

The Impact of Staffing Shortages on the Quality of Healthcare

Sana Syed, Dr. Pamela Wadsworth, Dr. Cassie Lopez-Jeng, Dr. Jessica Cataldo

College of Health & Human Services

Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo MI 49008



WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY
College of Health
and Human Services

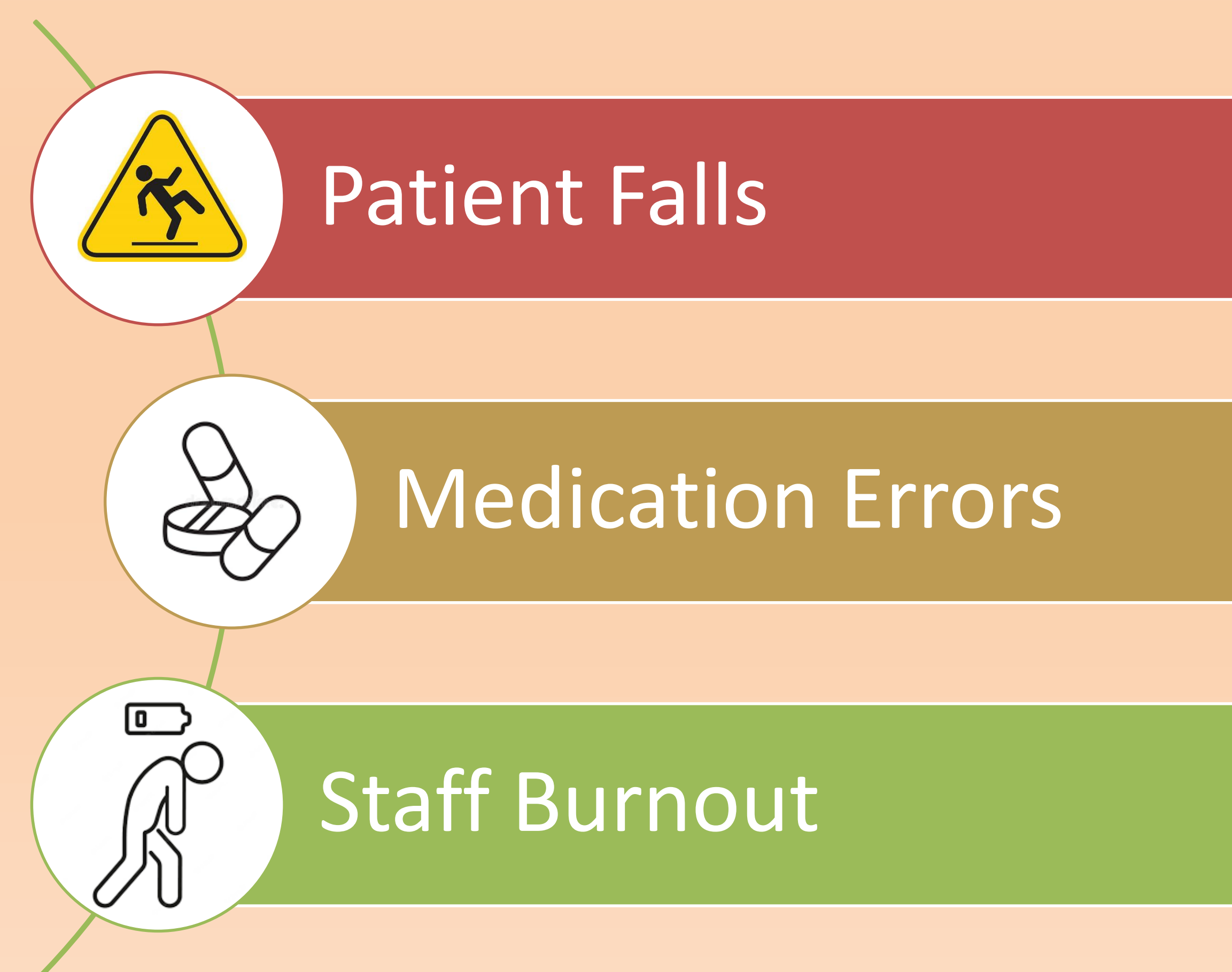
Introduction

The healthcare industry has been facing a staffing shortage crisis. Having adequate staffing is a fundamental element in healthcare and serves as the foundation for higher quality of care ¹. Hospitals and long-term care facilities across the nation have been struggling to retain healthcare workers and maintain a safe environment. This research focuses on the outcomes of staffing shortages including medication errors, patient falls, and staff burnout. This research also acknowledges programs that are designed to optimize patient safety and staff retention.

