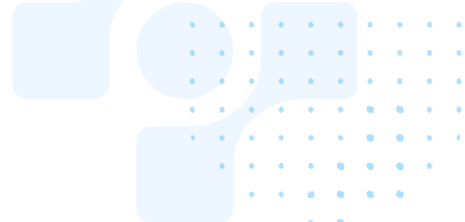
Age Range	# of Respondents	% Giving a Rating of 8, 9 or 10
18 – 24	1,102	17.0%
25 – 34	4,496	19.2%
35 – 44	2,089	28.8%
45 – 54	1,369	38.9%
55 – 64	758	44.7%
65+	114	39.6%



Career fulfillment is highest among nurses in Wyoming and Alaska and lowest in Maine and Montana. (Based on findings from states with at least 20 respondents.)

State	# of Respondents	% rating their career fulfillment as 8, 9 or 10	State	# of Respondents	% rating their career fulfillment as 8, 9 or 10
North Dakota	12*	41.7%	Minnesota	66	24.2%
Wyoming	33	36.4%	Oklahoma	89	23.6%
Alaska	47	34.0%	Alabama	194	23.2%
New Mexico	56	33.9%	North Carolina	285	22.8%
Louisiana	68	33.8%	Idaho	44	22.7%
Hawaii	48	33.3%	Virginia	204	22.5%
Mississippi	30	33.3%	Illinois	309	22.3%
California	1,226	33.2%	Nebraska	45	22.2%
Maryland	200	32.0%	Washington	298	22.1%
South Dakota	19*	31.6%	Colorado	257	21.8%
Arizona	252	30.6%	Connecticut	208	21.6%
Wisconsin	72	30.6%	Pennsylvania	372	21.2%
Delaware	33	30.3%	Tennessee	235	20.4%
Nevada	80	30.0%	West Virginia	75	20.0%
Texas	906	29.9%	Utah	73	19.2%
Florida	737	29.7%	Massachusetts	281	18.9%
New Hampshire	49	28.6%	Oregon	171	18.1%
Kansas	84	28.6%	Iowa	61	18.0%
New Jersey	267	27.3%	Michigan	244	18.0%
Indiana	187	27.3%	Ohio	331	17.2%
Georgia	310	27.1%	Kentucky	117	17.1%
New York	709	27.1%	District of Columbia (DC)	64	15.6%
South Carolina	140	26.4%	Rhode Island	41	14.6%
Arkansas	57	26.3%	Vermont	8*	12.5%
North Dakota	12*	41.7%	Montana	58	12.1%
Wyoming	33	36.4%	Maine	35	11.4%

NOTE: Asterisk indicates a sample size of less than 20, which is below the threshold to say the results are representative.



Nurses had higher career fulfillment scores in organizations where employers have implemented new initiatives over the past 18 months.

MEAN CAREER FULFILLMENT SCORE ON A SCALE OF 1 (LOW) TO 10 (HIGH)

- Organizations where employer **HAS** implemented new initiatives **6.10**
- Organizations where employer **HAS NOT** implemented new initiatives **5.17**

Career fulfillment is rated highest among nurses working in the Long-Term Care department and lowest among those who work in Pediatric Med/Surg

RATING OF FULFILLMENT IN CAREER AS A NURSE BY DEPARTMENT

Original Nursing Unit (pre COVID-19)	# of Respondents	% Giving a Rating of 8, 9 or 10	Original Nursing Unit (pre COVID-19)	# of Respondents	% Giving a Rating of 8, 9 or 10
LongTerm Care	85	47.1%	Other Unit	1,827	28.1%
PACU	80	37.5%	Mother / Baby	581	27.7%
OR	88	37.5%	Pediatric ER	90	25.8%
Behavioral	116	35.7%	Adult Med/ Surg	2,729	24.5%
Outpatient	59	33.9%	Adult ICU	2,030	24.4%
NICU	409	31.7%	Adult ER	1,374	24.3%
Skilled Nursing Facility	35	31.4%	Pediatric Med/ Surg	223	23.4%
PICU	200	29.6%			

Sense of Well-Being is Low but Steady

28.4%

of nurses give themselves a high well-being score (a rating of 8-10).

58.3%

of nurses give a moderate assessment of their well-being (a score of 4 -7)

13.4%

of nurses assess their level of well-being as low.

