

# Nursing Summit 2019 Report

**ONL** | Organization of Nurse Leaders

Advancing a culture of health.

## **About ONL**

The Organization of Nurse Leaders - MA, RI, NH, CT, VT (ONL) is a not-for-profit, personal, professional membership organization for existing and aspiring nurse leaders. Membership comprises more than 1,100 nurses from across five New England states. ONL is passionate about nursing and works in full collaboration with all other local and national professional nursing organizations to promote and optimize the profession. The vision of ONL is to advance the health of patients and communities through excellence in nursing care delivery.

## Executive Summary

In January 2019, ONL led ten nursing organizations through a Nursing Summit in central Massachusetts to bring nurses together, hear their concerns and feedback, and enhance trust among nurses. The Nursing Summit focused on engaging clinical nurses, listening, and elevating their voice. Every person in the room was a Registered Nurse (RN). By design, all roles and titles were removed from name badges to eliminate hierarchy and enhance open and honest dialogue about the state of nursing. The Nursing Summit was an opportunity to celebrate professional nursing and to remind ourselves why we chose this profession and why we decide to stay.

Several themes emerged from the discussions at the Nursing Summit, and a key one that surfaced repeatedly was professional governance. Nurses expressed a desire for shared decision-making through professional governance structures, which provide clinical nurses with more influence in their organizations. Professional governance structures include unit-based staffing councils that enable clinical nurses and nurse leaders to collaborate on important issues, such as unit staffing, and support shared decision-making. Professional governance structures can lead to increased job satisfaction for nurses by allowing them to bring their voice and talents to the decision-making table.

Attendees spent time discussing what makes a care team effective, characteristics of strong nurse leadership (including charge nurses), elements of a healthy work environment, and the importance of recognition and gratitude for all that nurses do. Survey data from the American Association of Critical-Care Nurses (AACN) has shown that creating a healthy work environment enables nurses to provide the highest standards of compassionate patient care while being fulfilled at work.<sup>1</sup> AACN's six essential standards that provide evidence-based guidelines for successfully creating a healthy workplace environment are skilled communication, true collaboration, effective decision-making, appropriate staffing, meaningful recognition, and authentic leadership. This report discusses how attendees at the Nursing Summit experience these standards in their work environments and makes recommendations for ways in which organizations can build healthy work environments.

**...participants shared their experiences, ideas, and best practices to empower one another to take action and create change within their work environments...**

Throughout the day, participants shared their experiences, ideas, and best practices to empower one another to take action and create change within their work environments and at their organizations. Replicating a small-scale summit within an organization is one way to begin assessing what is working or not and to create a path forward for implementing new policies, processes, and governing structures at hospitals.

At the 2019 Nursing Summit, participants expressed a keen desire to continue collaborative and productive professional discussions, enact the ideas that were shared, and have more summits in the future. ONL looks forward to continuing engaging with nurses across New England to amplify their voices and elevate the influence of professional nurses.

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<sup>1</sup> [AACN](#)

## Background

**...it is critical for nurses to influence their organizations and collaborate across care settings...**

Nurses are the largest segment of the health care workforce and spend the most time delivering direct patient care across every part of the care delivery system.<sup>2</sup> Nurses are highly skilled in navigating, aligning resources and bringing the care team together around the patient. Today, more than ever before, it is critical for nurses to influence their organizations and collaborate across care settings to identify and implement strategies that enable them to deliver the highest quality patient care in a safe, healthy, and supportive work environment.

As Massachusetts and other parts of the country face a shortage of nurses, nurses are experiencing challenging working conditions, ultimately increasing turnover. AACN reported a 3.7% enrollment increase in entry-level baccalaureate programs in nursing in 2018, but this increase is insufficient to meet the projected demand for nursing services, including the need for more nurse faculty, researchers, and primary care providers.<sup>3</sup> In New England, the aging nurse workforce will create a nursing shortage as nurses retire: compared to other regions in the country, New England has the oldest RNs, with 45% older than 50 years, 32% younger than 40 years, and an average age of 46 years.<sup>4</sup>

As discussed in the 2018 Press Ganey Nursing Special Report, high levels of nurse turnover lead to decreases in the quality of patient care, increased stress levels, and susceptibility to burnout among the nurses who remain.<sup>5</sup> The Press Ganey survey revealed that, excluding retirement, dissatisfaction with the work environment was the most commonly cited reason nurses plan to leave a current position for a different job situation within one year.<sup>6</sup> In addition, nurse turnover is expensive for health systems, which pay recruitment and replacement costs for nurses and receive lower reimbursement rates for decreased quality of care. The average cost of turnover for a bedside RN is \$52,100 and ranges from \$40,300 to \$64,000, costing the average hospital \$4.4 million – \$6.9 million.<sup>7</sup> The national average RN turnover rate in 2018 was 17.2%, up 0.4% year-over-year, and the Northeast is the region with the second-highest turnover rate.<sup>8</sup> Retirement of older nurses remains a top driver of turnover, indicating the need to draw young professionals into the field.

