

A blue-tinted photograph of two men in professional attire. One man in the foreground is shown in profile, looking down at a document he is holding. Another man in a suit is visible in the background, slightly out of focus.

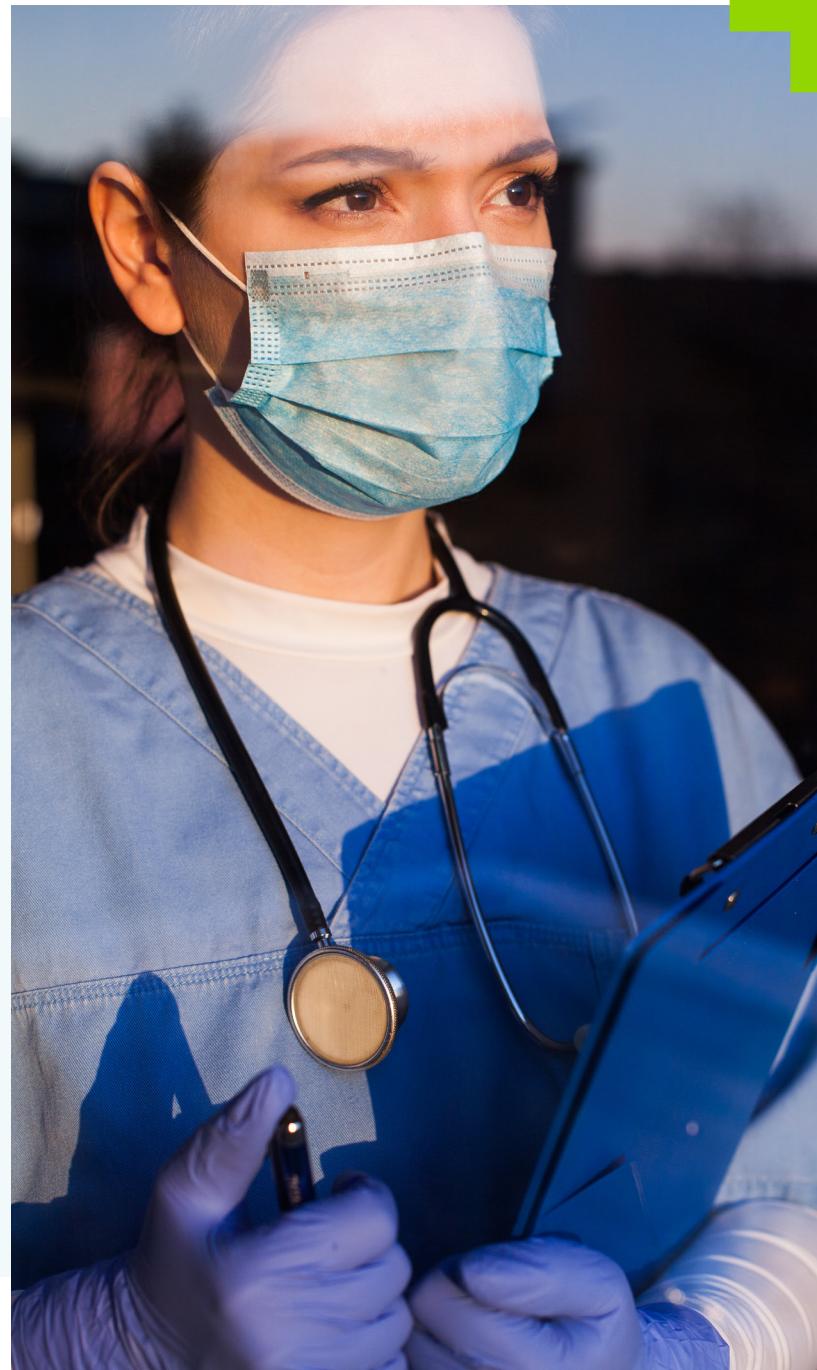
7 Challenges Facing HR Professionals in Healthcare



Introduction

Being an HR professional in healthcare today can sometimes feel like being on a rollercoaster ride. In addition to managing persistent talent shortages and technological advancements that have changed how healthcare organizations care for patients, HR must also navigate the COVID-19 pandemic, which has hit the healthcare industry harder than perhaps any other. Given these new developments, HR professionals have remained on the frontlines, charged with hiring, training and engaging a busy and ever-changing workforce.