A sense of well-being increases with age. Nurses in the 18-24 range are least likely to give a high rating to their overall well-being; however, the percentage increases steadily as age increases. For example, while 17.2% of the youngest nurses rate their well-being as high (a rating of 8-10), nurses in the 55-64 age range (47.5%) and 65+ range (47.4%) have a much higher assessment of their well-being.

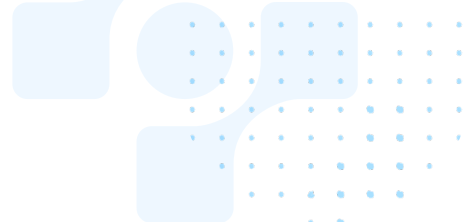
RATING OF FULFILLMENT IN CAREER AS A NURSE BY AGE GROUP

Age Range	# of Respondents	% Giving a Rating of 8, 9 or 10
18 – 24	1,104	17.2%
25 – 34	4,498	21.8%
35 – 44	2,092	32.4%
45 – 54	1,369	40.8%
55 – 64	756	47.5%
65+	114	47.4%

Nurses had higher well-being scores in organizations where employers have implemented new initiatives over the past 18 months.

MEAN CAREER FULFILLMENT SCORE ON A SCALE OF 1 (LOW) TO 10 (HIGH)

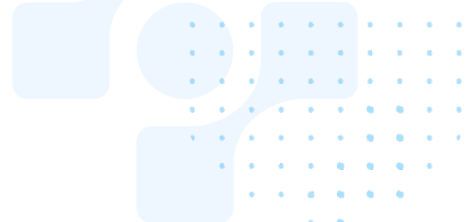
- Organizations where employer **HAS** implemented new initiatives **6.36**
- Organizations where employer **HAS NOT** implemented new initiatives **5.84**



Nurses working in Alaska, California, New Mexico, Florida, Mississippi, New Hampshire, Nevada and Texas have the highest assessment of their well-being, while nurses in Maine and Rhode Island are least likely to have a high assessment (a rating of 8-10) of their well-being. (Based on findings from states with at least 20 respondents.)

State	# of Respondents	% rating their career fulfillment as 8, 9 or 10	State	# of Respondents	% rating their career fulfillment as 8, 9 or 10
North Dakota	12*	41.7%	Pennsylvania	372	25.8%
Alaska	47	36.2%	Minnesota	66	25.8%
California	1,226	34.1%	Colorado	257	25.7%
New Mexico	56	33.9%	Connecticut	209	25.4%
Florida	737	33.6%	West Virginia	75	25.3%
Mississippi	30	33.3%	Washington	298	25.2%
New Hampshire	49	32.7%	Illinois	310	25.2%
Nevada	80	32.5%	Indiana	187	25.1%
Texas	906	32.0%	Wisconsin	72	25.0%
Hawaii	47	31.9%	Iowa	61	24.6%
South Dakota	19	31.6%	Tennessee	235	24.3%
Maryland	200	31.5%	Missouri	139	23.0%
Alabama	194	30.9%	Kansas	84	22.6%
Louisiana	68	30.9%	Massachusetts	281	22.4%
Arizona	253	30.8%	Ohio	331	22.1%
New Jersey	267	30.7%	Arkansas	57	21.1%
Georgia	311	29.9%	Kentucky	117	20.5%
Oklahoma	89	29.2%	Idaho	44	20.5%
New York	710	29.2%	Oregon	171	19.3%
Nebraska	45	28.9%	Delaware	33	18.2%
Wyoming	33	27.3%	Utah	73	17.8%
South Carolina	140	27.1%	Montana	58	17.2%
Michigan	244	27.0%	Rhode Island	41	14.6%
North Carolina	285	27.0%	Vermont	8*	12.5%
District of Columbia (DC)	64	26.6%	Maine	35	8.6%
Virginia	204	26.0%	Maine	35	11.4%

NOTE: Asterisk indicates a sample size of less than 20, which is below the threshold to say the results are representative.



