

## Three-Year Annual Assessment Survey: *Nurses Need Increased Support from their Employer*

January 24, 2023

As the world readies for the third anniversary of COVID-19 pandemic, nurses remain on the frontlines of care delivery. Nurses across the US have been striking and demanding better working conditions from their employers. The continued stress experienced by nurses due to their work environment has pushed an already frail healthcare workforce to the brink of collapse. As a part of the Pulse on the Nation’s Nurses Survey Series, the American Nurses Foundation has fielded its survey to probe today’s pressing issues in nursing. The goal for the Three-Year Annual Assessment Survey is to identify changes to nurses’ mental health and workplace support, while collecting additional insight into nurses’ financial well-being, intent to leave, and satisfaction.

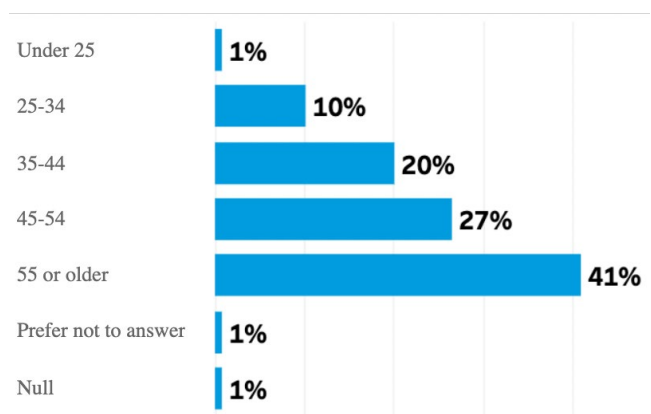
Amidst a national nursing shortage, nurses shared with us that they face: increasingly sick patients, family and patient abuse that is tolerated by employers, unsafe care environments, generational divisions, unrealistic patient volumes, inexperienced new nurses, and management that is often out of touch with the realities of direct care in their institutions.

### **SURVEY BACKGROUND**

The American Nurses Foundation and Joslin Insight launched a non-incentivized online survey to nurses across the United States. The November 2022 survey was the third annual assessment and the thirteenth survey conducted by the Foundation since April 2020. The survey was completed by 12,581 nurses between November 1-25, 2022, including all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The survey has a  $\pm 1.15\%$  margin of error at a 99% confidence level. Around 82% of those surveyed responded to all questions, and over 6,000 nurses provided qualitative feedback on how healthcare has changed over the past five years.

### **RESPONDENT PROFILE**

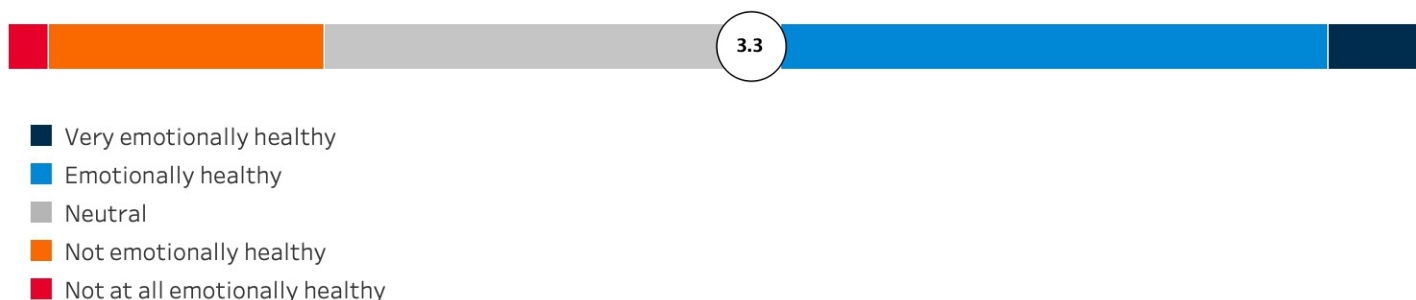
The survey was launched to nurses working in various settings across the entire continuum of care. Fifty-three percent are working in acute care hospitals, from small to large; 12% in primary, ambulatory or outpatient care facilities; 6% in community or public health facilities; and 6% in schools of nursing. Seventy-two percent of respondents provide direct care to patients. Ninety-one percent of respondents said they are currently employed, with 78% employed full-time. Four percent of respondents identified as a travel nurse. Seventy-one percent identified as White, 11% Black or African American, 5% Hispanic or Latino, 4% Asian, and 4% Mixed race. Forty-one percent of respondents indicated being 55 or older.



