

HealthCo

HealthCo Struggles with Nurse Attrition: *Culture Change*



Assessment

Case

HealthCo is a well established health care provider. The company was experiencing a nursing shortage. *Mindshift Consulting* was engaged to assess the concern and develop a plan of action.

Discovery

Our preliminary research findings confirmed a growing crisis in nursing recruitment and retention. Enrollment in nursing programs has declined nationwide at a time when the need for nurses is steadily increasing and a significant portion of the U.S. population is aging.

Leadership roles and relationships are seen as critical to job satisfaction for nurses. These roles are filled primarily by older, experienced nurses, many of whom will retire in the next decade.

We conducted interviews with nurses at all levels, as well as administrators and doctors. The results told a story of nurses dedicated to the company and committed to patient care, while feeling neglected and highly stressed. The story revealed issues that we categorized into three themes: retirement, recruitment, and culture.

Themes

Culture

- nurses expressed confusion around roles
- interviews identified cultural issues creating artificial separation among key roles
- perceptions of organizational purpose differed among administrators, doctors and nurses

Retention

- many nurses are retiring or will soon retire and many are leaving the field
- nurses feel over worked and stressed to a point of early retirement or career change
- stress is a key factor in nurses leaving their positions and leaving the field entirely

Recruitment

- nurses are becoming more difficult to find
- educational programs report good numbers, but not enough to meet future needs

Critical Success Factors

- Active top management sponsorship for the change initiative
- Access to nurses, doctors, administrators and support
- Cultural and leadership assessments

Engagement

Goal

The outcome goals were to rebalance the relationship among nurses, doctors and administrators; to redefine work and shifts; and to address issues of nurse stress and retention in the process.

Design

We began by co-creating *design principles*, statements that describe key requirements. Design principles serve to guide our work toward outcome goals and include behavioral principles*.

Design Principles

- develop a culture of appreciation for the knowledge, experience and perspective of nurses
- define clear roles and responsibilities, and reasonable work loads
- model authentic leadership through caring behaviors that motivate and inspire others*
- create a reward system that encourages collaboration*
- feeling valued and respected motivates employees and provides a sense of self worth*

Activities

Our initial research discovered attitudes, behaviors and concerns of nurses at all levels. Data indicated a need to address stressors in the work environment, including nurse-doctor & nurse-administrator relations. A cultural assessment was conducted to better understand the values, beliefs, assumptions, and behaviors of those in the organization.

Small and large group format meetings were held to define the culture and desired change. We implemented a *practice team* approach based on distinct patient populations, shared clinical goals and linked processes. We also implemented culture change and the following activities:

- pre- & post-implementation employee attitude surveys
- a cultural assessment (Denison)
- a leadership assessment (Denison)
- a series of team integration Cafes (World Café method)
- nurse practitioner workflow process analysis

Post Implementation

Outcome

Adjustments to workload, shifts, roles and responsibilities were made. On-the-job stressors were reduced and some eliminated. The culture is undergoing change in a long and carefully orchestrated shaping process. While some recruitment issues were influenced in a positive way, the more relevant issues are externally driven and beyond our direct influence and scope of work.

Follow-Through & Next Steps

Culture change at HealthCo is steady and positive. Ongoing consultation continued for two years before fully reaching the changes we co-designed.