RATING OF PERSONAL WELL-BEING BY DEPARTMENT

Original Nursing Unit (pre COVID-19)	# of Respondents	% Giving a Rating of 8, 9 or 10	Original Nursing Unit (pre COVID-19)	# of Respondents	% Giving a Rating of 8, 9 or 10
PACU	80	48.8%	Mother / Baby	581	30.1%
Long Term Care	85	41.2%	Other Unit	1,827	28.8%
OR	88	40.9%	Adult Med/ Surg	2,729	27.4%
Outpatient	59	39.0%	Pediatric Med/ Surg	223	25.6%
Behavioral	116	35.3%	PICU	200	24.5%
Adult ER	1,374	31.3%	Adult ICU	2,030	24.4%
Pediatric ER	90	31.1%	Skilled Nursing Facility	35	20.0%
NICU	409	30.1%			

Nurse assessments of personal well-being were highest in these units:

- Post-Anesthesia Care Unit (PACU)
- Long Term Care
- Operating Room (OR)

And lowest in these units:

- Skilled Nursing Facility
- Adult Intensive Care Unit (ICU)
- Pediatric Intensive Care Unit (PICU)
- Pediatric Medical/Surgical

Compared to September 2020, nurse assessments of their well-being dipped slightly in January 2021. Assessments of well-being have rebounded slightly since January but are still lower than the scores obtained in the first Pulse survey in September 2020.

RATING OF FULFILLMENT IN CAREER AS A NURSE OVER TIME

	Low Rating of %1-3	Medium Rating of %4-7	High Rating of %8 - 10	Mean Score
September 2020	8.6%	63.1%	28.4%	6.37
January 2021	16.2%	59.0%	24.9%	5.87
September 2021	13.4%	58.3%	28.4%	6.12

As with Career Fulfillment, nurse ratings of Personal Well-Being is lowest in units where patients have highest acuity and where COVID-19 patients may be treated.

4. Many Nurses Resent the Unvaccinated

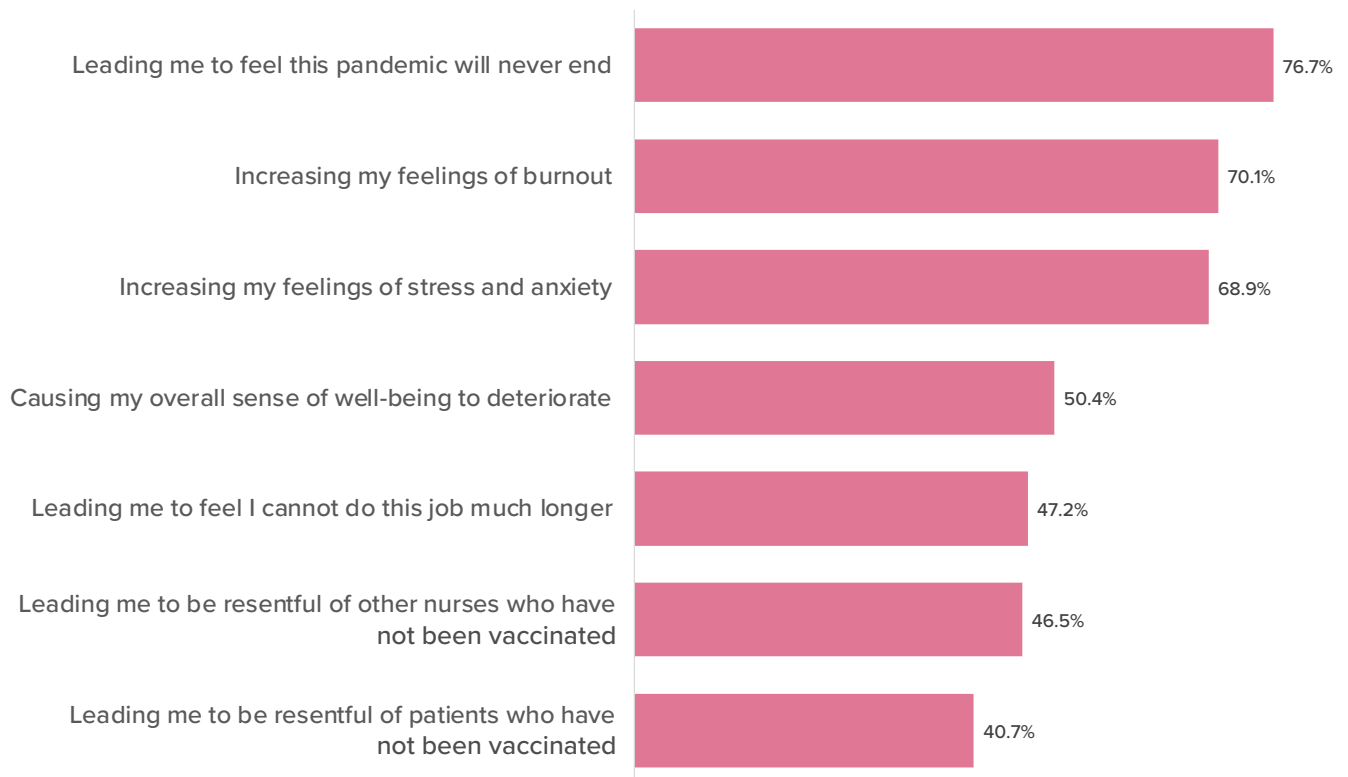
More than
3/4
 of nurses feel that this pandemic will never end (76.7%)