<sup>2</sup> “Optimizing the Nursing Workforce: Key Drivers of Intent to Stay for Newly Licensed and Experienced Nurses.” 2018 Press Ganey Nursing Special Report

<sup>3</sup> [AACN Nursing Shortage Fact Sheet](#)

<sup>4</sup> “How fast will the registered nurse workforce grow through 2030? Projections in nine regions of the country.”, Auberbach, Buerhaus, and Staiger, 2016, Nursing Outlook

<sup>5</sup> “Optimizing the Nursing Workforce: Key Drivers of Intent to Stay for Newly Licensed and Experienced Nurses.” 2018 Press Ganey Nursing Special Report

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> [2019 National Health Care Retention & RN Staffing Report](#). NSI Nursing Solutions, Inc. January 2019 survey data

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

## Summit Attendees

- 380 RNs
- More than 60% were clinical RNs
- Collectively had 7,236 years of nursing experience
- From five New England states
- Representing many different organizations and the full spectrum of nursing specialties

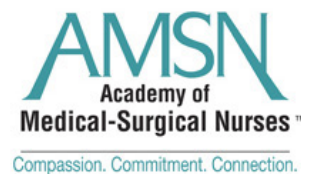
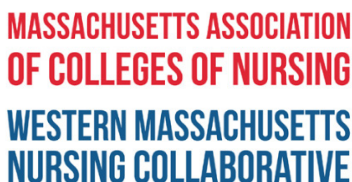
Throughout 2018, ONL led several planning sessions with nurse leaders to craft a path forward to strengthen the nursing profession. After hours of collaboration and brainstorming, the team came up with a vision to host a large-scale summit exclusively of nurses. The goal was to create a safe place where nurses from many specialties, geographic regions, and care delivery settings would be in one room focused on topics important to professional nursing.

On January 29, 2019, ten nursing organizations co-led the Nursing Summit at the AC Hotel in Worcester, MA. This landmark event enabled nurse participants to come together and share their ideas and vision for the future of nursing.

The nurses were not identified with their titles or credentials, so that there was no hierarchy in the room and each person had an equal voice. We were all “Registered Nurses.”

The day was characterized by productive discussions, thoughtful feedback, and enthusiastic participation by all attendees.

Each partnering organization worked diligently to ensure respectful collaboration so that all Nursing Summit participants were part of an inspiring and productive day.



## Description of the Day

Massachusetts Representative Kay Khan, RN and ONL President Terry Hudson-Jinks, RN delivered remarks to open the Nursing Summit. During the opening keynote and again during the wrap-up session, several nurses shared their clinical narratives. These first-person accounts describe a specific event or situation that a nurse had in a clinical setting. These were some of the most powerful and meaningful moments of the Nursing Summit as each nurse's exemplar told a different story about nursing and brought the patient into the ballroom, reminding nurses of why they chose the profession and how important it is that they support one another every day.

### In their words - Excerpts from three nurse exemplars

*I arrive to the hospital for my night shift. I am tired. My mind is preoccupied. As I am quickly walking through the doors I notice a man looking lost...sad...worried. "My son was in an accident. He's arriving by helicopter." My pace slowed, and I walked him through the doors.*

- Shelly Pitts, RN

*Many ask me how I can work as an addiction nurse believing it's depressing and futile. I say to them I am continually grateful to work with a group of courageous patients with a diagnosed brain disease who rise above shame and stigma to find stability and joy. Treatment works.*

- Sarah King McKeon, RN

*We are not another species of angels. We thrive on respect and gratitude and strive to show you the same. We hope that we give you tools to lead healthy, quality lives. In the end, we hope to give you respect and dignity. We are past, present, and future nurses.*

- M. Andrews, RN

Attendees then spent an hour and half participating in a World Café exercise, which is a method for facilitating group dialogues. Nurses worked in teams with other nurses they had never met and answered questions sitting at four different tables. The questions covered many topics including staffing, the work environment, communication, and leadership (see Appendix for question list).

