

Nurse Retention Strategies to Reduce Burnouts Thereby Improving Patient Safety – Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

The global nursing workforce faces unprecedented challenges due to high turnover rates, burnout, and growing concerns over patient safety. This literature review explores evidence-based retention strategies from diverse sectors—including technology, education, and non-profit organizations—and critically examines their relevance and adaptability to the healthcare setting. While non-healthcare sectors emphasize flexible work models, career development, and mental wellness programs, the unique emotional and operational demands of clinical environments often limit direct transferability. The review highlights a significant gap in research: the lack of integrated, sector-specific strategies that directly link nurse retention and burnout reduction to measurable improvements in patient safety. Through a thematic synthesis of current healthcare studies, this paper identifies promising interventions—such as transformational leadership, professional growth opportunities, adequate staffing models with safe staffing ratios, and resilience training—and underscores the urgent need for holistic approaches that align workforce well-being with care quality. The findings suggest that addressing nurse retention is not only an administrative imperative but also a pivotal component of patient safety outcomes.

KEYWORDS: nurse retention strategies, burnout, patient safety, healthcare sector

INTRODUCTION

The global nursing workforce is grappling with persistent challenges, including high turnover, widespread burnout, and growing concerns over patient safety. These issues, exacerbated by increasing healthcare demands and resource constraints, have intensified the urgency for effective nurse retention strategies. While the healthcare sector continues to search for sustainable solutions, industries such as technology, education, and hospitality have long experimented with innovative employee retention practices aimed at improving job satisfaction and organizational stability.

Retention strategies in non-healthcare sectors often focus on flexible work environments, career development opportunities, and wellness initiatives. These interventions have demonstrated measurable success in improving employee engagement and reducing attrition. However, the complexity of clinical settings—characterized by emotional labour, shift work, and patient dependency—presents unique challenges that limit the direct applicability of such models. There remains a critical gap in understanding

how these cross-sector approaches can be adapted to the nursing profession in ways that not only retain skilled staff but also protect their mental well-being.

This literature review explores the importance of the intersection between nurse retention, burnout mitigation, and patient safety, beginning with a comparative analysis of strategies used in non-healthcare sectors. By identifying common themes and potential limitations, the review aims to illuminate opportunities for adapting evidence-based practices to the clinical context. Ultimately, this paper argues that enhancing nurse retention is not merely an organizational concern, but a patient safety imperative that demands systemic, multidisciplinary solutions.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The objective of this study is to examine nurse retention and burnout reduction strategies through a cross-sectoral lens, identifying adaptable approaches that can enhance patient safety and workforce stability in hospital settings.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This literature review explores the relationship between nurse retention, burnout reduction, and patient safety in hospital settings using a thematic synthesis approach. By evaluating strategies from healthcare and cross-sector contexts, it identifies scalable interventions that enhance workforce stability and care quality.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Non healthcare sector

“Teacher turnover and teacher shortages: An organizational analysis”: Ingersoll, R. M. (2001).

Ingersoll (2001) conducted a seminal organizational analysis of teacher turnover and shortages in U.S. schools, challenging the prevailing assumption that staffing issues stem primarily from a lack of qualified teachers. Using data from the Schools and Staffing Survey and the Teacher Follow-up Survey, the study found that organizational factors—such as poor administrative support, low autonomy, and job dissatisfaction—were the primary drivers of teacher attrition, rather than retirement or insufficient supply. Ingersoll emphasized that many qualified teachers leave not because they exit the profession entirely, but because they seek better working conditions elsewhere. The study concludes that addressing internal school dynamics and improving workplace conditions are essential to improving teacher retention—insights that resonate with healthcare, where similar organizational stressors contribute to nurse burnout and turnover.

“Teacher attrition and retention: A meta-analytic and narrative review of the research. Review of Educational Research”: Borman, G. D., & Dowling, N. M. (2008).