47.2%
 feel they cannot do this job much longer.

There is also resentment among nurses for co-workers who have not taken the vaccine (46.5%) and unvaccinated patients
40.7%

THE RECENT RESURGENCE IN COVID-19 CASES DUE TO THE DELTA AND OTHER VARIANTS HAS IMPACTED ME BY...

Rate each statement on a scale of 1 (STRONGLY DISAGREE) to 10 (STRONGLY AGREE).. (Base = 9965)
 % ANSWERING 8, 9 OR 10...



5. Nurse Confidence and Manager Support Can be Improved

Despite a year and a half of experience treating COVID-19 patients

48.5%

say they are more confident dealing with new or varying clinical situations.

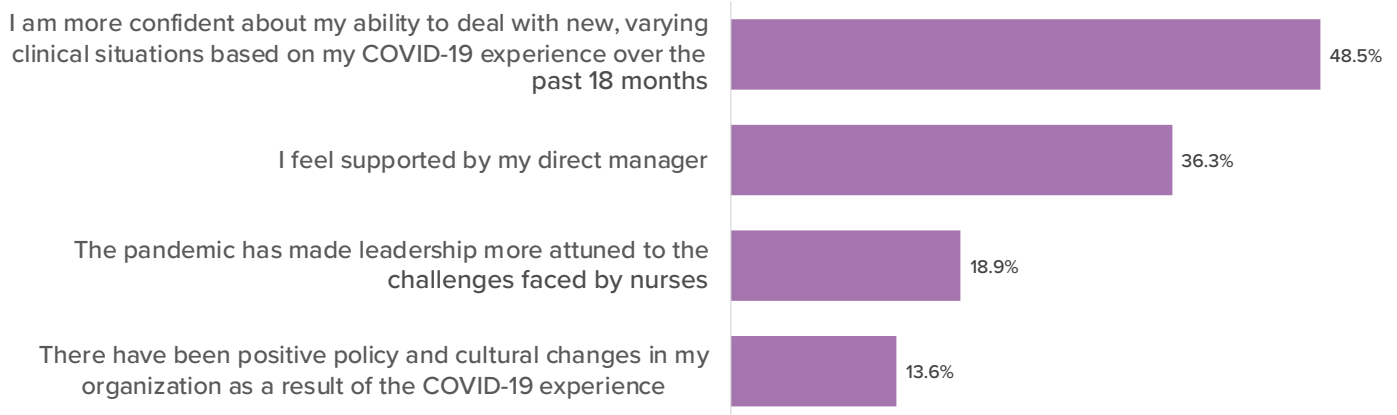
1/3

feel supported by their direct manager.

18.9%

feel the pandemic has made managers more attuned to the needs of nurses

Rate the following on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being **STRONGLY DISAGREE** and 10 being **STRONGLY AGREE**. (Base = 9991)
% ANSWERING 8, 9 OR 10...



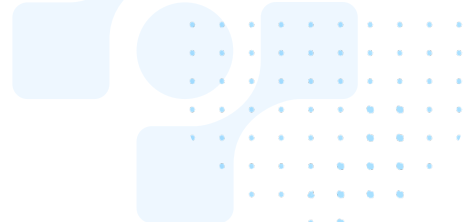
Actions by Employers and Nurses to Improve Well-Being

More than half of nurses indicate their employer has taken action to improve their well-being (54.7%). Among employers who have taken action, the most common activities have been:

- Offering counseling services to help cope with burnout and mental health issues (31.5%)
- Hiring more staff (27.7%)