**Figure 1 - Respondents indicate their age, Nov 2022**

## NURSES CONTINUE TO BE EXHAUSTED AND STRESSED

Sixty four percent of nurses report feeling stressed, and 57% exhausted. Additionally, certain segments of nurses are faring even worse. When analyzing the data by age or tenure, younger and more inexperienced nurses are struggling more with emotional health than their more experienced colleagues. Nearly one-third (32%) of nurses with less than 10 years of experience indicated being either not or not at all emotionally healthy. This is compared to just 8% of nurses with 41-50 years' experience. Additionally, the mean score for emotional health remains low. In this survey, nurses' responses represent a 3.3 on a scale from 1-5. This is a 6% increase from the January 2022 survey (3.1).



**Figure 2 – Nurses rate their current emotional health, November 2022**

The gap between different groups of nurses persists throughout the data. Nurses with less than 10 years' work experience feel less valued, less supported, and less hopeful. Sixty-one percent of nurses under 35 indicated feeling anxious in the past 14 days, compared to only 33% of nurses 55 or older. And 33% of nurses under 35 indicated feeling depressed in the past 14 days, compared to 18% of nurses 55 or older. This is a trend that has been identified and monitored since 2021.

While the individual nurse well-being scores have improved slightly from the previous survey, respondents continue to express their exhaustion within a health care system that puts patients at risk by deprioritizing nurses and their needs. As one survey respondent shared, "Employers see nurses as expendable. There's no retention plan in place, and I feel like the unit wouldn't care if I left nursing altogether."

**61% of nurses under 35 reported feeling anxious in the past 14 days; 33% said they felt depressed.**

## WORKPLACE VERBAL ABUSE AND RACISM PERSIST OR HAVE WORSENERD

The Three-Year Assessment Survey identified an increase to verbal abuse in the workplace, with 53% of nurses having reported an increase in verbal abuse since the pandemic began. When asked whether there is a mechanism at their organization to report verbal abuse, 28% said 'no' and 15% 'not sure.' Notably, a higher number of nurses from large acute care hospitals indicated not having a mechanism to report verbal abuse. One nurse wrote, "There has been a significant increase in workplace violence and verbal abuse, without appropriate interventions implemented to address this problem. I do not feel safe at work."

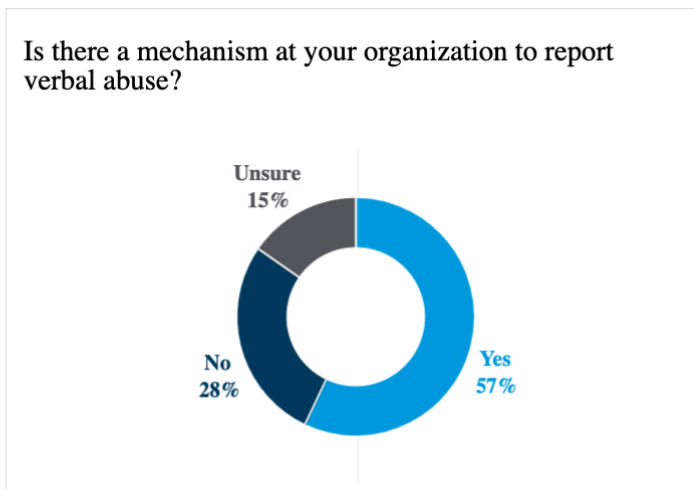
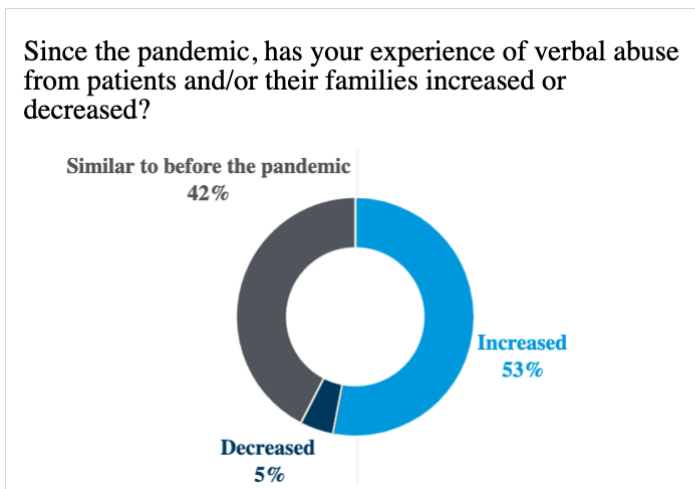


Figure 3 and 4 - Nurses indicate whether verbal abuse has increased and whether there is a mechanism to report verbal abuse, Nov 2022

Other questions assessed the state of racism in the workplace. While 12% of all respondents indicated that racism has increased since the pandemic, 21% of nurses of color said there has been an increase. When asked whether they have challenged an instance of racism, only 22% of nurses said ‘yes’ and 65% said ‘no.’ Notably, a higher percentage of nurses of color reported that they challenged acts of racism compared to respondents who identified as White.