Participants harvested the responses and identified key themes. They completed a Pulling it All Together worksheet and had group discussions about the information that had been discussed and gathered throughout the day. Finally, the nurses worked together to brainstorm next steps, and completed a What Comes Next worksheet. The themes that emerged from the World Café exercise and ideas for the path forward are discussed below.

## Key themes

*The day brought us closer as a profession...Honest dialogue proved that not only do we all want the same thing: high quality patient care in a safe, supportive practice environment but that we have many of the answers on how to move us forward together, as one nursing community.*

- Amy Lund, RN, Nursing Summit attendee

### The Voice of the Nurse

A central theme throughout the Nursing Summit was elevating the voice of professional nurses in all practice settings. Clinical nurses must be at the table to inform decision-makers and openly share feedback and suggestions. The existence of governance structures, policies, and processes in place that facilitate nurse contributions is critical to empowering nurses and improving care. When clinical nurses described the culture in which they would most like to work, they spoke about a unit with a professional governance structure, transparency and supportive leadership that encourages nurse autonomy. Clinical nurses stated that the structures and processes that best promote nurses' influence in decision-making include unit-based councils, committee involvement, real-time input from nurses, interdisciplinary councils, and autonomy at the unit level. When clinical nurses are empowered, they have the authority and autonomy to make decisions about nursing practices that improve patient care outcomes. By enhancing communication among clinical nurses, charge nurses, nurse managers, and the chief nursing officer, organizations can ensure that all stakeholders have a say in key issues, such as staffing and safety standards.

### Considerations for Unit-Based Staffing Councils:

- Hold open forums for transparent communication
- Link staffing to patient outcomes
- Utilize skill mix and experience when making decisions
- Real-time input from the clinical staff
- Use acuity data when creating staffing plans
- Include nurses in the hiring process
- Encourage dialogue addressing perceived needs and actual resources
- Provide autonomy at the unit level for determining and allocating nursing budget

## Recognition and Appreciation

Nurses identified recognition and appreciation as critical motivators. Nurses can be recognized by being added to committees or councils and included in conversations with leadership. It is also important that nurses be recognized and praised for the challenging work they do. Nursing Summit attendees had a plethora of suggestions for how health systems can show appreciation for their nurses. It is notable that the attendees highlighted recognition, appreciation, and improvements to their work environment as more important issues than pay, showing that hospitals can increase nurse satisfaction and retention without needing to increase spend on salaries.

### Meaningful Ways to Recognize Nurses

- Share direct patient feedback
- Create structures that facilitate peer recognition
- Create an Innovation Award
- Offer free self-care activities
- Providing protected time to work on professional projects
- Have management recognize nurses
- Support nurses presenting their work at local and national conferences

## Workplace Environment

Supportive nurse leaders are the key to creating a professional practice environment where all nurses can thrive. Nurse leaders who have a shared vision with bedside nurses, are transparent, communicate well and often, hold staff accountable for unprofessional behavior, and advocate for the unit (particularly for resources) are highly valued.

Nurses highlighted communication as a critical tool for having an effective care team. Good communication practices include closing communication loops, following through, truth-telling, active listening, debriefs, and huddles.

Nurses emphasized diversity, respectfulness, inclusion, and shared purpose as essential elements of a productive work environment. They also indicated that implementing policies and processes that reduce workplace violence should be prioritized. Finally, nurses emphasized the need for a healthy environment that enables self-care and well-being of the care giver.

**...diversity, respectfulness, inclusion, and shared purpose ...essential elements of a productive work environment.**



## Practicing at the Top of License

Clinical nurses communicated that their time is often not optimized to deliver the highest quality patient care and inefficiencies in systems mean that nurses are performing tasks below their license. Attendees cited numerous examples of non-nursing tasks they perform that take time away from providing patient care. Examples of tasks include hunting and gathering supplies and equipment, transporting stable patients to tests, discharge, or to another department, transporting specimens, and transporting an expired patient to the morgue. Triaging phone calls, redundant documentation, and sitting for patients are other examples of nurses practicing below their license. Nurses suggested enhanced technology to support their practice and eliminate waste.