In this comprehensive meta-analysis and narrative review of 34 studies examining factors influencing teacher attrition and retention the findings revealed that organizational conditions—such as school leadership, student demographics, and resource availability—were more influential in teacher turnover than previously recognized. While personal characteristics like age and qualifications played a role, the study emphasized that workplace conditions were the strongest predictors of voluntary resignation. The authors argued that attrition is not always a “healthy” turnover and that many departures could be mitigated through targeted policy interventions. These insights underscore the importance of addressing systemic workplace issues.

“Flexible working, individual performance, and employee attitudes: Comparing formal and informal arrangements. Human Resource Management” : De Menezes, L. M., & Kelliher, C. (2017).

This study examined the effects of formal and informal flexible working arrangements across several UK sectors, including finance, education, and local government. It found that flexibility—especially when perceived as autonomous rather than imposed—was positively associated with employee commitment, lower burnout, and intention to stay. Crucially, the positive effects on well-being and retention were stronger when employees had input into their schedules, rather than just being recipients of policy. The authors concluded that organizational support and a culture of trust were essential for flexible working arrangements to yield long-term retention benefits.

“Strategies for retaining employees in the non-profit sector”: Parker, G. (2018).

This is a single-case qualitative study to explore effective employee retention strategies within a nonprofit organization in Washington, D.C. Using Maslow’s hierarchy of needs as the conceptual framework, the study identified three core themes: training and development, advancement opportunities, and strategic leadership. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and organizational documents, then analyzed using thematic coding and triangulation to ensure trustworthiness. The findings emphasized that nonprofit leaders who invest in employee growth, align tenure with career progression, and demonstrate supportive leadership can significantly enhance workforce commitment. These strategies not only reduce voluntary turnover but also contribute to organizational stability and mission-driven impact. The study’s insights are particularly relevant to healthcare, where intrinsic motivation and leadership support are similarly critical to retaining skilled professionals.

“Leadership style, organizational culture and performance: Empirical evidence from UK companies”: Ogbonna, E., & Harris, L. C. (2000).

Ogbonna and Harris (2000) conducted an empirical study across UK retail and service firms to explore the interplay between **leadership style, organizational culture, and performance**. Their findings revealed that **organizational culture mediates the relationship between leadership and performance**—meaning that leadership alone does not directly drive outcomes unless it aligns with the prevailing culture. Specifically, **transformational and participative leadership styles** were more effective when paired with **adaptive, innovative, or clan-like cultures**, leading to improved employee morale, engagement, and retention. Conversely, mismatches between leadership style and culture often resulted in diminished performance and higher turnover. The study underscores that **leaders shape and are shaped by culture**, and that cultivating a supportive, values-driven environment is essential for sustainable organizational success.

“Study on impact of career development practices on employee retention”: Singh, S. (2022).

This study conducted at Symbiosis College of Arts & Commerce to examine how career development practices influence employee retention in corporate settings. The research found that structured initiatives—such as mentoring, upskilling, and internal mobility—significantly enhance employees’ sense of belonging and long-term commitment. The study emphasized that career advancement opportunities are increasingly valued over compensation, especially among early-career professionals. Employees who perceive clear growth pathways are more likely to remain with their organizations, as these practices help bridge the gap between individual aspirations and organizational goals. Singh concluded that career development is a strategic retention tool, particularly in competitive industries where talent mobility is high.

“Incentives and recognition: An evidence review. Practice summary and recommendations”: Cotton, C., Gifford, J., & Young, J. (2022).

This study published by Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) by conducting a sector-wide evidence review across industries such as education, retail, and finance, emphasizing the strategic value of non-financial recognition in improving employee motivation, engagement, and retention. The report found that praise, awards, and peer acknowledgment aligned with organizational values can be as impactful as financial rewards. It stressed that clarity, fairness, and task relevance are vital for incentive programs to succeed. Importantly, the review highlighted that generic one-size-fits-all systems are less effective than tailored recognition approaches that reflect diverse employee needs. These insights support the argument that recognition is not merely symbolic but a powerful driver of workforce stability and organizational performance, even outside the healthcare sector.