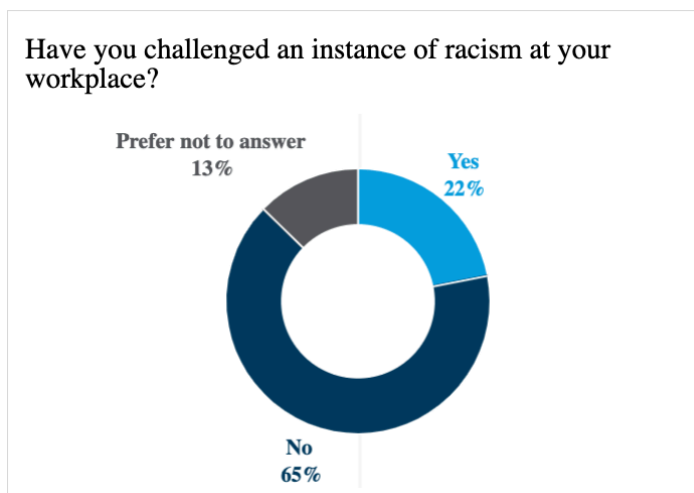
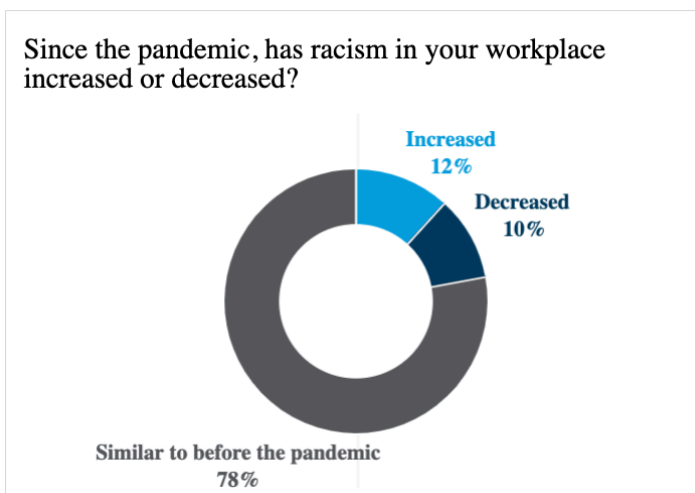


Figure 5 and 6 - Nurses indicate whether racism in the workplace has increased and whether they have challenged instances of racism, Nov 2022

### NURSES NEED MORE SUPPORT FROM THEIR EMPLOYERS

The Survey of Perceived Organizational Support (SPOS) is a validated measure of the general belief held by an employee that the organization is committed to them, values their continued contributions, and is generally concerned about their well-being. The Foundation has continued to track five indicators regularly to measure how nurses perceive the support they receive from their employer. Statements range from an employer caring about their well-being to recognition of doing good work. These scores have not improved over the last four surveys. Overall, the scores have been consistently weak, with more nurses strongly disagreeing with the statements than strongly agreeing. The stagnant SPOS data is evidence nurses continue to need more support from their organizations. And when looking at segmented responses, it is clear certain groups and work settings are in more need than others.

Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

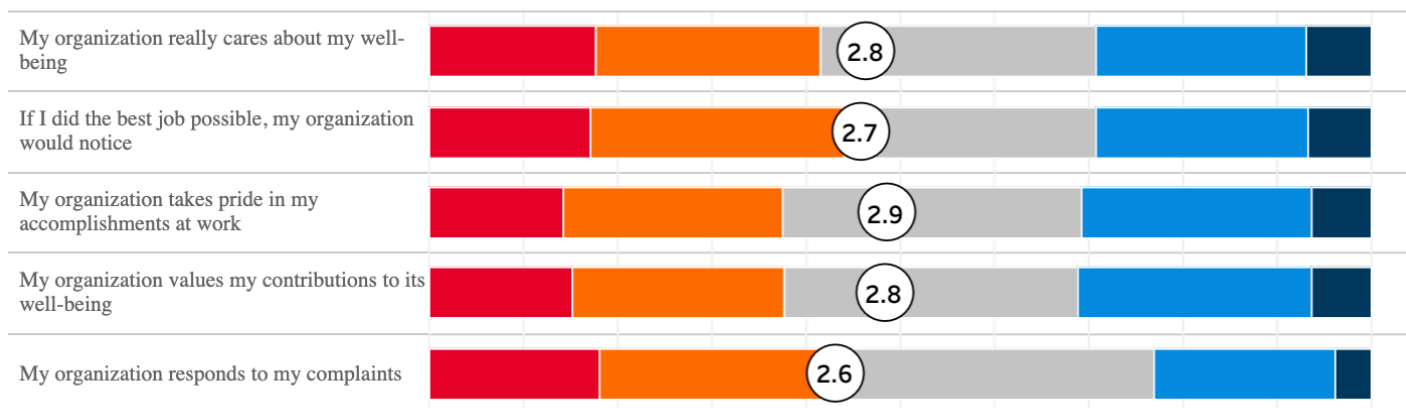


Figure 7 - Nurses indicate whether they agree or disagree to Survey of Perceived Organizational Support (SPOS) questions, Nov 2022

When analyzing the data by race or ethnicity, Latino nurses report the lowest perception of organizational support. They scored a 2.7 for “My organization takes pride in my accomplishments at work,” compared to 3.1 for Asian respondents, 2.9 for Black respondents, and 2.9 for White respondents. As a group, Latino nurses have the lowest scores across the board, while Asian nurses report the best scores across all five SPOS measurements.

When analyzing the data by age, nurses 55 or older exceed the averages. Nurses 55 or older scored a 3.0 for “My organization values my contributions to its well-being.” Compare this to 2.6 for nurses 25-34. Overall, nurses 25-34 presented the worst scores across all SPOS indicators, followed by nurses 35-44 and under 25.

### Younger nurses have the lowest SPOS scores

This is consistent with reported feelings, with younger nurses feeling less supported and less valued. The pivot towards higher SPOS scores begins with nurses 45-54, where all but one score matches the total population.

When analyzing the data by work setting, medium acute care hospitals (100-500 beds) are faring the worse, with all five SPOS measurements below average. Medium acute care hospitals are followed by large acute care hospitals (500+ beds) and long-term care facilities for reporting lower scores. The work settings with the highest scores are schools of nursing and community or public health facilities. Medium acute care hospitals scored a 2.6 for “My organization really cares about my well-being,” compared to 3.1 for schools of nursing.

### BURNOUT & INTENT REMAIN KEY ISSUES

Eighty-four percent of nurses say they are stressed or dealing with burnout. While there have been slight improvements in self-identified burnout scores, burnout is still severe among nurses. Nearly 50% reported feeling some level of burnout. Twenty-one percent reported feeling that they were beginning to burnout, 22% said they are burned out now, and 4% said they are completely burned out and may need help. An additional 36% of nurses reported feeling stressed.

When nurses were asked what contributes most to workplace burnout, the leading response was not enough staff to adequately do their job (38%). This was followed by lack of respect from employer (14%), too many administrative tasks (10%), and insufficient compensation (9%).

When nurses were asked whether they believed their colleagues were coping better or worse with burnout, 4% said 'better,' 26% 'worse,' and 70% 'unsure.' For nurses under 35, a significantly higher 7% said that they believed other nurses to be coping better.

Looking back, 22% of nurses said they have changed positions in the past six months. Looking forward, 19% said they intend to leave their position in the next six months, and 27% are considering leaving. This is a 6% improvement compared to survey results one year ago. Of those who intend or are considering leaving their position, 13% said they plan to leave nursing altogether; 30% said they are considering it.

While results from this survey reveal some positive improvements, the situation remains critical by and large. One nurse shared, "I have seen more nurses recommend other career choices to friends and family. I have seen many caring people step aside from nursing, because they have found it is no longer worth it."

Another nurse echoed this sentiment, "The staffing shortage has gotten even worse and most of the medical staff currently working are burned out and ready to leave. It's hard to stay positive in this type of environment. I'm at the point where I want to leave nursing, but I am unable to because I'm supporting my family." The effects of burnout are far-reaching, and employers need to heed the warning.

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Using your own definition of burnout, please select the option that applies to you.

