

A close-up photograph of a woman with dark hair, wearing blue scrubs, adjusting a light blue surgical mask over her nose and mouth. Her hands are visible, holding the white ear loops of the mask. The background is softly blurred, suggesting a clinical or hospital setting.

**SOLVING THE
HEALTHCARE
WORKER SHORTAGE**
**BEST OF APLOI'S
ROUNDTABLE**



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TAKEAWAYS FROM APPLOI'S ROUNDTABLE ON THE HEALTHCARE TALENT SHORTAGE

Healthcare staffing has been on a rollercoaster ride. COVID-19 hasn't made things easier, but we know the healthcare worker shortage started years ago. This year, Apploi hosted our inaugural roundtable discussion on the healthcare talent shortage. We brought together healthcare leaders and visionaries to share their experiences and discuss how to tackle the healthcare worker shortage.



5 TAKEAWAYS FROM APPLLOI'S HEALTHCARE STAFFING ROUNDTABLE

1

COVID-19 didn't change the path of healthcare technology—it just accelerated it

COVID-19 has changed how we work and live, but our panelists agreed that healthcare was on its way to a digital transformation regardless of the pandemic. Many healthcare organizations were already in the process of introducing more virtual services by the time the pandemic hit.

When the pandemic made virtual care a necessity, organizations had to scramble to put these plans into action faster. The quickened timeline highlighted other important issues, like the tricky process of getting insurance reimbursements for telehealth services.

2

Turnover isn't the root of healthcare's problems

Employee turnover is a big topic in healthcare staffing, but our panelists say it's not the unique issue we might imagine. In fact, healthcare has experienced COVID-era turnover at rates comparable to many industries, and lower than some.

Among healthcare workers who did quit, many are leaving the industry entirely. Because of this trend, recruiting employees from other healthcare facilities won't cut it. Instead, recruiters need to bring more people into healthcare at large. That means going beyond your usual candidate sources to attract people who are working in other industries.

3

Healthcare employers need to be flexible enough to meet workers where they are

As the candidate shortage grows more and more pressing, employers will need to give candidates certain accommodations. This may involve granting benefits that workers have been requesting for a long time, like shorter and more flexible shifts.

Many healthcare workers are motivated by passion for their work, but that doesn't mean they'll stay in the industry no matter what. Non-healthcare employers may be able to pay at higher rates than healthcare organizations, and these jobs often have fewer barriers to entry. To stay competitive, healthcare recruiters should consider why their employees leave the industry.

4

Equity issues will determine healthcare's success in the pandemic era and beyond

Our panelists agreed: equity is essential to healthcare's progress. To rebuild healthcare staffing, organizations will need to answer the specific needs of women and racially and ethnically diverse workers, who have been more greatly affected by the pandemic than their counterparts.

Likewise, new healthcare technologies can only succeed if patients can reach them. Currently, many rural Americans don't have broadband wifi—and not everyone can navigate mobile devices. To make telehealth equitable, we need mobile interfaces that are usable for everyone.

5

The future of healthcare is all about helping nurses regain their joy

More often than not, nurses enter healthcare because they're passionate about their work. Nurses leave healthcare, our panelists argued, because they've been exhausted and overworked to the point of having that passion doused. To fight the healthcare worker shortage, employers need to help nurses find their joy again.

To do this, it's critical to support a healthy work-life balance. Step away from cookie-cutter benefits, and use that budget to address the specific issues preventing workers from living balanced lives. Pleasure in work, and a commitment to the workplace, will follow.



HEALTHCARE ACCESSIBILITY AND NEW TECHNOLOGIES

Our panelists discussed how new technologies affect healthcare accessibility and why accessibility is a top concern for the industry's future.

Better Access for Rural and Low-Income Patients

While telehealth is a boon for many patients, it also poses issues for equitable care.

To make telehealth accessible for all patients, we first need more widespread access to broadband internet. Currently, broadband is out of reach for many rural and low-income Americans. That's a serious problem for healthcare accessibility.

According to the [FCC's 2020 broadband report](#), about 19 million Americans currently lack access to broadband. The FCC also estimates that a quarter of all rural residents and a third of tribal residents don't have broadband access.