“Promoting employee wellbeing and preventing non-clinical mental health problems in the workplace: A preparatory consultation survey”: Coppens, E., Hogg, B., Greiner, B. A., Paterson, C., de Winter, L., Mathieu, S., Cresswell-Smith, J., Aust, B., Leduc, C., Van Audenhove, C., Pashoja, A. C., Kim, D., Reich, H., Fanaj, N., Dushaj, A., Thomson, K., O’Connor, C., Moreno-Alcázar, A., Amann, B. L., & Arensman, E. (2023).

This multinational study explored how small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) across Europe and Australia approach employee mental health. environments) were somewhat common, structured mental health interventions—such as resilience training or stress management workshops—were rarely implemented. Key barriers included lack of managerial resources, concerns about productivity loss, and employee fears of stigma or discrimination. However, the study also found that highlighting the economic benefits of mental health programs and sharing success stories from other organizations could motivate adoption. These insights underscore the importance of organizational culture and leadership buy-in in promoting mental health and improving retention.

“Employee retention strategies in information technology companies: A case study in Hyderabad” : Devarapalli, R. (2024).

In this case study exploring employee retention strategies among prominent IT firms in Hyderabad, Devarapalli found that despite a slight post-pandemic dip in attrition, turnover remained a persistent concern. The study examined practices employed by companies such as Infosys, TCS, HCL, and Tech Mahindra, highlighting the importance of internal mobility, flexible work arrangements, and hybrid models as effective means to retain talent. Additionally, the study emphasized the critical role of leadership continuity and recognition of employee contributions in fostering loyalty. A supportive organizational culture was shown to alleviate workplace stress and enhance employee commitment. These findings suggest that leadership engagement, work-life flexibility, and proactive talent management are vital in high-pressure environments—insights that could inform more tailored retention strategies in the healthcare sector.

“Employee retention strategies for nonprofits: 11 tips”: Published by Dickerson Bakker (2024)

This article outlined 11 practical strategies to improve employee retention in nonprofit organizations, emphasizing that retaining mission-driven staff is essential for sustaining impact. The article highlights that nonprofit organizations often face unique challenges—such as limited budgets, high emotional demands, and burnout—which make retention especially difficult. Key recommendations include fostering a culture of recognition, offering flexible work arrangements, investing in leadership

development, and aligning roles with individual purpose. The piece also stresses the importance of transparent communication, career growth opportunities, and wellness support to maintain morale and reduce turnover. These strategies underscore how values-based engagement and supportive leadership can help nonprofits retain committed professionals—insights that are highly relevant to healthcare, where similar pressures affect nurse retention.

Healthcare sector

“Evidence for psychiatric and mental health nursing interventions: An update (2011 through 2015)”: Bekhet, A. K., Zauszniewski, J. A., Matel-Anderson, D. M., Suresky, M. J., & Stonehouse, M. (2018)

Bekhet et al. (2018) conducted a state-of-the-evidence review of 115 intervention studies published between 2011 and 2015 in psychiatric nursing journals. Of these, 23 studies specifically targeted nursing staff and mental health professionals, focusing on interventions to improve their psychological well-being. Common strategies included resilience training, mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), cognitive-behavioral interventions, and peer support programs. The review emphasized that multi-dimensional interventions—those combining education, emotional support, and skill-building—were more effective in reducing stress, anxiety, and burnout among nurses. The authors also noted a growing trend toward implementation science, highlighting the importance of translating evidence-based interventions into routine clinical practice.

“An intervention to decrease burnout and increase retention of early career nurses: A mixed methods study of acceptability and feasibility”: Brook, J., Aitken, L. M., MacLaren, J.-A., & Salmon, D. (2021).