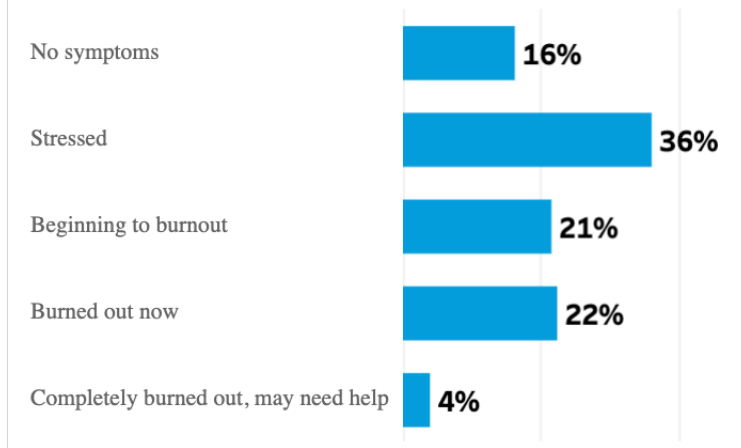
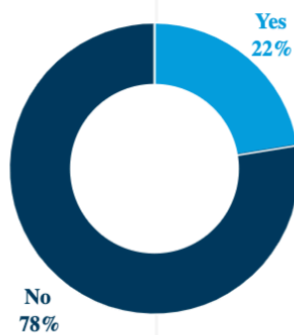
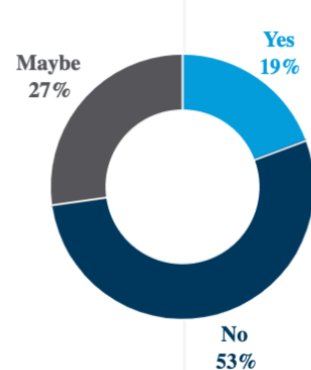


Figure 8 - Nurses indicate their level of burnout, Nov 2022

Have you changed positions in the past 6 months?



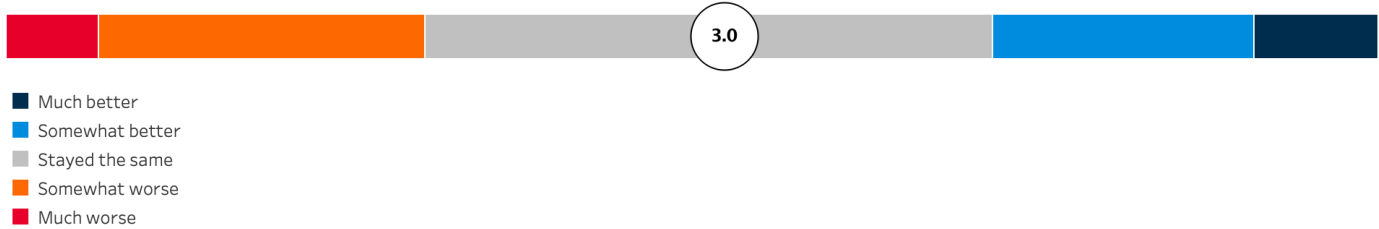
Do you intend to leave your position in the next 6 months?



Figures 9 and 10 - Nurses indicate whether they left their position or will leave their position, Nov 2022

