

**Understanding and Retention of the Multigenerational Nurse**

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In today's nursing profession, there are four generations co-existing, the Veterans, Baby Boomers, Generation X, and the Millennials, all expected to provide quality patient care, function as a team and effectively communicate with each other. Each generation grew up with different values, beliefs, attitudes and perceptions of the world which leads one generation to disagree or make assumptions of the other generation. As leaders in a healthcare organization, it is important to have a basic understanding of the attributes of each generation in order to provide a positive work environment and more importantly assist with retention of the generational nurse. Understanding generational differences can lead to increased productivity and job satisfaction which decreases staff turnover and improved working environments for all nurses (Carver, 2008). As individuals, all employees react differently to given situations; however, those with similar backgrounds, such as gender and values, tend to have comparable viewpoints and outlooks as well as a higher level of comfort and trust in one another. This can be said the same about employees from the same generation. "The ideals, values, traits, goals, and characteristics held by generations are different from one another; however, differences play a significant role in how employees of one group relate to the others" (Hu et al., 2004, p. 355). There are many differences in the four generations that are currently working together. As mentioned previously, generational values, attitudes, and worldly perceptions and experiences mold a generation's uniqueness as well as communication and work styles, views on loyalty and authority, technology and acceptance of change (Hu et al., 2004).

The veterans or 'silent' generation were born between 1925 and 1945 and endured World War II and the Great Depression. "They are cautious and conservative who respect hierarchy, authority, and hard work ethic" (Kramer, 2010, p. 125). Veterans are described as adaptive and loyal; they value hard work, build trust with others and work in large organizations for job security. Veteran

nurses believe that sacrifice and hard work should be rewarded and prefer face-to face or written communication instead of technological advancements (Kramer, 2010). Veterans have also been described as unimaginative, unadventurous and cautious, hence, the 'silent' generation. This generation has the least number of representatives working in the profession today with most nearing retirement or choosing early retirement due to the progression of technology and experiencing more difficulties in adjusting to these advancements (Johnson & Romanello, 2005).

The Veteran generation, being the most mature and experienced of the four generations, may be found at the bedside or hold upper leadership roles. Since these nurses did not grow up in the world of technology, they prefer the traditional classroom setting and lecture methodology for continued learning opportunities and professional development. In a classroom setting with multigenerational nurses, the veteran nurse can be utilized for the growth and development of younger staff by sharing patient stories, clinical experiences and their expert knowledge on specific topics. The veteran nurse is able to understand, relate and communicate case specific presentations or role-playing for the younger generation learning opportunities (Gallo, 2011). Specific strategies to show respect and acknowledgement of a veteran nurse's work and performance are to honor them for their loyalty and service. Veteran nurses desire to be valued by the organization and are satisfied when recognition is acknowledged (Carver & Candela, 2008).

The baby-boomers, born between 1946 and 1964, are currently the largest generation in the nursing profession and are often found working in leadership positions. Baby boomers were raised in a traditional home setting, where values were taught through family and television programs that recognized that satisfaction was achieved with a job well done (Lipscomb, 2010). Baby boomers were raised by parents that endured wars and times of economic depression and their parents were committed to ensure that their children would have a better life than the previous generation. Baby

boomers also have a very strong work ethic and want recognition for good performance. They are competitive and strive for excellence (Carver & Candela, 2008). This generation has “been called the most egocentric generation who grew up being individuals, independent, and creative” (Kramer, 2010). They prefer open and direct face to face or telephone communication, and will utilize email communication if comfortable with technological advancements. They enjoy lifelong learning and find gratification and motivation of a job well done, through public recognition such as a special parking space, or award nominations. Boomers have been called ‘workaholics’, their job defines their identity and often put work before family (Kramer, 2010).

Baby boomers expect to be rewarded for their contributions through merit increases and benefits. This generation consists of a large portion of our population therefore they tend to be competitive and desire excellence. Employees in this generation view work as their life and their career is often their identity. For professional development, this generation prefers to be able to have personal contact with faculty and learns best through lecture and note taking (Carver & Candela, 2008). In a study focused on retention strategies for the mid-career nurse, areas important for retention focused on a healthy work environment, job flexibility, professional development, respect, staffing, education and team-building. The results of this study showed that these nurses desired reliable patient care equipment, respect from co-workers, and were most content when able to provide efficient and safe patient care in a respectful work environment (Lobo et al, 2012). Flexible scheduling, offering eight or twelve hour shifts to this particular nurse can be an effective retention strategy (Putre, 2013). With the increase in patient census, acuity and nurse to patient ration, as well as budget cuts in personnel, twelve hour shifts can be exhausting, resulting in job dissatisfaction and nurse burn out. Another option that is available in some organizations is recognizing 32 hours as a fulltime work week. Normally fulltime is noted to fall between 36 to 40 hours per week, however, offering the aging nurse the option to maintain fulltime benefits, at the same premium but only work 32 hours per week, is very appealing.