This study examines burnout among newly qualified nurses and evaluates a structured intervention aimed at improving workforce retention. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study identifies psychological stressors, excessive workloads, and workplace adaptation challenges as key contributors to burnout. The intervention integrates mindfulness training, cognitive resilience strategies, and peer support networks, leading to significant improvements in nurses' coping mechanisms and professional engagement. Findings suggest that early-career support programs enhance nurse job satisfaction, retention, and long-term workforce stability, reinforcing the need for organizational strategies to mitigate burnout risks.

“Factors influencing retention among hospital nurses: Systematic review”: Marufu, T. C., Collins, A., Vargas, L., Gillespie, L., & Almghairbi, D. (2021).

Marufu et al. (2021) conducted a systematic review to identify factors influencing nurse retention in hospital settings. Analyzing 47 studies, the authors identified nine key domains affecting turnover: nursing leadership and management, education and career advancement, organizational environment, staffing levels, professional issues, workplace support, personal influences, demographics, and financial remuneration. Among these, leadership and organizational culture emerged as central themes, with poor management practices and unsupportive environments consistently linked to higher attrition. The review emphasized that transformational leadership—characterized by clear communication, staff empowerment, and emotional support—was associated with improved retention outcomes. The authors concluded that addressing these systemic factors is essential for stabilizing the nursing workforce and safeguarding patient care quality.

“Nurses’ assessments of the work environment, organisational culture and work arrangements: A cross-sectional study of Estonian hospitals in 1999, 2009 and 2021”: Korgemaa, U., Sisask, M., & Ernits, U. (2025).

It is a cross-sectional study analyzing nurses’ assessments of the work environment, organizational culture, and staffing arrangements in Estonian hospitals over three decades (1999, 2009, and 2021). The study found that while the physical work environment remained stable or improved, nurses consistently perceived nurse-to-patient ratios as insufficient, especially in larger regional hospitals. Improvements were noted in communication and psychosocial support, but collaboration quality declined over time. The research emphasized that organizational culture and staffing adequacy are critical to nurse well-being and care quality. The authors advocate for a comprehensive evaluation of staffing models, integrating both quantitative ratios and qualitative perceptions to improve retention and patient outcomes.

“Nurse burnout and patient safety, satisfaction, and quality of care: A systematic review and meta-analysis”: Li, L. Z., Yang, P., Singer, S. J., Pfeffer, J., Mathur, M. B., & Shanafelt, T. (2024).

The study found that burnout—particularly emotional exhaustion and depersonalization—was significantly linked to lower patient safety climate, increased rates of nosocomial infections, patient falls, medication errors, and adverse events. Additionally, burnout was associated with reduced patient satisfaction and lower nurse-assessed quality of care, though not with standardized mortality rates. These associations remained consistent across demographic and geographic variables. The authors concluded that systems-level interventions targeting burnout could meaningfully enhance both nurse well-being and patient outcomes.

Nurse Retention Strategies

Nurse retention strategies refer to the planned policies, practices, and organizational interventions aimed at keeping nurses employed within a healthcare system over time. These strategies target factors such as job satisfaction, workload, career development, leadership support, and work-life balance to reduce turnover, foster professional commitment, and ultimately enhance patient care quality. The overarching aim is to create conditions in which nurses feel valued, professionally fulfilled, and motivated to continue their employment, ultimately contributing to workforce stability and the overall effectiveness of healthcare delivery.

Nurse Burnout

Nurse burnout refers to a work-related syndrome resulting from prolonged exposure to occupational stressors that exceed a nurse’s coping capacity. It manifests through emotional exhaustion, depersonalization—where nurses may develop a detached or indifferent attitude toward patients—and a diminished sense of professional efficacy. Common contributors include high workloads, understaffing, emotionally charged environments, limited control over clinical decisions, and inadequate organizational support. This persistent strain not only affects the mental and physical well-being of nurses but also undermines their engagement and effectiveness within healthcare teams. Recognized as a serious occupational challenge, nurse burnout underscores the need for systemic reforms and holistic strategies that promote a sustainable, healthy work environment.