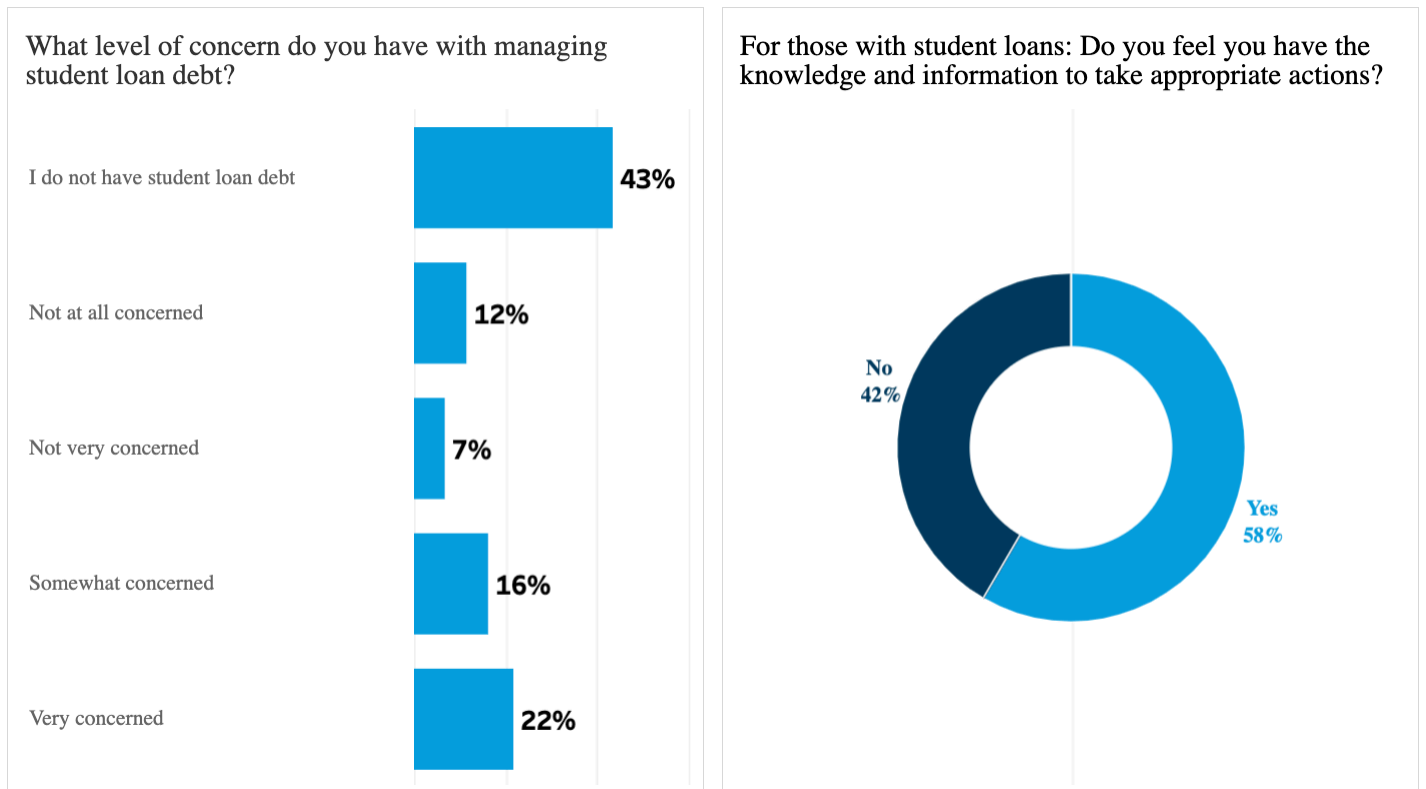
## FINANCIAL WELL-BEING WORSENS, MANY HAVE CONCERNS ABOUT STUDENT LOANS

Financial well-being has worsened, dropping 3% from one year ago. Sixty-one percent of nurses surveyed described how they have managed their financial hardship by using savings or emergency funds (28%), delaying major purchases (27%), and relying more on credit cards (19%).



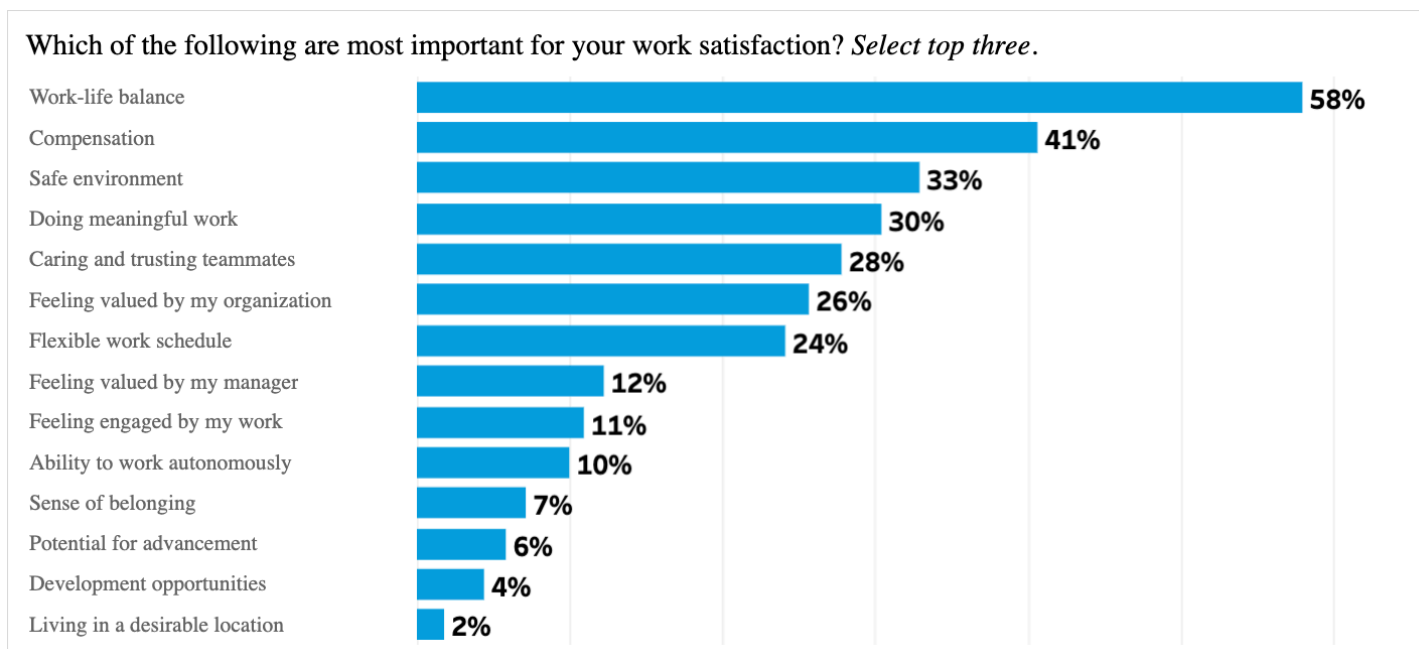
**Figures 11 - Nurses indicate financial well-being, Nov 2022**