## Tenets of a Practice Environment that Supports Nursing Excellence and Ways to Implement Them

### • Transparency

Commit to being open communicators

Hold team meetings

Share and discuss the unit's financial position including opportunities and challenges

### • Education

Hold skills fairs

Provide funding for educational and research activities

Opportunities for mentorship

### • Respect

Hold colleagues accountable for their actions

Encourage open-mindedness

Implement strategies to increase diversity

### • Teamwork

Develop a culture of peer support

Create conflict management tools

Cultivate a non-punitive culture

### • Inclusion

Give staff nurse representation at senior leadership meetings

Develop forums and processes that promote collaboration across disciplines

Build channels for feedback

### • Communication

Formalize tiered communication channels

Have frequent huddles

Provide training on active listening

## Taking Ideas and Turning them into Action

*My colleague and I have created a Recruitment, Retention and Recognition taskforce as a result of the Nursing Summit. The taskforce has board representation throughout the hospital and we routinely discuss the topics brought forward at the Nursing Summit. Last week we used three of the same questions for a World Café Exercise within our organization. The response to these initiatives has been overwhelmingly positive; the meetings are well attended and allow nurses to have a voice to create solutions.*

- Thomas Panaccione, RN, Nursing Summit attendee

### *Within Health Organizations*

#### **Professional Governance**

A common recommendation nurses made during the Nursing Summit was to implement a professional governance structure within their work setting. Despite organizations having some professional governance structures, nurses still expressed the need for more opportunities to participate in decision-making. While professional governance models can look different within different organizations, they are based on the principle of creating a partnership between staff and leadership. Shared decision-making can be conducted via unit and clinic boards, committees, councils, task forces, and surveys seeking input.<sup>9</sup> Nurses and executives are brought together to make decisions about clinical practice standards, quality improvement, staff and professional development, and research. While many organizations have varying degrees of professional governance structures, nurses participating in the Nursing Summit strongly emphasized the need for more opportunities to engage with leaders and influence decisions impacting their work environment, role satisfaction, and retention.

#### **Recommendation:**

Leaders should evaluate the ways in which nurses can influence decision-making within their organization. Focus groups may help to reveal where nurses feel they have influence and where they would like to see new processes and opportunities developed.

**...nurses still expressed the need for more opportunities to participate in decision-making.**

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9 [Vanderbilt University Medical Center](#)

## Examples of Goals for a Unit-Based Council

- Evaluate policies and procedures
- Analyze quality data and develop action plans in collaboration with the Nurse Manager
- Foster evidence-based practice
- Assess and plan to meet education needs of the staff on the unit
- Analyze data and develop action plans for turnover rates, vacancy rates, and staff satisfaction; foster a work-life balance environment
- Foster effective communication among staff members

Source: Princeton HealthCare System Unit-Based Council Charter

## Unit-based Councils

One element of the professional governance model that was frequently suggested during the Nursing Summit is the unit-based council. In a unit-based council, clinical nurses and unit leaders come together to work towards making clinical and business decisions that affect the delivery of patient care. When establishing a unit-based council, it's important to identify the council's goals, meeting schedule, and membership (ensuring nurses from all shifts, as well as other professional and unit staff are represented).

## **Bringing the 2019 Nursing Summit to Your Organization**

One common suggestion to carry on the work from the 2019 Nursing Summit was to have smaller summits within an organization.

After attending the Nursing Summit, one organization that provides comprehensive senior care services and senior living communities in Massachusetts, held its own sessions to bring together its internal nursing staff and discuss the key issues they face.

The team began its sessions by asking nurses about what makes them proud to work at the organization and why they choose to work there. This appreciative inquiry approach opened up the dialogue and invited constructive discussions around what challenges nurses in much the same way that the nurse exemplars used during the 2019 Nursing Summit conveyed the important that work that nurses do and the issues they face and paved the way for the day's conversations.

The nurses then participated in a modified version of the World Café Exercise, breaking out into groups to tackle four challenges:

- **What could we do to create a less stressful work environment?**
- **What type of non-nursing support could we add to help you support patient care?**
- **How could we recruit new staff?**
- **How could we retain our current staff?**

This exercise generated rich discussion and brought many challenges to the surface. After completing nine sessions, the team reached alignment on several possible solutions. Most importantly, these sessions created a sense of unity among the nurses.

### *Teaching Legislators and the Public about Nursing*

When nurses were asked about what they wished legislators and the general public knew about their profession, nurses want to emphasize their dedication to the profession and the personal sacrifices they make. For many, a career in nursing is a passion that has a lifetime commitment and is more than just a job. In addition to being a very physically demanding profession, nurses routinely sacrifice personal and family time due to the 24/7 demands of caring for patients.