Patient Safety

Patient safety refers to the prevention of harm to patients during the process of healthcare delivery, emph-

asizing the creation of systems and practices that minimize the risk of errors, accidents, and adverse events. It involves a proactive approach to identifying potential hazards, fostering a culture of transparency and continuous improvement, and ensuring accountability at all levels of care. Key elements include safe medication practices, infection control, effective communication, and standardized procedures that prioritize the well-being of patients. Recognized globally as a fundamental component of healthcare quality, patient safety aims to build trust, enhance clinical outcomes, and protect the dignity and lives of those receiving care.

Table 1: COMMON THEMES OF RETENTION STRATEGIES IN HEALTHCARE (NURSING) AND NON-HEALTHCARE SECTORS

Theme	Healthcare Sector (Nursing)	Non-Healthcare Sector
Supportive Leadership	Leadership—characterized by clear communication, staff empowerment, and emotional support—was associated with improved retention outcomes. (<i>Marufu et al., 2021</i>)	Enhances morale and performance through participative styles (<i>Ogbonna & Harris, 2000</i>)
Organizational Culture	Unsupportive environments consistently linked to higher attrition (<i>Marufu et al., 2021</i>)	Organizational culture mediates the relationship between leadership and performance (<i>Ogbonna, E., & Harris, L. C. 2000</i>).
Career Development	Career support programs enhance nurse job satisfaction, retention, and long-term workforce stability, reinforcing the need for organizational strategies to mitigate burnout risks(<i>Brook et al.,2021</i>)	Mentoring and growth pathways increase engagement (<i>Singh, 2022</i>)
Recognition & Incentives	Recognition boosts morale and reduces attrition (<i>Empuls, 2025</i>)	Non-financial recognition strongly influences retention (<i>CIPD, 2022</i>)
Wellness & Mental Health Support	Crucial to preventing burnout and emotional exhaustion (<i>Getie et al., 2025</i>)	Wellness programs improve retention and engagement (<i>Coppens et al., 2023</i>)

TABLE 2: LIMITATIONS OF NON-HEALTHCARE RETENTION STRATEGIES TO USE IN HEALTHCARE SECTORS

Non-Healthcare Strategy	Why It May Be Limited in Nursing Context	Supporting References
Flexible work arrangements	Nurses work in shift-based, in-person roles, making remote or flexible hours difficult to implement	<i>CIPD, 2022; Singh, 2022</i>

Non-Healthcare Strategy	Why It May Be Limited in Nursing Context	Supporting References
General wellness programs	Nurses require deeper support for emotional exhaustion and moral distress beyond generic wellness programs	<i>Coppens et al., 2023; Getie et al., 2025</i>
Non-clinical recognition systems	Corporate-style recognition may not reflect the impact of clinical care or frontline patient work	<i>Empuls, 2025; CIPD, 2022</i>
Flat leadership structures	Healthcare has clinical hierarchies; corporate leadership styles may need adjustment to fit this structure	<i>Ogbonna & Harris, 2000; Marufu et al., 2021</i>
Incentive-based performance models	Financial incentives may clash with patient-centered ethics and teamwork principles in nursing	<i>CIPD, 2022; Empuls, 2025 (contextual inference)</i>

To improve nurse retention and enhance patient safety within healthcare settings, several sector-specific strategies have proven effective. Maintaining safe nurse-to-patient ratios helps reduce burnout and medical errors, while transformational leadership and shared governance empower nurses and foster job satisfaction. Opportunities for continuous professional development and structured career pathways not only motivate retention but also elevate clinical competence. Creating healthy work environments grounded in respect, psychological safety, and teamwork supports nurse well-being, as do targeted burnout prevention programs and access to mental health resources. Recognition initiatives and meaningful incentives boost morale, while strict policies against workplace violence ensure a secure and supportive setting—both critical to sustaining a committed, high-performing nursing workforce.