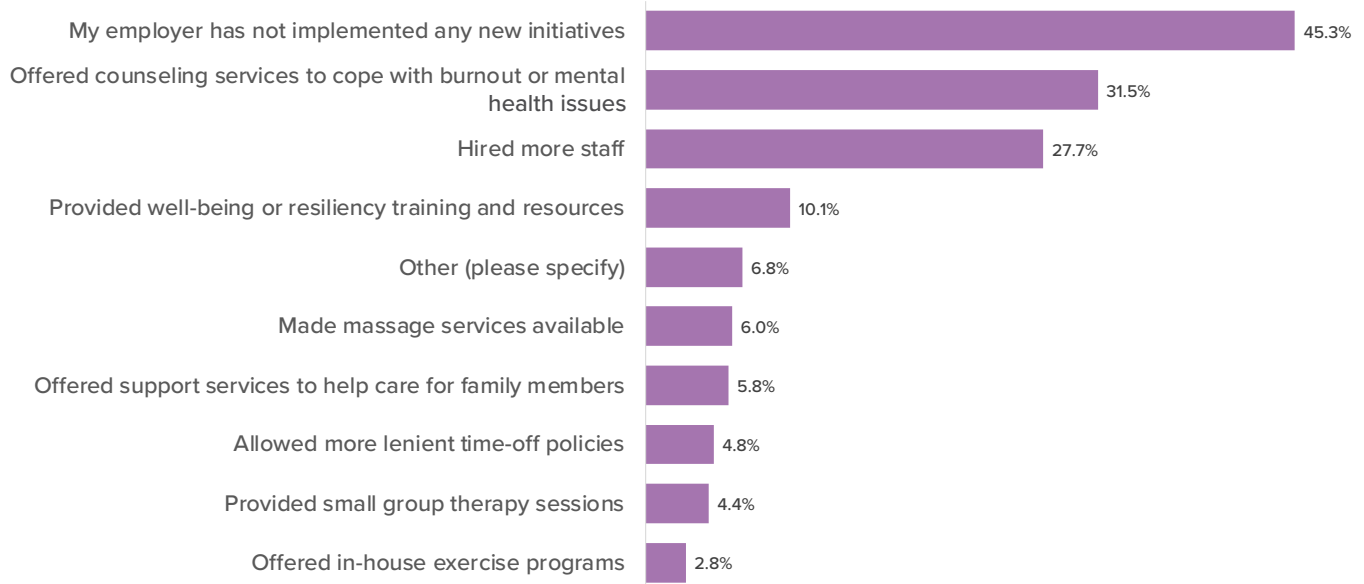
Among nurses themselves, nearly half (49.0%) have talked with a colleague or friend about mental health issues. Other common actions have included:

- Taking extra vacation time (36.2%)
- Increasing exercise (32.8%)
- Improving diet (30.0%)



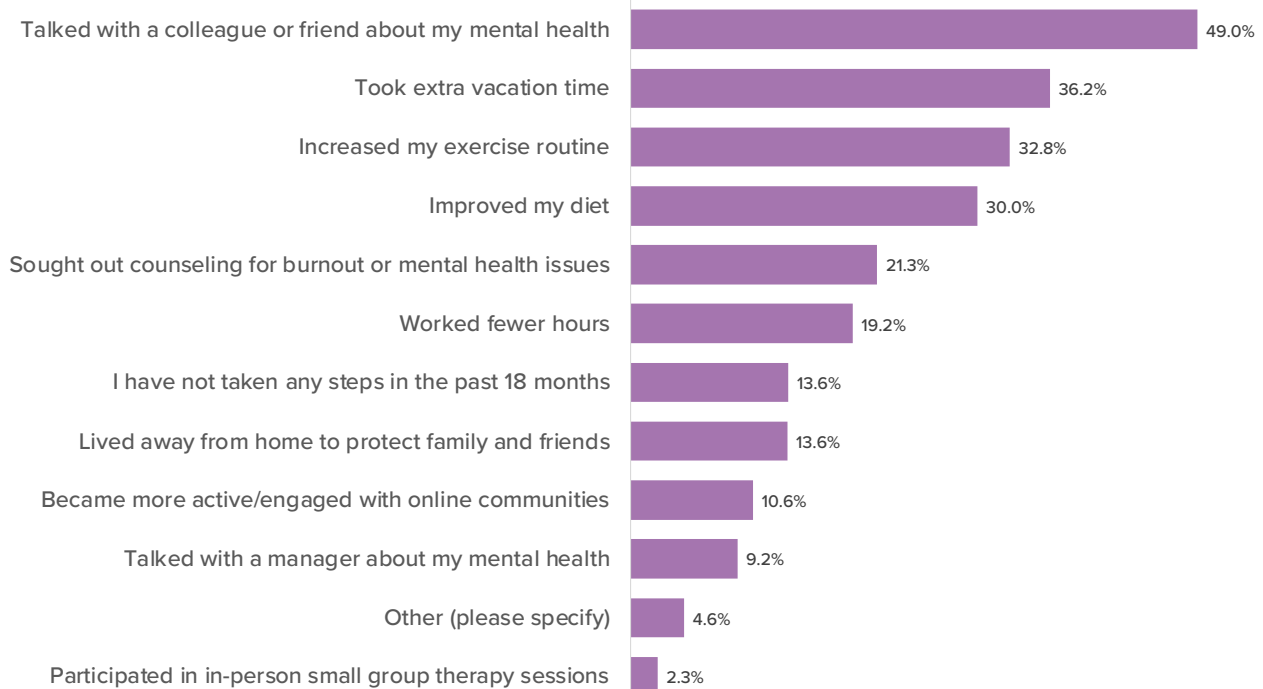
WHAT INITIATIVES HAS YOUR EMPLOYER IMPLEMENTED IN THE PAST 18 MONTHS THAT BENEFIT YOUR WELL-BEING AS A NURSE?