Other experts [dispute](#) these findings, arguing the reality is even more extreme. Bloomberg CityLab put the number of Americans without wifi closer to [40 million](#). The [Brookings Institution](#), meanwhile, estimated that anywhere from 6 to 12% of Americans don't have broadband access.

So what can healthcare leaders do? One important step is to become advocates for broadband accessibility. When we make it clear that internet access issues are also healthcare issues, we powerfully reframe the conversation around widespread and affordable internet.

Healthcare Technology's Growing Role

Although many healthcare organizations were already embracing new technologies, there's no doubt the pandemic sped things up. Virtual caregiving was already on the rise, but when telehealth became a necessity, many organizations acted fast to introduce the right tools.

The past few years have been a trial by fire for new healthcare technologies. The demands of the pandemic forced healthcare workers to rapidly adjust to new processes. In 2018, experts predicted telehealth would grow from a \$1.9 billion industry to one worth over [\\$13 billion](#) by 2025. This forecasted growth was staggering, even without factoring in the pandemic.

The rapid adoption of new healthcare technologies has increased access in many cases. Just as critically, however, it has also exposed existing issues that may result in barriers to healthcare access if not addressed.

Focused Recruiting for Professional Access

Beyond the patient's experience, there's another side to healthcare accessibility. Healthcare workers and job seekers have access issues of their own.

For many healthcare workers, getting online is the first hurdle to finding a job. Your amazing social media recruiting strategy will only work if job seekers are online to see it. Not everyone has a smartphone or an internet connection. It's hard to hire equitably while there's such a barrier between job seekers and the recruiting strategies meant to attract them.

Fortunately, there are ways to reach people with much greater rates of success. While internet access is still spotty across the country, Pew has found that over [97% of Americans](#) own a cellphone. If you're having a hard time finding healthcare candidates, consider leaning into [text recruiting](#). This strategy is also better for extremely busy candidates, like working mothers, who can respond to your recruiting texts while occupied with other things.



Creating Usable Interfaces for Patients With Disabilities

Broadband restrictions weren't the only accessibility issue brought up. Panelists also argued that smartphone interfaces are critical to healthcare accessibility as a whole.

No matter why you're accessing telehealth, the mobile interface will have a direct impact on your experience. For some, this might mean the difference between an easy and frustrating appointment. For others, however, the consequences of poor mobile interfaces are more serious. In worst case scenarios, inaccessible interfaces might prevent users from getting care at all.

Only 62% of American adults with disabilities say they own a computer, reports the [Pew Research Center](#). By comparison, 81% of adults with no disability have one. The discrepancy also exists for smartphones, which 72% of disabled adults report owning, compared to 88% of other respondents.

This disparity gets worse: 15% of Americans with any disability say that they "never" go online, compared to 5% of respondents without any disability. For some disabled Americans, digital healthcare isn't yet an option.

This is particularly pressing given the rising trend toward [mobile-only internet use](#). Healthcare technology will only be accessible when mobile devices are fully usable for patients with any physical and cognitive condition.

62% of American adults with a disability own a computer

81% of American adults without a disability own a computer

15% of Americans with a disability "never" go online

5% of Americans without a disability "never" go online

"The patchwork quilt of technologies you'd have in these communities where people aren't talking to each other is mind-numbing."

Pat Mulloy, on the need for integrated technology



FLEXIBLE BENEFITS: THE #1 WAY HEALTHCARE EMPLOYERS CAN SUPPORT NURSES

To recruit and retain nurses, you need to find ways to be a more supportive employer. You may be wondering how to help healthcare workers without hurting your budget and how to offer support that's genuinely meaningful for your workers. We talked about one important way you can support your nurses: give them flexible benefits.



08 → Solving the Healthcare Worker Shortage

Supporting Nurses for Better Staffing

Supporting your staff is vital to maintaining your staffing ratios. Nurses who feel supported are less likely to suffer from [burnout](#), so they'll be more likely to continue working at your organization longer. If you can help your employees feel satisfied with their jobs, you're also investing in your recruiting. Happy employees will represent your business as a great place to work, helping your organizational reputation. In turn, this will make it easier to hire new recruits.

