

Enriching Resilience to Prevent Burnout

The Four Fundamentals

Introduction

At a time when 54% of physicians are experiencing burnout and 50% of critical care nurses are emotionally exhausted, organizations that don't prioritize engagement, workplace culture and caregiver resilience could be impacting their ability to provide safe, high-quality, patient-centered care. When organizations prioritize engagement and build resilience by addressing the voices and unique needs of their caregivers, they are best-positioned to deliver on the expectation of a superior patient experience.

The goal of clinicians and their organizations is to anticipate, detect, and mitigate suffering inherent to patients' conditions; and to prevent suffering caused by external delivery system dysfunction. The difference between approaches to inherent versus external causes of burnout are even sharper than the differences in approaches appropriate for the two types of patient suffering. Health care organizations that proactively detect work units with low resilience can address issues that lead to burnout. When organizations prioritize engagement and build resilience by addressing the voices and unique needs of their caregivers, they are best-positioned to deliver on the expectation of a superior patient experience.

The Four Fundamentals for Enriching Resilience and Driving Engagement

- 1. Amplify Inherent Rewards**
- 2. Reduce the Impact of Added Stress**
- 3. Mitigate the Effect of Inherent Stress**
- 4. Consider Added Rewards**

Amplify Inherent Rewards

There are many inherently rewarding aspects of a career in healthcare because the work of helping people is meaningful. Inherent rewards are intrinsic, or inextricable from the work; they cannot be separated. For example, many are called to the healthcare industry in order to help patients and their families improve their lives. This sense of purpose and meaning imbued in the industry is one of the key inherent rewards of working in healthcare. Having the ability to impact or save lives, overcoming difficult challenges and appreciation for your role in that process are key reasons many are called to the field of health care. Amplify these inherent rewards by connecting people to their purpose by reminding them of why they chose the field in the first place. Every person in the organization contributes toward the bigger purpose whether they have direct patient contact or not; tell stories illustrating how the work being done impacted a patient/family.

Consider the following questions as you assess how your organization amplifies the inherent rewards of care for patients:

- Do you begin meetings with a reflection/story connecting the group/individuals to the organization's purpose/mission?
- Do individuals and/or teams practice the “3 Good Things” exercise during daily huddles/safety huddles/team meetings?
- Do you build in time for expressing gratitude? For example, in meetings make it a practice to encourage individuals to share thoughts of gratitude regarding recent events, situations, successes or appreciation for what was learned from challenges overcome.
- Do you incorporate mindfulness techniques into daily work with patients and coworkers to:
 - Focus attention on task at hand and purpose?
 - Increase ability to reduce stress, emotions, anxiety and depression?
 - Build resilience?
- Do you utilize storytelling to reinforce successes/learning opportunities in your unified strategy of keeping patients safe and providing high-quality, compassionate care?
- Do you build in time for recognizing and reinforcing the meaning/opportunity/gifts of working in healthcare?

Reduce the Impact of Added Stress

Added stressors are the day-to-day challenges for which caregivers “did not sign up”. That is, they are additional areas of stress from their job that goes beyond providing care. These are things like poor communication, lack of leadership support, the Electronic Medical Record, team dynamics, staffing concerns, or environmental issues. Where inherent stressors often have rewards with a deeper meaning attached to them, these added stressors do not. When these added stressors are managed well, they can become perks of the work.

Consider the following questions as you identify sources of potential added stressors and evaluate the current state (i.e. are these perks or stressors?):

- Does your organization foster a just culture in which caregivers and patients feel safe in their daily activities and in which they can speak up if they do not?
- Are staffing levels aligned appropriately for acuity levels on the unit and in alignment with national benchmarks?
- Are there adequate resources for caregivers to provide safe, high quality, compassionate care (access to reliably functioning equipment, adequate supplies; clean, standardized work environment)?
- Do you have the right policies and the right procedures (are there too many or not enough; are they clear and concise)?
- Are documentation expectations and procedures efficient for caregivers to execute without unnecessary duplication? Do caregivers understand how documentation requirements impact safety, quality, regulatory and financial outcomes?
- Are you seeing incremental improvement in Culture throughout the organization as measured by safety, nursing practice, resilience, and engagement? Does the current culture and team dynamics set up caregivers to be engaged and resilient?
- Is management throughout the organization trained in the tools and techniques of promoting caregiver resilience?