(Select all that apply.) (Base = 9922)



WHAT ACTIONS HAVE YOU TAKEN IN THE PAST 18 MONTHS TO SUPPORT YOUR WELL-BEING?

(Select all that apply.) (Base = 9922)

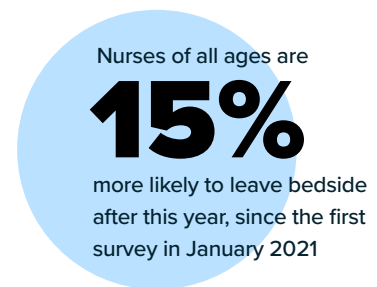


Conclusion

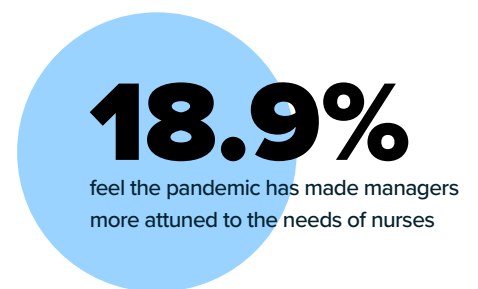
The current unsettled state of nursing, driven by the unprecedented challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, is apparent in the responses to nearly every question in this edition of the survey. Bedside nurses, particularly those of younger generations (18-34), find less career fulfillment and an increasing desire to leave the bedside. In fact, since the first survey in January 2021, nurses of all ages are 15% more likely to leave bedside after this year, climbing to an all-time high of 38.6%.

While three in four nurses feel the pandemic will never end, hospitals must be ready to support staff as COVID admissions wane. Only 18.9% of nurses think that the pandemic has made leadership more attuned to the challenges nurses face, while a majority do feel that management has taken action to support their needs. This leaves a significant opening for hospitals to engage with staff and retain some nurses who are planning to leave bedside altogether. Results indicating career fatigue and an intent to leave bedside care suggest that burnout is not unique to any one facility, rather a systemic problem for the industry only exacerbated by the pandemic.

Once the pandemic subsides, facilities that show the most improvement in their nurse engagement scores will likely retain more staff and have a better chance at providing adequate staffing levels.



Nurses of all ages are **15%** more likely to leave bedside after this year, since the first survey in January 2021



18.9% feel the pandemic has made managers more attuned to the needs of nurses

About the Survey

The information in this report is based on a survey of nurses conducted via the NurseGrid app from Aug. 27 – Sept. 6, 2021. A total of 10,022 nurses responded. Most respondents were RNs (84.8%). Respondents were somewhat younger than the nurse population as a whole, with 77.5% falling in the 18-44 age ranges. Nurses who responded to the survey worked in units heavily impacted by COVID-19—Adult Med/Surg (27.5%), Adult ICU (20.4%), and Adult ER (13.9%). The states most heavily represented were California (12.3%), Texas (9.1%) and Florida (7.4%).