These benefits might include wellness perks, more options for retirement or savings, education support, or more flexibility around picking shifts. It can take time and resources to set up flexible benefits, and you'll need fantastic communication between employees and HR. However, once you have flexible benefits in place you'll make things easier on yourself in the long run by inviting workers into the selection process.

Who's Using Flexible Benefits?

Flexible benefits are rising in popularity across [many businesses](#). Healthcare is just one of the industries embracing unconventional or flexible fringe benefits. As of March 2021, [36%](#) of hospital industry workers had some form of flexible benefit package.

Over a third of these workers are getting flexible benefits, but these packages aren't yet standard. In other words, flexible benefits are growing in popularity, but they're still unique enough to set you apart as an employer.

What Kind of Benefits Do Workers Want?

The top benefit that workers want, according to [one survey](#), is better health insurance. After that, respondents say they want shift flexibility, help with student loans, family leave, and daycare. Many of these benefits have very low up-front costs for the employer. Options like flexible scheduling are especially popular among women. That's worth thinking about, considering how woman-dominated nursing is as a profession.



Gone are the days of cookie-cutter benefits. Benefits are not one-size-fits-all.



Pritma Chattha
VP of Healthcare Innovation
Applio

WHY SUPPORT NURSES WITH FLEXIBLE BENEFITS?

Flexible Benefits Get Rid of the Guesswork

The whole idea of fringe or flexible benefits is to help employees live balanced, healthy lives. There can be a lot of guesswork involved with selecting benefits, though. Even with the best intentions, sometimes HR managers select benefits that aren't really useful. There is one way to guarantee your employees get the fringe benefits they need, and that's to let them pick.

Flexible Benefits Increase Loyalty

In one MetLife survey, [72%](#) of respondents said they would feel more loyal to their organization if they were offered flexible benefits. This is big news for any healthcare employer trying to [reduce turnover rates](#).

Flexible Benefits Can Reduce Burnout

Overall, [58%](#) of workers say that nontraditional benefits would help them manage stress. That's huge for healthcare, where burnout is one of the biggest reasons employees leave the industry. If you look at younger employees, the consensus is even stronger. Gen Z and Millennial applicants want to pick their own benefits—and these are the workers healthcare employers need to attract as Baby Boomers retire.



FIGHTING TURNOVER CAN'T FIX THE TALENT SHORTAGE. RECRUITING NURSES CAN.

Nursing is one of the [top growing](#) professions in the US, but you wouldn't know it from [recent employment numbers](#). The healthcare worker shortage is still raging across the country. While the COVID-19 pandemic didn't start the shortage, it certainly hasn't helped.

Many organizations lost record numbers of nurses in the past year, prompting some managers to look inward and focus on retention. But is fighting turnover really the answer to staffing problems? It might help healthcare rebuild from pandemic-era losses, but it won't solve the talent shortage. Updating your nurse recruiting, on the other hand, can.

The Trouble With Turnover

While turnover is an issue for many healthcare organizations, its role in the talent shortage can be overstated. Turnover can become a bogeyman, covering up other issues. In reality, turnover isn't the sole (or even the most important) reason for healthcare talent shortages.

Turnover in healthcare is common, but it's not unique. In fact, turnover rates are just as high or even higher in industries like [hospitality](#) and [foodservice](#). During the COVID-19 pandemic, even industries with historically high retention have seen their [turnover rates increase](#). So why do we act like turnover is the greatest thorn in healthcare's side?





4 NURSE RECRUITING TIPS TO HELP FIX HEALTHCARE'S TALENT SHORTAGE

To solve nurse recruiting, healthcare needs a bigger overhaul than fighting turnover. It needs more people. That means transforming into an industry where more job seekers can imagine thriving.

Recruit Nurses From Other Industries

Healthcare isn't just struggling because nurses leave their roles—it's struggling because they leave the industry altogether. This goes beyond the usual understanding of "turnover," and needs to be addressed in a different way.

Healthcare won't solve its nurse recruiting woes by sticking to the same limited pool of candidates. Post-acute employers may benefit from pulling candidates from acute settings, but overall, the industry needs a massive influx of new talent.