To bridge the gap between growing tuition and stagnating wages, student loans have been increasingly obtained to cover the cost of education.<sup>1</sup> The result is that more and more newer nurses are entering the workforce with larger student loans. When asked about their level of concern with student loan debt, over one-third of nurses said they were either somewhat or very concerned. Those burdened by student loan debt were also asked whether they have the necessary information to take appropriate action. Nearly half said they did not have the information they needed to act. Notably, a statistically significant 57% of Black respondents reported being either somewhat or very concerned about their student loan debt, and a statistically significant 47% said they do not have the information to take appropriate action.



**Figure 12 and 13 – Nurses’ concern with student loan debt and whether they have information to take appropriate action, Nov 2022**

## MORE WORK-LIFE BALANCE TO IMPROVE WORK SATISFACTION



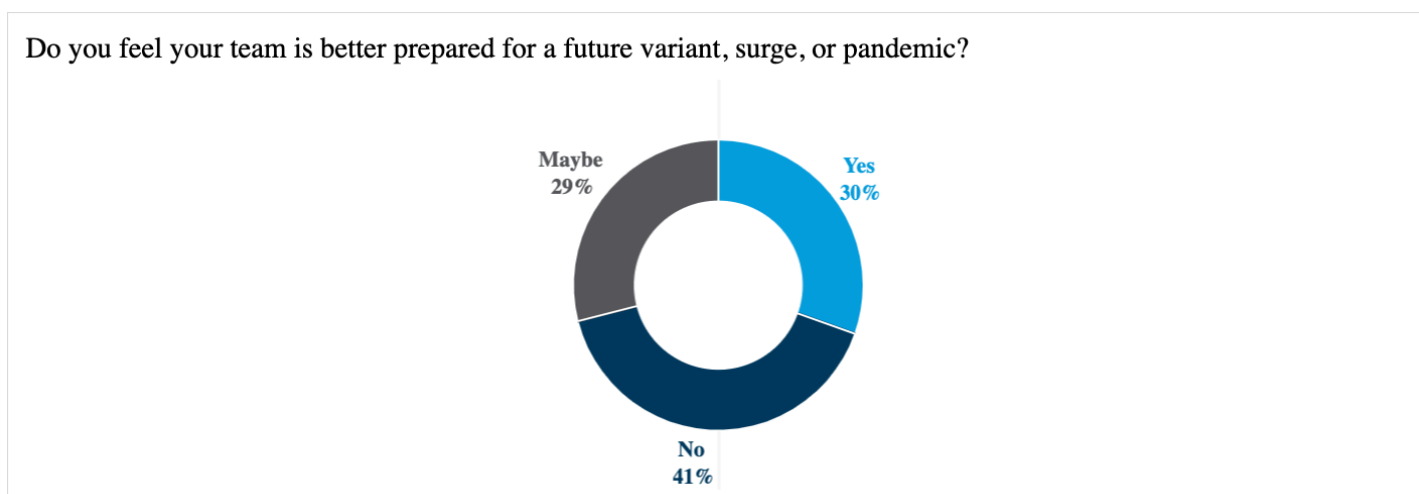
**Figure 14 - Nurses indicate what is most important for their work satisfaction, Nov 2022**

When nurses were asked what is most important for work satisfaction, work-life balance was the number one answer, selected by 58% of nurses, and by 63% of nurses under 35. Other important factors selected by nurses to improve their work satisfaction include compensation (41%), a safe work environment (33%), and doing meaningful work (30%).