Mitigate the Effect of Inherent Stress

Caregivers understand that while their work is inherently rewarding, it also comes with inherent stressors. These stressors can be the same things that give the job inherent meaning. For example, being in charge of your work is meaningful, but that autonomy is also inherently stressful. Additionally, these stressors are ones caregivers expect while in a caregiving role. They are the stressors “they signed up for” when entering the healthcare field. These inherent stressors cannot be reduced without altering the primary job, however they can be transformed into rewards. For example, while witnessing suffering is an inherent stressor, understanding how they helped reduce that suffering can become very meaningful to the caregiver.

Consider the following questions as you assess how your organization mitigates the effect of stress inherent to the work:

- Do caregivers and/or teams develop/reconnect to a sense of meaning and purpose in the care they provided?
- Are there mentorship programs to create a culture of connection in which caregivers can support one another?

- Do employees use mindfulness techniques: for example, putting stressors into perspective by framing them as opportunities for growth; knowing when to step away, retraining the brain to address reflexive and automatic reactions to flip thought patterns?
- Does the organization provide resources that acknowledge the inherent stress of the clinical role, for example, providing ongoing support in dealing with loss?
- Does the organization train employees on prioritizing and focusing on those matters that are within their span of control?

Consider Added Rewards

Added rewards are extrinsic in nature, they occur outside of the work itself and are controlled by someone else in the organization (like a manager). Compensation such as pay/bonuses, benefits, and supportive management are examples of added rewards. Management can amplify these rewards by asking for input/feedback as decisions are considered and encouraging teamwork within and across teams. Find ways to make the work more efficient so that people can maximize their focus on the work which is inherently rewarding (e.g. more time with patients, less time with red tape). Amplify these extrinsic rewards by frequently acknowledging accomplishments and monitoring the fairness of compensation. Engage individuals in discussions about how they prefer to be recognized and customize recognition for each individual when they exceed expectations in their role.

Consider the following questions as you identify options for added reward:

- Does the organization utilize a total rewards communication approach (compensation as the sum of pay, benefits, time off, retirement, etc.)? Have they evaluated current rewards such as pay, benefits, paid training, education reimbursements to understand current state versus motivating factors?
- Does the organization leverage market analysis of compensation information? Are wage scale, how individual placement is determined, and how individuals can increase their compensation (education, experience, accomplishments, etc.) clearly explained?
- Do we understand what extrinsic rewards motivate physicians and caregivers? Is it compensation, recognition, or something else? Are individual recognition preferences discussed/documented during orientation and at each performance evaluation discussion to keep preferences current?
- Does the organization regularly take time to gather, celebrate and appreciate ourselves as a community (national appreciation weeks, ice cream socials, themed events around holidays, community volunteer events, organization-wide picnics, work anniversaries, birthdays, etc.)?
- Does the organization work to minimize administrative duties so that Physicians can spend more time connecting with their patients?

Final Thoughts

As you evaluate your current organizational goals for safety, engagement, and the patient experience, reflect on the four fundamentals of enriching resilience, outlined here, and take an inventory of what you're doing well, and where you might improve. While these fundamentals establish the primary considerations for cultivating a resilient workforce that consistently provides safe, high-quality, compassionate care, implementing effective change requires commitment from leadership to champion, and model their personal expectations for execution.

As part of our mission at Press Ganey to continuously improve the patient experience, eliminate avoidable suffering in healthcare, and develop resilient and engaged caregivers, we urge all healthcare organizations to:

- 1. Amplify Inherent Rewards**
- 2. Reduce the Impact of Added Stress**
- 3. Mitigate the Effect of Inherent Stress**
- 4. Consider Added Rewards**