Although most baby boomers are comfortable with the use of computers, the increased technology that is seen in healthcare today is a struggle for them and is identified as making their jobs more complicated (Hu et al., 2004). Being able to provide more support, hands on training and human resources, as well as appropriate teaching methods when introducing new technology, would be helpful for this generation of nurses to assist with positive acceptance of computerized advancements.

Generation X is made up of those born between 1963 and 1980. This generation often saw their parents' divorce, leading to broken homes and was labeled 'latchkey' children. This generation was the first generation to see both parents work outside the home; therefore they became self-sufficient and self-reliant. Unlike the boomers, Gen X does not believe in corporate loyalty and they have no intentions on remaining in one company for the duration of their career. Gen X was the first generation to grow up in front of the television and technology is a very important part of their lives. Gen X has been described as pessimistic and selfish and having no work ethic. They like communication to be straight to the point, preferably through technology and do not want to be micromanaged. Gen X values their personal time and they work to live not live to work (Kramer, 2010).

As mentioned above, Generation X is described as independent and self-reliant therefore they enjoy working autonomously. They do not seek to be micro-managed, but are open to be mentored and coached and prefer working together in decision-making (Hu et al., 2004). This generation of nurses is more confident with technology and learns best through self-directed or on-line learning methods. With the large number of Baby Boomers that will be leaving the workforce soon, it is very important to engage Generation X and retain them in the nursing profession. However, Gen X saw the 'industries' lay off their parents, downsize companies and do not have trust or loyalty in corporations. If this generation is not happy or satisfied in their workplace, they will go elsewhere. It is very important to provide these nurses with opportunities for growth. In a study conducted by Shelton and Shelton in

2005, qualities of this generation were impatient, demanding and arrogant. They are looking to add to their resume and will do so even if it means seeking another employer (Carver & Candela, 2008). Some opportunities that could be considered to assist in providing autonomy and leadership advancement for this generation include membership on hospital teams and committees, preceptor and charge nurse. These positions are usually considered professional advancements in hospitals and would help satisfy this nurse in climbing the professional ladder while adding experience to their resume. Although Gen X is recognized as to not being dedicated to one establishment, placing them in an environment that supports their professional growth and allows continued learning opportunities can increase their loyalty to the organization (Apostolidis & Polifroni, 2006). Other retention strategies to retain this generation could be focused on encouragement of educational advancements, degrees and certifications. Some organizations provide monetary funding to assist with academic finances as well as recognition and reimbursement for degrees and certifications. With importance focused on joint decision making, an effectively run shared governance team would allow this group to be involved in decision-making at the department and organizational level. Scheduling must be flexible, allowing the nurse to take advantage of educational opportunities, while also ensuring that their personal time is not interfered with. Self-scheduling could be an option to assist with retention, allowing the nurse to have some control and decision-making into personalizing their work weeks.

The next 'praised to be' generation is the Millennials, or Gen Y'ers, who were born between 1982 and 2002 and they offer hope for the future. This generation is described as being positive, assertive and defining. They were raised in a child friendly society where the focus was on their safety. Millennials have never known life without technology and with information at their fingertips; they have always received immediate feedback. They work well in a team atmosphere, adaptive and positive with change, and their goal is to achieve a work-life balance (Carver & Candela, 2008). Even with all of the negative exposure surrounding nursing work environments, such as nurse to patient ratios and job

dissatisfaction, this new generation is continuing to pursue a career in the nursing profession. The turnover rate with new graduates has continued to grow since 2007. In a 2005 study, twenty-two percent of new nurses said the work environment was the reason for them leaving their first job. They resented being given too much responsibility with too little support and were displeased with scheduling and staffing. "Generation Y was raised in the "Era of the Child" with parents who nurtured and structured their lives...and are self-sufficient and technologically advanced" (Lavoie-Tremblay & Marchionni, 2011, p.40). Retention in this generation should be focused on ensuring support to the new nurse by providing ongoing preceptorship and positive clinical experiences. A study performed by Lavoie-Tremblay and Marchionni (2011) used a practice environment scale that measures hospital environment in relation to support of professional nursing practice to look at nurse turnover. The new nurses were more likely to stay in their current position if they were in "magnet-like environments" and if "the use of the orientation and preceptorship programs" continued longer than for just a few weeks (Lavoie-Tremblay & Marchionni, 2011). A lot of hospitals focus on recruitment tools, but having retention programs, as seen at one local Magnet facility, can have great importance on decreasing nurse turnover. Catawba Valley Medical Center currently has a preceptor program that not only rewards staff for precepting new nurses, but rewards the primary preceptor an additional monetary amount if the new nurse is still at the facility one year later. This encourages the preceptor to continue to support and mentor the new staff, while building a positive, professional relationship, giving continued guidance throughout the nurses first year.