When analyzing responses by age, there are findings that stand out statistically that could help organizations focus their efforts on developing a multi-generational approach to support. For nurses with less than 20 years' experience, work-life balance, compensation, potential for advancement, caring and trusting teammates, safe environments, flexible work schedules, and development opportunities were more important. For nurses with more than 20 years' experience, feeling valued by their manager, feeling valued by their organization, feeling engaged by their work, doing meaningful work, and the ability to work autonomously were more important. Note, these are statistically stronger for their respective age brackets and are not necessarily the leading choices for either.

## GAPS IN WHAT NURSE LEADERS PERCEIVE AND NURSES EXPERIENCE

On top of the generational divide that is evident throughout the data, a gap persists between nurses and nurse leaders. This divide has real consequences that go beyond work culture. When nurses were asked whether they feel their team is better prepared for a future variant, surge, or pandemic, only 30% said 'yes,' with 29% 'maybe' and 41% 'no.' When compared to nursing leadership, the gap is considerable, if not alarming. When the same question was asked in an October 2022 survey fielded by the American Organization of Nursing Leadership (AONL), 65% of nurse leaders said 'yes,' they felt their team was better prepared for a future variant, surge, or pandemic.<sup>ii</sup>



*Figure 15 - Nurses indicate whether they feel their team is better prepared for a future variant, surge, or pandemic, Nov 2022*

### **NURSES’ WORKPLACES MUST CHANGE**

The concern about clinician burnout – especially that of nurses – is a major issue in health care today. The U.S. Surgeon General’s Advisory on Building a Thriving Health Workforce report noted that “Burnout is associated with risk of mental health challenges, such as anxiety and depression.... While addressing burnout may include individual-level support, burnout is a distinct workplace phenomenon that primarily calls for a prioritization of systems-oriented, organizational-level solutions.”<sup>iii</sup>

Throughout this report, we see the effects of an under-supported nursing workforce. While individual nurses have reported modest improvements in their well-being, their faith in their workplaces has not improved. Now, three years into a global pandemic, nurses can no longer hold together a fragmented system, a system that historically undervalued its nurses while depending on their willingness to sacrifice.

Without addressing the concrete and daily obstacles that are driving nurses away from health care, such as employers refusing to hire enough nurses or provide them a safe environment in which to practice, the workforce will remain at risk. Significant financial investments need to be made to reimagine and reconstruct the care environment with nurses’ frontline expertise driving decisions on improvement.

The American Nurses Foundation is committed to supporting nurses’ individual needs through its Well-Being Initiative<sup>iv</sup> and the ANA Enterprises’ Healthy Nurse Healthy Nation<sup>v</sup> program. While supporting their personal needs, the Foundation is also committed to providing nurses with resources to innovate<sup>vi</sup> and create organizational-level solutions.

From the voice of a nurse, “The pandemic revealed what nurses actually mean to the healthcare system and hospital operations. This was profoundly disillusioning, but ultimately strangely empowering. We all experienced so intensely how little we mean as individuals and how undervalued our work is. We saw so clearly what we were trained to accept as our due—which was very little—and how much was asked of us in return—which was too much. This destroyed trust in institutions that we had invested in. However, it also gave us the freedom to leave them, and to begin to demand more for ourselves either in the form of greater compensation, better benefits, or more flexibility and balance. I see nurses setting better boundaries for themselves and taking better care of themselves than ever before. We are powerful advocates, and the pandemic revealed all the ways we need to advocate for ourselves and each other.”



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<sup>i</sup> Webster, Patrick, and Sara E North. "Health Professions Educational Debt: Personal, Professional, and Psychological Impacts 5 Years Post-Graduation." *Frontiers in Medicine*, U.S. National Library of Medicine, 10 Feb. 2022, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8866662/>.

<sup>ii</sup> "Longitudinal Nursing Leadership Insight Study." *AONL*, 2022, <https://www.aonl.org/resources/nursing-leadership-covid-19-survey>.

<sup>iii</sup> *Addressing Health Worker Burnout*. United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2022, <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/health-worker-wellbeing-advisory.pdf>.

<sup>iv</sup> *The Well-Being Initiative*. ANA Enterprise, 13 May 2020, <https://www.nursingworld.org/practice-policy/work-environment/health-safety/disaster-preparedness/coronavirus/what-you-need-to-know/the-well-being-initiative/>.

<sup>v</sup> *Healthy Nurse Healthy Nation*. ANA Enterprise, 2023, <https://www.healthynursehealthynation.org/>

<sup>vi</sup> *The Reimagining Nursing Initiative*. ANA Enterprise, 27 Apr. 2022, <https://www.nursingworld.org/foundation/rinitiative/>.