

Women, Easing the Burdens in Healthcare

As Women's History month draws to a close, sharing the remarkable way women are easing the burdens in healthcare is important to highlight. Across industries, women are well-represented in roles that have been deemed essential. As a matter of fact, the [United States Census Bureau](#) found that women hold 42% of the nation's full-time, year-round jobs designated as essential, while also making up the majority of essential workers in specific fields like education, healthcare, personal care, sales, and office occupations.



During the COVID-19 pandemic, the added emotional and cognitive labor taken on by women contributed to increasing amounts of burnout, across all industries. However, COVID-19 was just a small part of the problem when it comes to burnout and women in healthcare. In [Deloitte's Women at Work 2022](#) study, more than 50% of the 5,000 women surveyed reported higher stress levels than the year prior, and nearly as many reported feelings of burnout.

Both the increased workload and frequent burnout hold true in healthcare, where the majority of front-line workers identify as female. Three years removed from the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the feelings of being overburdened has become an unprecedented workforce crisis.

I had a front row seat witnessing record-breaking nurse turnover and vacancy rates in 2021. Additionally, the median turnover rate for bedside registered nurses was 18%, an increase from 14.8% in 2020. The healthcare industry has realized that the cavalry isn't coming because they are the cavalry. As a result, healthcare leaders began thinking outside the box and began incorporating travel nurses and technology by way of robots to transport medicine from the pharmacy to the bedside to ease some of the burden of staff.

WHAT'S CAUSING THE NURSE SHORTAGE

Unfortunately, the nursing shortage is expected to persist for at least another 10 years. There are more than 195,000 openings for registered nurses projected through 2031 according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics, and women are more likely to bear the brunt of this shortage. According to a [2021 Kaiser Family Foundation](#) analysis found that women comprised more than 77% of healthcare workers with direct patient contact and 84% of those working in long-term

care settings. Furthermore, according to the [United States Census Bureau](#), nearly 87% of those in crucial healthcare occupations like registered nurses are women.

With the healthcare industry on the frontlines during a global pandemic, the import of women in these fields is clear. The brunt of increasing care requests and requirements has also fallen heavily on women in healthcare, and in an industry where staff burnout has a very real effect on both patients and providers, women are bearing the brunt of these stressors.

Still, it does not have to be this way. While healthcare workers will always be at the heart of care, there are ways for digital health technology to ease some of the burden, scaling healthcare workers' reach and allowing them to return to practicing at the top of their licenses.

One such option can be found in in-room patient education solutions. This type of digital patient engagement resource can alleviate the administrative burden from staff by placing tasks like meal ordering, entertainment, service requests, and environmental controls in the hands of patients. This automation of routine tasks and documentation for staff enables healthcare organizations to support patients and families to be active participants in their care without adding to staff and clinician workloads.

By empowering patients to manage aspects of their hospital stay through consumer-first digital technology, and providing in-depth patient education around conditions and medications, the clinical team can dedicate more time providing care and less time on non-clinical tasks. This means a renewed staff focus on higher value activities, such as teach-back, while understanding that technology can act as a true support, rather than just another requirement.

If you haven't already, before this Women's History month ends, let us celebrate and support our healthcare workers—of any gender—in every way we can. From headcount to digital health technology, providing resources and support will go a long way toward leveling the playing field for women in healthcare.