TABLE 3: NURSE RETENTION STRATEGIES TO REDUCE BURNOUTS

Retention Strategy	Measures to Be Followed	Impact on Burnout Reduction	Impact on Patient Safety	Supporting Study
Mentally Healthy Work Environment	- Establish peer support groups - Provide access to counselling and stress management resources	Improves emotional regulation and resilience	Maintains clinical performance and situational awareness	<i>Bekhet et al. (2018)</i>
Transformational Leadership & Culture	- Promote open communication - Involve nurses in decision-making - Provide emotional and managerial support	Reduces emotional exhaustion; fosters sense of purpose and empowerment	Enhances team coordination, lowers turnover-related care disruption	<i>Marufu et al. (2021)</i>

Retention Strategy	Measures to Be Followed	Impact on Burnout Reduction	Impact on Patient Safety	Supporting Study
Early Career Support & Recognition	- Introduce on boarding with psychological safety - Offer structured mentoring and regular recognition programs	Boosts confidence, reduces early-career anxiety and attrition	Retains skilled talent, strengthens continuity of care	<i>Brook et al. (2021)</i>
Professional Growth Opportunities	- Support continuing education - Provide clear career ladders and role flexibility	Reduces stagnation and burnout linked to lack of progress	Increases clinical competency and quality of care	<i>Marufu et al. (2021); Brook et al. (2021)</i>
Adequate Staffing Models	- Maintain optimal nurse-patient ratios - Use data-driven workload assessments	Prevents fatigue and work overload	Decreases medical errors and ensures timely interventions	<i>Korgemaa et al. (2025)</i>
Healthy Organizational Culture	- Foster teamwork and mutual respect - Conduct regular feedback and listening sessions	Alleviates moral distress caused by toxic work dynamics	Encourages error reporting and learning culture	<i>Korgemaa et al. (2025)</i>
Multidimensional Burnout Interventions	- Implement mindfulness, CBT, and resilience training bundled with organizational changes	Improves coping skills and stress management effectiveness	Supports sustained focus and compassion in patient care	<i>Bekhet et al. (2018); Brook et al. (2021)</i>

NEED FOR THE STUDY

Why Nurse Retention Strategies Are Essential for Burnout Reduction and Patient Safety

Healthcare systems globally are grappling with growing nurse shortages, rising burnout levels, and mounting pressures to ensure patient safety. However, these issues are often approached in isolation, missing their critical interdependencies. When nurses face chronic stress without institutional support, they become more likely to disengage or leave the profession. This loss of skilled staff leads to diminished continuity of care, heavier workloads for remaining nurses, and a higher likelihood of clinical errors—all of which jeopardize patient outcomes. Retention strategies that prioritize nurse well-being—such as flexible scheduling, supportive leadership, and career development—do more than reduce turnover; they directly combat the root causes of burnout. In turn, a stable, supported nursing workforce fosters consistency, attentiveness, and responsiveness in care delivery—conditions essential for maintaining patient safety. Thus, implementing sector-specific nurse retention strategies is not simply a workforce issue—it's *a patient safety imperative*.

CONCLUSION

The global nursing workforce is at a critical juncture, challenged by alarming turnover rates, pervasive

burnout, and escalating concerns over patient safety. This literature review underscores the urgent need for systemic, evidence-based retention strategies that not only prioritize nurse well-being but also enhance care quality. By drawing insights from diverse sectors—such as technology, education, and non-profit organizations—the review reveals promising interventions including supportive leadership, safe staffing ratios, flexible scheduling, and resilience training. However, the emotional complexity and operational intensity of clinical environments demand tailored adaptations. A significant gap remains in integrated frameworks that empirically link workforce stability to patient safety outcomes. Addressing this gap calls for holistic, sector-sensitive approaches that embed retention and burnout mitigation within the fabric of hospital policy and culture. Ultimately, improving nurse retention emerges not as a peripheral administrative concern, but as a cornerstone of sustainable, high-quality healthcare delivery.

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