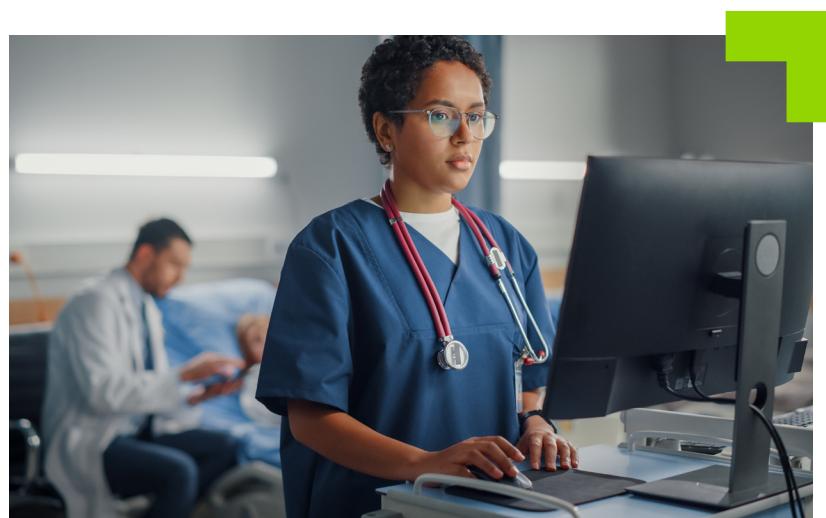
Although healthcare HR teams must perform many of the same duties as HR professionals in other industries, the role of HR may be even more critical in healthcare because of its impact on patient care, including life or death scenarios. HR teams in healthcare organizations are not only in charge of hiring doctors, nurses and specialists, but also delivering workforce management solutions that enable higher productivity and efficient deployment of staff across multiple facilities and departments.



The Top Challenges Facing HR in Healthcare (and How to Address Them)

Managing a healthcare workforce requires having enough qualified staff to address swings in patient demand. Whether it's a slow day or the emergency room is filled, the HR team must ensure the workforce is equipped and staffed to meet the day's needs.

Despite the policies and processes for workforce management you likely already have in place, there are ongoing HR challenges that can impact any healthcare organization. Here are seven of the top challenges facing healthcare HR teams and some fresh ideas for addressing them:



1. TALENT SHORTAGES AND TURNOVER

The healthcare talent shortage is nothing new. For years, healthcare employers have struggled to find the talent necessary to keep pace with the steady increase in demand for services combined with retiring healthcare professionals. Consider these findings:

- An [estimated](#) 60,000 Baby-Boomer registered nurses have retired each year since 2012.
- By the year 2025, [there will likely be a nationwide shortage](#) of 446,300 home health aides, 95,000 nursing assistants and 98,700 medical and clinical laboratory technicians.
- According to a poll from Morning Consult, since February 2020, 30 percent of U.S. healthcare workers have either lost their jobs (12 percent) or quit (18 percent). Of those who kept their jobs, [31 percent considered leaving their employers during the pandemic](#).



