

Healthcare AI, Documentation capture

National Nurses Week: How can we better support the nurses that work so hard to care for us?

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Despite years of relentless pressures, rising burnout, and a global pandemic, nurses have shown remarkable resolve in continuing to provide exceptional care. Yet with nearly two-thirds of nurses reporting severe emotional exhaustion, there is a critical need for innovation. Technology providers, health system decision-makers, and industry leadership must come together to offer nurses a more streamlined way to manage their workloads, so they can focus on what they love about their roles—and what drew them to healthcare in the first place. For National Nurses Week, former nurse Mary Varghese Presti, Senior Vice President and General Manager of Dragon Medical at Nuance, highlights stories from practicing nurses and discusses how we can help them embrace the most meaningful parts of their job.

This National Nurses Week (and International Nurses Day), I want to talk about how the technology community can come together to give our nurses the support they need to embrace the joys of working in healthcare. Their [resilience has been put to the test](#) more than ever over the past few years, but healthcare's largest workforce has stood strong—and that needs to be rewarded with the same level of care they give patients.

The pandemic has resulted in stretched resources and staffing shortages for many clinics and health systems, putting extra pressure on nurses—and to say they have risen to the challenge is an understatement. Steve Polega, Chief Nursing Officer at University of Michigan Health West, shares his experience:

“Looking back at the last two and a half years, I am amazed at the strength and resiliency of our nursing team. We faced a generational challenge that pushed each of us to incredible levels of stress and loss. Our nursing team rose to every challenge and found the time to not only support patients and visitors but excel at helping to create authentic human connections. I witnessed countless acts of kindness and grace as our nursing team leaned in to serve when they were exhausted and scared themselves.”

Every nurse has a story like this right now; working against the odds to give their patients the best possible care in challenging circumstances.

People become nurses because they care deeply about making life better for others—that’s why I started my career in nursing as a pediatric nurse at Johns Hopkins. And making life better for my fellow nurses is why I’ve spent my later career supporting health reform and pioneering the effective adoption of health information technology to improve the vital yet time-consuming processes that can pull nurses away from caregiving. I have many friends who are still practicing nurses, and they all inspire me to work harder and find new ways to ease their everyday burdens. But what’s the best route forward?

Let’s turn our attention to nurses’ workloads

“As I reflect on my nursing journey over the past 22 years, I believe this has been the most challenging year,” says Helen Crowther, National Digital Primary Care Nurse Lead for Digital Primary Care & CNIO Office at NHSE&I. “Nurses stepped up during a global pandemic and continued through the challenges, but the risk of burnout is so high.”

There’s no easy fix for the challenges nurses face. But I believe those of us who work to transform patient care through technology must start with the caregivers themselves. That means, as an industry, we have a responsibility to support our nurses and reduce burnout wherever we can.

A lot has been invested in creating innovative solutions to ease the physician burden—and yet there has been a lack of innovation and process improvements for nurses. This contrast is particularly stark when it comes to documentation support. Despite ever-increasing discrete flowsheet fields and a significant “point and click” burden, nurses can’t benefit from the traditional dictation technologies that clinicians rely on, because their responsibilities and workflows differ massively. Nurses often complete their documentation alongside their hands-on duties as they move between appointments, rooms, or clinics, updating medication dosage information, intervention details, and other frequently changing patient data. A new approach to documentation could have a massive impact—if it’s tailored to the intricacies and specificity of the nursing workflow.

“Identifying innovative technology solutions that improve the nurse’s workflow is very important to me as a nurse, we need to make it better at the bedside, to keep and attract our nurses for the future of healthcare,” says Kathleen McGrow, Chief Nursing Information Officer at Microsoft. To make real improvements for nurses, we need to provide solutions that offer flexibility as well as efficiency.

Intelligent workflows help put patients back at the center

Over the years, I’ve worked with the National Quality Forum, The Joint Commission, the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology, and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services to find ways to achieve this—and now I’m continuing that work by supporting mission-critical healthcare innovations at Nuance.

With Dragon Medical One, Dragon Ambient eXperience, and our other documentation-focused solutions, optimizing how clinical staff approach documentation is one of Nuance’s strengths. Combine that with Microsoft’s expertise, and there’s also potential to help nurses increase their productivity in communication and task management.

With more streamlined workflows, nurses can continue putting patients at the center of everything they do, completing their tasks faster and with more detail and accuracy while the information is fresh in their minds. Giving nurses more time and capacity to care for patients will be instrumental in alleviating burnout. It’s so heartening to see that [more people than ever are applying to nursing schools](#). I’m hopeful that a collaborative effort to reimagine core processes like documentation will mean that all future generations of nurses are set up for success from day one.

Here at Nuance, we’re at the beginning of a journey to create something tailor-made for nurses, designed to tackle some of the top contributors to burnout. As a former nurse, my firsthand experience navigating these pain points has helped me ensure we’re building something that will truly improve the experience for my former colleagues and other nurses around the world.

And we’re not alone; there are other promising initiatives in the industry. Helen, for example, has recently joined the [Florence Nightingale Digital Leadership program](#), which is aimed at supporting UK nurses as

they explore new digital best practices within their work.

"The opportunity to gain international learning, to network and experience the differences in the profession across the world along with the pace of change over the last two years has been extraordinary; we have seen innovations that would have taken years to implement," says Helen. "Communicating and networking is easily achieved on an international footprint—so let's remain curious, listen, and learn together. Happy International Nurses' Day!"

And to my fellow nurses, happy National Nurses Week—stay tuned for more news on Nuance's own nursing innovations.

Tags: [Burnout](#), [Dragon Ambient eXperience](#), [National Nurses Week](#)

More Information

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See how we're helping clinical professionals streamline their documentation workflows and put patients at the center of every interaction.

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About Mary Varghese Presti

In her role leading Nuance's Dragon Medical franchise, Mary is responsible for overseeing and growing the market leader in cloud-based speech recognition for clinicians. Mary began her career as a pediatric nurse at John Hopkins Hospital. She then moved into consulting, working in healthcare advisory services for KPMG and then management consulting with Booz Allen Hamilton. Ten years later, Mary joined Pfizer, where she served in a number of global strategy and innovation roles helping big pharma navigate significant changes in the healthcare landscape, including the broadscale adoption of health IT and health reform. Mary also served as general manager of athenahealth, where she tested and incubated new business lines for the pioneer in cloud-based electronic health records. Mary earned a B.S. in nursing from the University of Pennsylvania and a Master of Public Health in health policy and management from The Johns Hopkins University. She has also completed executive education coursework in designing and leading innovation at Harvard University.

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