Because of this, nurse recruiting strategies must target passive candidates and candidates from other industries. With bold marketing, recruiting efforts can double as awareness campaigns, educating job-seekers about the opportunities in healthcare.

Recruit Nurses From Underrepresented Demographics

Nurses are primarily white and [overwhelmingly female](#). To bring in the number of new candidates the industry needs, this pool must diversify. In addition to providing free training, healthcare managers can show men and people of color that this is an industry where they can thrive. Doing this will require a major push in education about healthcare careers.

[Experts](#) say one way to attract men to healthcare is through marketing campaigns that target them specifically. Educating high school students about healthcare positions may also help young people, including young men, see nursing as a viable career option.

Advertise Growth Opportunities During Nurse Recruiting

It's true that internal growth creates openings in some roles, but healthcare managers shouldn't let this scare them. When employees advance, they're showing their peers that healthcare offers a promising career path. Speak with your employees about their goals so you can lay out clear expectations for promotions and plan ahead for recruiting needs.

Turnover isn't always a bad sign. In industries like [tech](#), high turnover signals that there are lots of opportunities, little unemployment, and more people moving through different positions. These are the kinds of growth opportunities that actually attract workers to a new industry. By giving employees clear pathways to growth you're building a positive work culture, which is vital to boosting your nurse recruiting.

Train Your Own Staff

There is one way to actually create more qualified candidates, and that's to train them yourself. Some job seekers are interested in starting a healthcare career but may be discouraged by education requirements.

It can get harder and harder to think about pivoting careers when you're managing other responsibilities, like parenthood. There are many [benefits to offering free in-house training](#), but a major one is that you'll get more entry-level candidates from all walks of life. Couple that with internal advancement, and you're really investing in your whole nursing staff.



ADDRESSING THE TALENT SHORTAGE WITH RECRUITING TECHNOLOGY

It's clear we need to turn healthcare recruiting upside down. But how do we do this? Our panelists agreed technology will be part of the solution.

At our roundtable, we learned that weak recruitment is the biggest issue holding back healthcare staffing. It's recruiting software, therefore, that will help us move toward healthier staffing levels.

With the right technology, businesses can hire faster, streamline interviewing and screening, ease collaboration, and manage candidates' credentials.

A solution like Apploi can help healthcare employers:

- Source, attract, and screen qualified candidates across multiple channels, accessing applicants who use different job sites
- Remove hiring bias by pulling resume information into a standard, easy-to-read format
- Connect with candidates who are busy with their families, education, or other jobs through unlimited texting and email
- Track which candidate sources see the highest traffic, so you can optimize your job posts for certain jobseekers
- Reduce healthcare organizations' time-to-hire so you can onboard candidates before they start another job
- Create efficient, applicant-friendly recruiting and onboarding experiences so candidates can move quickly through the hiring process
- Verify healthcare licenses automatically



LOOKING FORWARD

There's no doubt that we learn more from each other than we can alone. Our panelists brought much-needed depth to the conversation about accelerating healthcare technology, the overemphasis on nursing turnover, and the importance of helping workers live balanced and joyful lives.

We grow alongside our community every day, but something special happens when we address the issues facing our industry together. We're excited to continue the conversation with many more events to come, and we hope to see new friends and old joining the discussion as we move forward.



Healthcare organizations must be willing to share knowledge, learnings, and best practices for the whole ecosystem to succeed. We won't be able to improve the patient experience, populations' health, and the cost of care until we break out of our silos.



Sharon Gabrielson
Past Chair
Mayo Clinic

As a healthcare professional, your education never ends. Inviting discourse is the only way to support healthcare workers and foster understanding across the industry.



Pritma Chattha
VP of Healthcare Innovation
Apploi



Healthcare hiring is changing. Apploi is here to help ensure those changes are for the better.

Apploi is on a mission to help healthcare hire, onboard, and retain staff more successfully with smart job distribution, digital credential management, and streamlined onboarding. With automatically created digital employee records and up-to-date credential analytics, we make it easier to keep your staff work-ready, whether you're a team of tens or hundreds.

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