U.S. healthcare workers who quit or lost their jobs during the pandemic



Healthcare workers who kept their jobs but considered leaving during pandemic

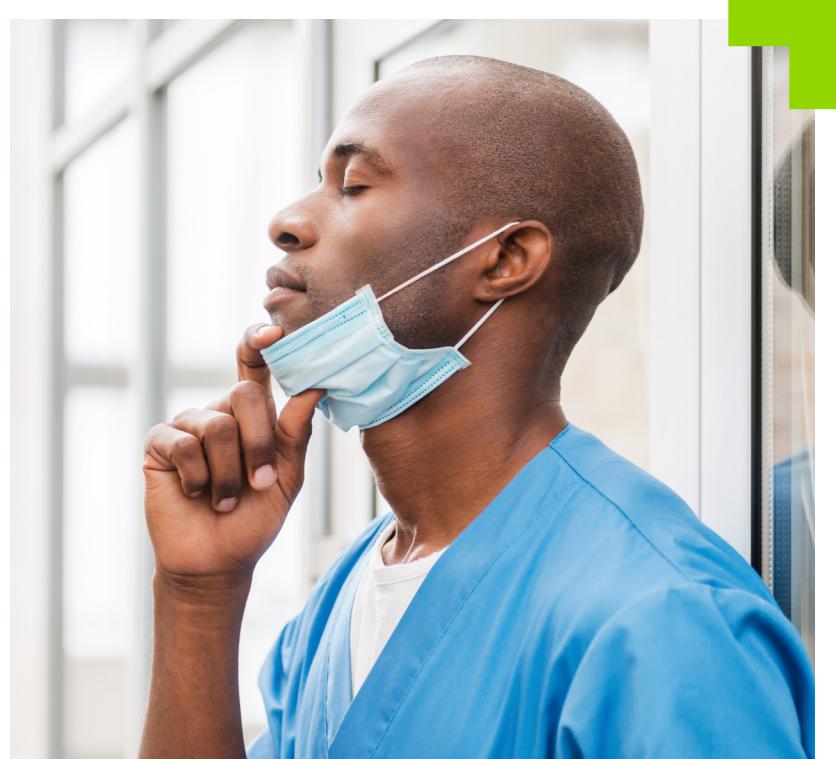
Turnover concerns compound the talent shortage and make it even harder to recruit. According to the 2021 NSI National Health Care Retention & RN Staffing Report, turnover in healthcare has skyrocketed in recent years, with hospital turnover increasing by 1.7 since the start of the pandemic to its [current level of 19.5 percent](#).

When healthcare organizations are losing people faster than they can replace them—and it takes longer to make critical additions to staff—the result can be catastrophic for patients. HR and talent acquisition staff have to work even harder, and even then may find their workforce short on key roles, including physicians, nurses and specialists. To stem the tide, the following recruitment strategies offer some hope:

- Use employer branding to help candidates visualize themselves as employees.
- Build partnerships with local universities that attract emerging healthcare talent.
- Provide competitive compensation and benefits, such as sign-on bonuses.
- Support hiring and promoting from within with internal recruiting activities.



Current hospital turnover rate (up 1.7% since the start of the pandemic)



2. EMPLOYEE BURNOUT

Sometimes the daily stressors of work can be enough to cause burnout in employees. The pandemic only makes matters worse. In an American Medical Association survey, [49 percent of healthcare workers](#) said they experienced burnout amid the pandemic.

The pressures of patient care—combined with long shifts and staff shortages—can be enough to force burned-out healthcare professionals to become absent more frequently or [even leave their employers](#). According to a 2021 McKinsey survey, [22 percent of nurses](#) said they were considering leaving their current position. The top reasons for wanting a change included insufficient staffing, demanding work and the emotional toll of the job.

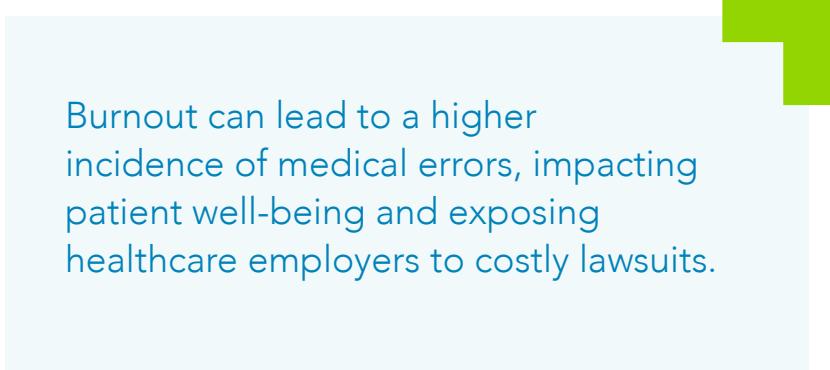
Although burnout is concerning in any workplace, it is particularly worrisome in healthcare. Burnout can lead to a higher incidence of medical errors, impacting patient well-being and exposing healthcare employers to costly lawsuits. One study found that doctors with burnout are [twice as likely to have made a medical error in the previous three months](#).



