



2024 STATE OF NURSE MENTORSHIP





In this paper, we explore the current state of mentorship programs within the nursing profession and their role in closing skill gaps, supporting professional identity, and improving retention rates. Drawing from our 2024 State of Mentorship survey, we highlight key findings on how mentorship is valued yet underutilized in skill development for new nurses.

Key Findings:

- 97% of respondents find mentorship highly important for nurse development.
- 59% of healthcare organizations offer mentorship programs, a significant increase from 36% in 2022.
- Only 20% of respondents with mentorship programs indicated that those mentorships are integrated into specific developmental programs, leaving 80% which are missing opportunities for targeted skill development.
- 86% of respondents believe mentorship could help close skill gaps in new nurses.

As the nursing workforce stabilizes, healthcare leaders are turning their attention to critical gaps in nurse training that play a key role in retention, patient safety, and professional identity of nurses. Some of these skill gaps were formed when nurses joined the profession during COVID where their unique and unprecedented entry to the profession may have missed building key professional skills.

Mentorship, long seen as a crucial component of professional growth, is increasingly recognized for its potential to address skill shortages in nurses. This whitepaper aims to explore how mentorship programs are being utilized in the nursing profession, the gaps in current practices, and propose a more structured, intentional approach to leveraging mentorship for skill-building and career advancement - especially in nurses newer to the profession.

The Value of Mentorship in Nursing

Over the past 3 years, Lead for Care has looked into the value of mentorship for nurses. Our most recent survey continues to point to the importance of mentorship for professional development within the nursing profession with 97% of respondents agreeing it is highly important for nurse development, which aligns with prior years' responses. Further, 86% of respondents believe mentorship can close skill gaps in newer nurses especially in areas such as people skills, communication, and critical thinking.

However, despite this broad recognition, mentorship programs remain largely underutilized or improperly structured. While 59% of organizations now offer mentorship programs (up from 36% in 2022), the lack of structure and resources in these programs suggests a missed opportunity for targeted skill development and maximum impact.

Current State of Mentorship Programs

While many organizations are investing in mentorship programs, 80% of those programs do not align with specific professional developmental tracks or career ladders. This indicates a significant opportunity to better integrate mentorship with structured learning objectives.

Among the organizations that cited having mentorship programs, 81% indicated that those programs focused on new graduate nurses, and 75% indicated they had mentoring programs specific to their emerging leader programs. These two populations are encouraging to see being supported with mentorship given the fact that many nurse leaders are aiming to better support nurses entering the profession and new nurse turnover is a consistent challenge for healthcare organizations.



Further, up to 50% of nurse managers plan to leave their roles in the next 5 years and often enter without any training.^{1, 2, 3} Given these are the top areas where mentorship is deployed, we want to take a deeper look into current strengths and opportunities among these nursing populations.

Mentorship Program Populations

New Graduate Nurses	81%
Emerging Leaders	75%
All Bedside/Clinical Nurses	50%
Managers or Above	50%
Early Career	38%
School/Certificate	13%

Mentorship for New Grads: When asked what skills new nurses are lacking, communication/people skills (41%), clinical/job skills (30%), and commitment/accountability (30%) rounded out the top three categories.

New Nurse Skill Gaps

Communication	41%
Clinical/Job skills	30%
Commitment/Accountability	30%
Critical Thinking	22%
Confidence	11%
Wellbeing	7%

Further, 86% of respondents indicated that they believed mentoring is a crucial method to addressing this skill gap. However, among organizations that have mentorship programs focused on new graduate nurses, only 13% align their mentorship with a developmental program. Given these skill gaps, the value of mentorship programs is maximized when aligned with clear, focused developmental programs that target these gaps directly.

Often mentorship with new graduate nurses is more aligned with preceptorship, which is focused on building clinical skills. While this is a vital element of new nurse training, there is continued opportunity to fully develop a nurse’s skillset beyond clinical skills, and develop skills such as communication, resiliency, and interpersonal skills among nurses entering the profession. Further, when organizations help develop these skills in new nurses, there are benefits in nurse engagement, career identity and clarity, retention, and patient care.

When nurses leave residency and have a mentor-supported development framework they better understand where their clinical skills and “soft skills” can work together to impact not only patient care but the profession and their careers. Unfortunately, we see few organizations currently supporting early career nurses in this way and it’s a missed opportunity to make a major impact on their nursing workforce.

Mentorship for Emerging Leaders: The second area respondents noted as an area of focus for mentorships was emerging leaders, with 75% indicating they had programs for these nurses. This is an encouraging area to see mentorships focus as a study showed that 93% of nurse managers entered the role without any leadership development prior to taking a



formal seat.⁴ Moreover, nurse managers often enter management due to their strong clinical skills rather than leadership competence. With turnover and recruitment of nurse managers a recurring pain point for nearly all healthcare organizations, instituting the right mentorship framework for emerging leaders programs is key.

Often mentorships without proper structure can vary widely and the success of the mentorship is on the mentor and mentee to figure out. We believe there's a simpler, more efficient, and effective way to provide mentorship to emerging leaders. By framing the mentorship structure on the content of the mentorship there is more targeted development and growth in key areas for effective leadership.

Reimagining Mentorship for Targeted Skill Development

Nurses are entering the workforce with pronounced gaps in needed bedside leadership skills such as self-awareness, communication, problem-solving, and professionalism. These gaps must be addressed through modern mentorship models that incorporate microlearning and real-time feedback, rather than relying on outdated, classroom-centered approaches. Mentorships should be strategically aligned with developmental tracks that focus on skill-building and ensuring mentors have the resources and framework to support targeted learning objectives.

Combining mentorship with microlearning content offers a powerful approach to skill-building. By providing easily digestible learning content alongside personalized mentorship, nurses can immediately apply their learning on the job, in fact:



90%
of new nurses who receive guided mentorship and targeted microlearning are able to apply what they learn immediately



65%
of mentees and mentors voluntarily become more involved in their organizations, joining committees, earning certifications, or mentoring others



80%
of mentees prefer the mentorship combined with development versus either type of program alone



92-96%
retention of nurses 14 months post-program who are developed through mentor-enabled programs

Mentorship remains an invaluable tool for nursing development, yet many organizations fail to leverage it effectively. A shift toward more structured, skill-specific mentorship programs can close critical gaps in communication, clinical skills, and leadership; ultimately leading to stronger nurse retention and better patient outcomes.

We urge healthcare leaders to reconsider how mentorship is integrated into professional development programs, ensuring it is purpose-driven, aligned with career progression, and rooted in measurable skill development. If interested in understanding if the Lead for Care Program can help you achieve this in your organization, contact Heidi Kamm at hkamm@leadforcare.com.

Citations:

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- 2.Warden, D. H., Hughes, R. G., Probst, J. C., Warden, D. N., Adams S. A. (2021). Current turnover intention among nurse managers, directors, and executives. *Nursing Outlook*, 69, (5): 875-888. doi.org/10.1016/j.outlook.2021.04.006. 10.1097/NNA.0000000000000880
- 3.Warshawsky, N. E., Caramanica, L., Cramer, E. (2020). Organizational Support for Nurse Manager Role Transition and Onboarding: Strategies for Success. *JONA: The Journal of Nursing Administration* 50(5):p 254-260. DOI: 10.1097/NNA.0000000000000880
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