AMN Survey Shows COVID-19 Impacts to Nurses' Mental Health and More Discrimination, Less Inclusion for Diverse Nurses

December 7, 2021

DALLAS, Dec. 7, 2021 – The COVID-19 pandemic has created significant mental health risks for the nation's registered nurses and set back their education plans, though nurses who treated COVID-19 patients seem more energized to pursue higher education plans, according to the AMN Healthcare 2021 Survey of Registered Nurses.

Nursing and the Nation: Extreme Challenges, Extraordinary Impact, based on the responses of 6,562 registered nurses, found that 66% said working during the pandemic raised their stress level "a lot" or "a great deal." As a result of the pandemic, 63% of nurses felt emotionally drained, and 56% felt burned out most days. These problems were worse among nurses who directly treated COVID-19 patients.

The survey included significant new data on diverse nurses, including that nonwhite, non-heterosexual, and disabled RNs have greater negative perceptions about equitable opportunities and workplace support for diversity compared to white, heterosexual and nondisabled RNs.

"Solving the mental health, wellness, and inequality problems that nurses face today is one of our greatest priorities," said Dr. Cole Edmonson, DNP, RN, FAAN, Chief Experience and Clinical Officer at AMN Healthcare. "Healthy communities require healthy nurses. The pandemic has further highlighted the inequities in healthcare that we must address, including the social justice issues that affect broader society. We have to embrace, co-create, and drive new solutions to the nationwide crisis in nursing."

Impact of COVID-19

Nearly one-quarter of nurses – 23% – said it was somewhat likely or extremely likely they would leave the field of nursing due to COVID-19, reflecting the high level of frustration and distress among many nurses practicing during the pandemic. Nurses who treated COVID-19 patients were at significantly greater risk: Among nurses who said they experienced a great deal of stress at work, 43% treated COVID-19 patients while 29% did not. Career satisfaction among nurses who treated COVID-19 patients was 7 percentage points lower; satisfaction with quality of care was 9 percentage points lower.

The pandemic has created for nurses a particularly damaging emotional wounding known as moral distress. Moral distress is defined as the psychological distress from being in a situation where you know what the right thing to do is, but you can't do it because of forces beyond your control. A major source of moral distress for nurses has been the often ambivalent and sometimes hostile public attitudes toward vaccines, masks, and COVID-19 safety.

Pandemic Interrupts Education

COVID-19 has had a negative impact on many nurses' education and training. Half of RNs in the survey said the pandemic had an impact on their education plans, ranging from "a little" to a "great deal." Approximately three quarters already in enrolled in programs said the pandemic impacted their training and transition to residency programs.

Nurses who provided direct care to COVID-19 patients were more motivated to seek higher education compared to nurses who did not treat COVID-patients. Nineteen percent of nurses who treated COVID-19 patients were enrolled in a nursing education program, compared to 14% of nurses who did not treat COVID-19 patients. Forty-eight percent who treated COVID-19 patients were planning to enroll in a nursing education program, compared to 42% of nurses who did not treat COVID-19 patients.

New Evidence on Diversity

Nonwhite nurses and nurses who do not identify as heterosexual were more likely to feel excluded in the workplace and to experience more discrimination and harassment. Nonwhite nurses were twice as likely to experience racial or ethnic harassment compared to white nurses. They were 12 percentage points less likely to agree that all employees have equitable opportunities and 11 percentage points less likely to agree that employers and coworkers value employees from different backgrounds. Nurses who do not identify as heterosexual were 5 percentage points less likely to agree that all employees have equitable opportunities and 7 percentage points less likely to agree that their employers and coworkers value employees from different backgrounds.

At the same time, nonwhite nurses and nurses who do not identify as heterosexual have higher career satisfaction compared to white and heterosexual nurses.

Solutions to Protect Nurses

The most important immediate solution to protect and support nurses is universal vaccination for coronavirus, according to Edmonson. Nurses are overwhelmed by unvaccinated patients in hospitals, and many are traumatized by patient sickness and death that could be avoided by vaccination. The situation is causing moral distress among nurses, which can lead to intense frustration, increased burnout, and nurses quitting their profession.

The Future of Nursing 2020-2030 report by the National Academy of Medicine urges coordinated and collaborative action by everyone – patients, nurses themselves, healthcare organizations, professional organizations, education, government, and the public – to promote nurses' health and wellbeing.

Among other programs, the American Nursing Association launched a long-range program to improve sleep, nutrition, physical activity, quality of life,

and safety of nurses through essential resources and programs. Another movement is underway to embed nurse mental health and wellbeing support into nursing education.

AMN Healthcare, the nation's largest nurse staffing company, engaged an aggressive virtual approach to caring for nurses on assignment in all 50 states. This included utilizing video conferencing to provide counseling on demand for nurses and their families. Mobile applications allow nurses to manage all business aspects of their work and to support clinical work, including video conferencing and exchanging critical information with patients, their families, and colleagues. AMN Healthcare provided nurses other programs such as free financial planning and resources and legal support and guidance to reduce the common stressors of life.

The 2021 RN Survey can be downloaded on the AMN Healthcare website at https://www.amnhealthcare.com/amn-insights/nursing/surveys/2021/.

About AMN Healthcare
AMN Healthcare is the leader and innovator in total talent solutions for healthcare organizations across the nation. The Company provides access to the most comprehensive network of quality healthcare professionals through its innovative recruitment strategies and breadth of career opportunities. With insights and expertise, AMN Healthcare helps providers optimize their workforce to successfully reduce complexity, increase efficiency and improve patient outcomes. AMN total talent solutions include managed services programs, clinical and interim healthcare leaders, temporary staffing, executive search solutions, vendor management systems, recruitment process outsourcing, predictive modeling, language interpretation services, revenue cycle solutions, credentialing and other services. Clients include acute-care hospitals, community health centers and clinics, physician practice groups, retail and urgent care centers, home health facilities, schools and many other healthcare settings. AMN Healthcare is committed to fostering and maintaining a diverse team that reflects the communities we serve. Our commitment to the inclusion of many different backgrounds, experiences and perspectives enables our innovation and leadership in the healthcare services industry. For more information about AMN Healthcare, visit www.amnhealthcare.com.

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