COVID-19 has stressed all healthcare delivery systems from patient access to care quality to financial viability and to maintaining an engaged workforce. In addition to delivery systems, COVID has stressed care providers which will compound the RN labor shortage, per a recent NSI Nursing Solutions survey of 1,490 RNs.

As a result of the pandemic, 94% of staff RNs indicated some degree of burnout. Thirty-six percent of which were to a high degree. In fact, only 21% of RNs look forward to going to work, while 56% felt drained at the end of their shift. These figures are leading indicators of increased turnover and recruitment activity.

Listed as one of the top growth occupations, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) projects the need for, at least, an additional 200,000 RNs per year through 2026. This projection is pre-COVID. According to the survey, many RNs indicated that they would like to transfer to a non-patient care area (21%) or leave the profession (10%) or retire sooner (22%). All of which will strain the national supply of nurses.

RECRUITING EXPERIENCED RNs

“A clear indicator of the RN staffing crisis is the rising vacancy rate. Currently, this stands at 9%, up a full point from last year. Approximately one in five (19.3%) hospitals reported a RN vacancy rate of ‘less than 5%’ while a third (31.8%) reported a vacancy rate exceeding 10%. The RN Recruitment Difficulty Index remains elevated at 81 days on average, regardless of specialty. In essence, it takes close to 3 months to recruit an experienced RN.”  (Source: 2020 NSI National Healthcare Retention & Staffing Report)

Traditionally, Talent Acquisition is focused on recruitment in a given geographic radius with graduate nurses being a core source of fills. However, with social distancing, many new grads are delayed in taking their boards, slowing the availability of a qualified labor pool. Further impacting a hospitals ability to recruit is that 35% of RNs are less willing to consider opportunities that require relocation due to the pandemic.

As service lines reopen, as hospitals refocus on pre-COVID expansion plans, as the threat of a resurgence looms, as RN burnout is on the rise, how do we ensure appropriate staffing levels? The need is still there. The RN shortage has not gone away. The question remains is: how do we hire experienced RNs while still controlling labor costs?

To meet the challenge, Talent Acquisition must move beyond their comfort zone, expand geographic boundaries, increase applicant flow and seek help. At the end of the day, recruitment is accountable for the rising vacancy rate. Partnering with a vendor that has a national reach, name recognition and a history of successfully navigating volume recruitment is paramount.

CONCLUSION

In short, COVID-19 will speed the nursing shortage. To strengthen the bottom line, hospitals need to build retention capacity, manage vacancies, bolster recruitment initiatives and control labor costs. The war for RN talent just got tougher. The good news is that NSI can help.

At NSI Nursing Solutions, we encourage our clients to minimize excess labor utilization and focus on a strategy that embraces full staffing, builds retention and enhances ROI. Since 2000, NSI has helped clients open towers, expand bed capacity, and stabilize their workforce.

Contact Michael Colosi at (717) 575-7817 or macolosi@nsinursingsolutions.com to learn how NSI can improve your bottom line results.