The Millennials have known technology their entire life and use it self-assuredly. With technology being available to them since birth, they have been able to receive instant answers to questions by the click of a button. Therefore, Gen Y needs immediate communication and feedback. Emails or text messages are great communication tools and they prefer team meetings for updates (Carver & Candela, 2008). Involving the nurse in new technology advancements within the department

or even at the hospital level is a way to productively utilize this generation, while allowing them to share their knowledge that they are already recognized as being the expert in.

Being creative with scheduling is also important for the Gen Y nurse. They too have to find a life – work balance and may request working odd hours or shifts. No matter the length or hours of shift scheduled for, they are often just as productive as staff who may work longer shifts. Their technological skills allow them to be faster with their tasks and activities, especially if computer applications are present. A work environment that provides the latest and greatest computer systems, I-pads or tablets that can be utilized in patient care and documentation will draw Generation Y to an organization. Gen Y also wants to have fun and be creative. This group enjoys sharing things about themselves, so placing a bulletin board in the break room for birthdays, announcements, or just getting to know each other is important to them (Putre, 2013).

Many theories on leadership support the idea that the manager or ‘superior’ of others behaves and treats all subordinates the same way. The Leader-Member Exchange theory (LMX) supports the idea that a leader divides a group into 2 categories, the in-group and the out-group. The in-group is often given more responsibility, rewards and attention. They are recognized as the ‘trusted lieutenant’ and are given more opportunity in decision-making, open communication, and job responsibilities. The out-group, is recognized as low performers, receives less attention from the leader, and is expected to follow policies. Stressors for the in-group revolve around the responsibilities delegated to them by the leader, whereas the out-group faces stress due to lack of involvement and communication. When comparing the two groups, the in-group will have higher productivity, increased job satisfaction and motivation. The overall goal for a leader would be to have as many employees as possible in the in-group. In order to do this, leaders need to meet individually with employees to see what motivates them, discuss their goals, and explore desired involvement within the organization. Continued follow-up

with each individual will help develop trust, loyalty and respect, while supporting and encouraging each individual to develop clinically and professionally, strengthening the in-group, a creating high-quality relationships and overall satisfaction (Lunenburg, 2010).

In a study conducted in 2010, 1,376 hospital employees, from all of the generations except the Veterans, completed a Psychological Climate Questionnaire and a measure for turnover intention. The results of this study concluded that even though each generation has their own expectations regarding their specific employment expectations, orientation, continuing education and benefits, that creating a healthy work environment was the best strategy for retaining healthcare workers, irrespective of generation (Lavoie-Tremblay, et al, 2010).

“Predictive modeling has revealed a warning that the nursing profession in many countries will face another serious shortage in the coming years” (Lavoie-Tremblay & Marchionni, 2011, p. 39). Currently, the work environment for most nurses consists of high patient acuities, increased patient assignments and census, limited management support and discontent among nurses. Integration of these issues and concerns into a multigenerational workforce can be detrimental, resulting in nurse dissatisfaction, nurse turnover and potentially, premature exiting of nursing careers (Lavoie-Tremblay & Marchionni, 2011). There is an abundance of research and literature that describes the concerns mentioned above that afflict the nursing profession, but the one that needs continued assessment and understanding is the generational workforce. Authors that continue to study the nursing generational workforce believe that recognizing and treating employees as merely a number of staff working together to provide patient care is ineffective and reckless. It is important to understand the differences and characteristics of each individual generation to help decrease conflict and successfully recruit a new generation of nurses while retaining the mature, experienced staff (Boychuk & Cowin, 2004).

As a manager, it is very important to understand the differences in the generations that they are leading not only to have their own understanding of each generation, but to assist in resolutions of conflict and differences that may arise among the multi-generations. Leaders should be fair and equal, but allow for accommodations based upon each individual's need. This may be time consuming based upon the size of a department, but flexibility seems to be an important retention factor. Being flexible with schedules, whether by decreasing hours or shifts, allowing parents to leave early for their children's ballgame, or changing one's schedule to support advanced degrees, all lead to more content and satisfied employees. It is important to know each employee as an individual as well as what motivates them to be most productive. It is crucial to be a leader who wants to share in decision-making and allow everyone the opportunity to be involved and grow in their profession. Being a leader, who is willing to understand each generation related to their communication and learning styles, goals and values, and overall characteristics will be more successful with nursing retention.

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