Healthcare workers experiencing burnout amid the pandemic

To support your workforce and avoid the negative outcomes of employee burnout—including turnover, high absenteeism and medical errors—take the following actions:

- Provide resources that help employees recognize the warning signs of burnout and get help from mental health and other professionals.
- Utilize scheduling tools that provide notifications to [avoid excessive overtime and overscheduling](#).
- Provide an outlet for employees to communicate and receive support from peers and managers.
- Offer a robust leave management program that allows employees to take [the time they need to improve their work-life balance](#).



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3. SHIFT STAFFING

One of the common scenarios many hospitals and health systems faced in the early months of the pandemic was a soaring demand for emergency healthcare. Stories of emergency rooms becoming over-filled and hospitals running low on available beds were common across the country. As such, hospitals had no choice but to schedule shifts to maximum capacity to handle the rising patient load.

Though the demand for emergency hospital care has subsided, hospitals still need to ensure each shift is staffed with the right combination of physicians, nurses and specialists. In fact, [employee scheduling in a 24/7 healthcare operation](#) isn't as simple as slotting names into shifts. HR must also equip managers and supervisors with the tools needed to ensure the right individuals are matched with shifts, even when there may be shortages and employee absences.

To avoid having understaffed shifts, HR professionals can use workforce management technology for smarter scheduling.

When a shift lacks nurses, lab technicians or even custodial staff, employees must work even harder to pick up the slack. When this happens, employees can become stressed, burned out and disengaged. What started as a shift with too few employees can become an employee engagement nightmare for management and HR.

To avoid having understaffed shifts, HR professionals can use workforce management technology for smarter scheduling. For example, a [demand-driven scheduling solution](#) uses data analytics to predict staffing demands based on historical workforce data. Instead of noticing staffing gaps after the shift has already begun, HR can get scheduling insights that highlight potential gaps in advance. As a result, HR and managers can [schedule the right employees for each shift](#).

Other ways to support optimal shift scheduling include:

- Establishing a list of on-call employees who can fill in at short notice.
- Empowering employees to swap shifts or volunteer for extra shifts when available.
- Increasing scheduling transparency by making schedules accessible in advance.



4. EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Every organization sees employee engagement as an ongoing challenge affecting the workforce, and healthcare organizations are no exception. After all, engagement plays a critical role in patient care and satisfaction and influences employees' desire to stay with their current employer. A Gallup study found that engaged employees are [**59 percent less likely**](#) to seek a position with a different organization in the next year.

Despite the importance of employee engagement, a 2020 Gallup poll shows that [**only 36 percent of employees in the U.S. are engaged**](#). When employees lack engagement, they may not give their best effort at work and may be less likely to manage change in the workplace, among other negative outcomes. In healthcare, low engagement can have more serious effects, such as poor bedside manners, a higher incidence of mistakes or even fraudulent activity.

HR professionals in search of activities and programs to improve healthcare employee engagement should consider:

- Creating opportunities for transparent communication so employee concerns and questions can be heard and addressed.
- Building an organizational culture in which employees feel valued and appreciated.
- [**Empowering employees to manage their time off and schedules**](#) using workforce management software with self-service access.

5. COMPETITIVE COMPENSATION

Many healthcare employers are struggling to find and keep talent, so the war for healthcare talent has become even more competitive. As such, it is critical to offer compensation, benefits and perks that attract new candidates and retain existing employees. In some cases, this may mean offering a higher salary or hourly rate than competing organizations.