### **Ways Nurses Can Get Involved in Changing Public Policy and Perception**

- Engage your Communications Department in highlighting the work of nurses in your organization
- Get to know your legislator
- Run for office and become an elected official
- Join professional nursing organizations
- Seek opportunities to serve on Boards, commissions, and taskforces of community organizations, hospitals, and other health care entities
- Tell people you are a nurse and talk to friends and family about your work

**It is also important to change the public perception of what a nurse does.**

It is also important to change the public perception of what a nurse does. Nurses are innovators and researchers in addition to providing care across a wide spectrum of practice areas. Nursing requires an advanced education and there is minimal funding for nursing school and very little loan forgiveness. Legislators and the public should appreciate the risks nurses face at work: nurses are exposed to patients and families in crisis who can act aggressively, they can experience injury from heavy equipment and/or exposure to chemical and biological hazards, and they may experience sexual harassment, all of which can result in personal injury.

*At the end of the day, each of us spoke about how we hoped this would be the first of many such forums and would serve as launching pad for registered nurses coming together to plan for the future of nursing in New England.*

- **Mary Beth Williams, RN, Nursing Summit attendee**

### *Spreading the Word*

Attendees felt that it is important to share ideas and best practices across different care settings. Ideas can be spread through nurse exchange programs, regional summits, and engaging nurses through social media. Participants also suggested a taskforce with members from multiple facilities to share ideas on staffing. Partnerships between academic institutions and service settings were recommended.

Nurses emphasized the need to spread the word about nursing as a profession, the work that happened during the 2019 Nursing Summit, and best practices. They suggested podcasts, social media, television, online learning communities, and a statewide nursing communication platform.

At the recommendation of the Nursing Summit participants, ONL is pleased to share the results of the 2019 Nursing Summit in this report and looks forward to engaging the nursing community in further discussion with an upcoming survey.

## Conclusion

**The positive energy and high engagement in the room was evident from the moment the event started.**

The goal of the Nursing Summit was to bring together the nursing community in an open dialogue that will elevate the nursing profession. The positive energy and high engagement in the room was evident from the moment the event started until it ended.

During the 2018 election cycle, Ballot Question 1 in Massachusetts sought to mandate minimum nurse staffing levels on all hospital units, at all times, regardless of local circumstances. After the overwhelming defeat of Ballot Question 1, the Nursing Summit was the first meeting to take place where the collective nursing community worked together on staffing issues raised during the election. Nurses in Massachusetts were divided on this issue throughout the campaign, and the Nursing Summit began the work of rebuilding a cohesive nursing community, with productive conversations about nurse staffing, workload, and the professional practice environment.

Having nurses who are engaged and satisfied in their jobs is key to consistently providing patients with high-quality care and decreasing turnover. When nurses come together and nurture supportive, healthy work environments, the profession moves forward and can achieve its goals.

There was an overwhelming consensus that this summit should be repeated, and we look forward to the next opportunity to host such a thoughtful group of nurses and continue the work of elevating the nursing profession and support nurses in their endless pursuit to provide the highest quality patient care.

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The exercises that nurses participated in during the Nursing Summit can easily be done within hospitals and other health systems to encourage collaboration and idea-sharing among staff nurses, management, and administration. Below are the questions that were asked during the World Café Exercise. You can hold sessions within your organizations and ask some or all of these questions to gather feedback and give nurses an opportunity to have their voices heard.

### **World Café Exercise Questions**

- 1** Are there creative ways to utilize nurses that may be thinking of retiring?
- 2** How do we address the nursing shortage in New England?
- 3** What do you wish legislators and the general public knew about nursing?
- 4** Are there creative ways to attract nurses into difficult-to-fill specialty positions?
- 5** What structures and processes support and promote nurses' influence in staffing decisions and patient assignments?
- 6** What do the best charge nurses consider (or do) when making a nurse/patient assignment?
- 7** What are the things that make a good day go bad?
- 8** What are the best solutions on a day or night when nurse staffing does not go as planned?
- 9** What matters most in the practice environment to support nursing excellence?
- 10** What non-nursing responsibilities could be taken off your plate to allow you to practice at the top of your license?
- 11** Nurse recognition—what is most important and meaningful to you?
- 12** Describe the culture where you want to work.
- 13** What keeps you in your current job?
- 14** In your career, when you've been part of an AMAZING team, what made it work so well?
- 15** How do you think nurse staffing effectiveness should be measured?