In the early months of the pandemic, many organizations offered higher rates to traveling nurses and full-time staff. Now, offering competitive compensation and benefits is a way to [retain staff amid the "Great Resignation."](#) with employees leaving their jobs in record numbers.

Despite the need for competitive pay in healthcare, some organizations don't have the budget to increase compensation. Additionally, small or rural healthcare facilities may not have the resources to compete with larger health systems.

However, HR professionals can offer less expensive rewards that may be just as valuable to candidates and existing employees, including:

- [Flexible scheduling](#), providing employees with a better work-life balance.
- Benefits and other perks—such as preferred parking—that kick in after a specific amount of tenure.
- Performance-based incentives.
- Deeper discounts for on-site meals.



6. EMPLOYEE TRAINING

In a competitive talent market, your healthcare organization may do better to hire and train employees rather than hold out for individuals with all the training already under their belts. Moreover, your existing workforce needs periodic training and development to keep their skills current and take advantage of all that modern technology has to offer.

Given that continuous improvement is a necessity for any workforce, keeping yours well-trained is essential for operating efficiently and meeting the needs of patients and visitors. And—given advancements such as electronic health records and workforce management technology—digital skills should be at the top of your list of desired capabilities. In a recent PwC survey, healthcare executives said that [digital upskilling their existing workforce](#) was a top workforce strategy for 2020 and beyond.

Your existing workforce needs periodic training and development to keep their skills current and take advantage of all that modern technology has to offer.

Improving your employees' digital skills doesn't just position them to provide better patient care. There are other benefits, including:

- Improved on-the-job skill development, satisfying continuing education requirements for medical licenses and certifications.
- Increased opportunities to acquire new skills and knowledge, making employees less likely to leave for career development elsewhere.
- Higher confidence in new capabilities, supporting boosted employee morale and engagement.



7. REGULATORY COMPLIANCE

Perhaps not surprisingly, the healthcare industry is one of the most regulated. The Affordable Care Act, employee credentialing requirements and privacy laws—such as the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)—are just a few examples. These laws are designed to protect patients from medical malpractice, fraud and misuse of government funding, such as Medicaid and Medicare.



Though health systems and hospitals typically have a dedicated legal department to ensure organization-wide regulatory compliance, HR professionals are often responsible for implementing processes that support compliance. For example, HR must follow strict requirements set by the Department of Health and Human Services to conduct background checks for new hires and avoid hiring individuals who appear on [healthcare employment sanction lists](#). This extensive screening process requires HR to work even harder to fill positions and get new hires on board.

Not only are there hundreds of laws healthcare organizations must comply with ([629](#), according to the American Hospital Association), but these laws are also routinely amended, and organizations must keep up with these changes. To help improve organizational compliance—particularly with laws affecting workforce management—HR can:

- Partner closely with internal stakeholders to share ideas for maintaining compliance.
- Leverage workforce management technology with customizable [tools to support labor law compliance](#).
- Use [document management solutions](#) to protect employee data and limit access only to those who need it.

Use Workforce Management Solutions to Tackle Everyday HR Challenges

To manage a healthcare workforce, HR professionals must be prepared to tackle unique industry challenges. In addition to hiring healthcare talent and keeping the workforce productive and engaged, HR teams must leverage workforce management tools to ensure smooth staff scheduling and time tracking. With modern technology to support efficient time and attendance management, hospitals and care centers can forge a clear path to optimally-staffed shifts.

In today's healthcare organizations, employees work a combination of schedules, with some even working across facilities and locations. That's why workforce management technology is essential for keeping track of a busy workforce. The productivity of your workforce is too crucial to organizational success and patient care outcomes to rely on manual scheduling and time tracking.

To further advance the workforce management capability of your HR team, learn more about available solutions in our eBook, **Everything You Need to Know About Workforce Management for Healthcare.**

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