Question: How does inadequate staffing contribute to the quality of patient care?

Risks & Outcomes

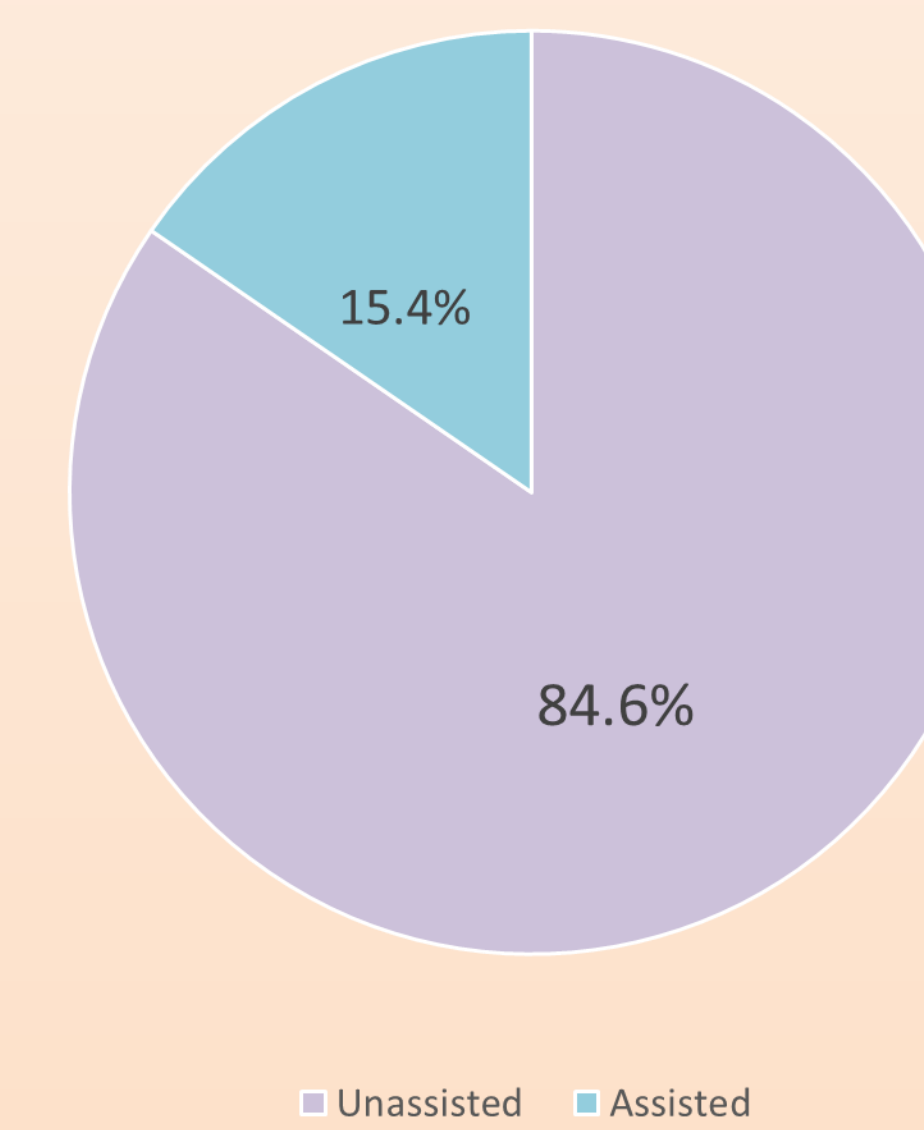
With less staff available per shift, there is a high risk for unassisted patient incidences, medication errors, and eventual staff burnout. Severe burnout may lead to increased staff shortage as nurses resign ².



Patient Falls

Falls are a major concern in every healthcare facility. When a patient incident occurs, extensive paperwork is required to be sent to administration. Several patients & residents are a fall risk at hospitals and nursing homes and require assistance during ambulation. With a lack of adequate staff available, patients are more likely to walk themselves to the restroom and end up slipping. Using the National Database of Nursing Quality Indicators (NDNQI), a study was conducted to observe the amount of assisted versus unassisted falls in 8,069 units among 1,361 hospitals in the United States. Results have indicated that of 3.53 falls per 1000 patient days, 84.61% of falls were unassisted by patients that require assistance. Insufficient staffing was a major factor in this occurrence ³.

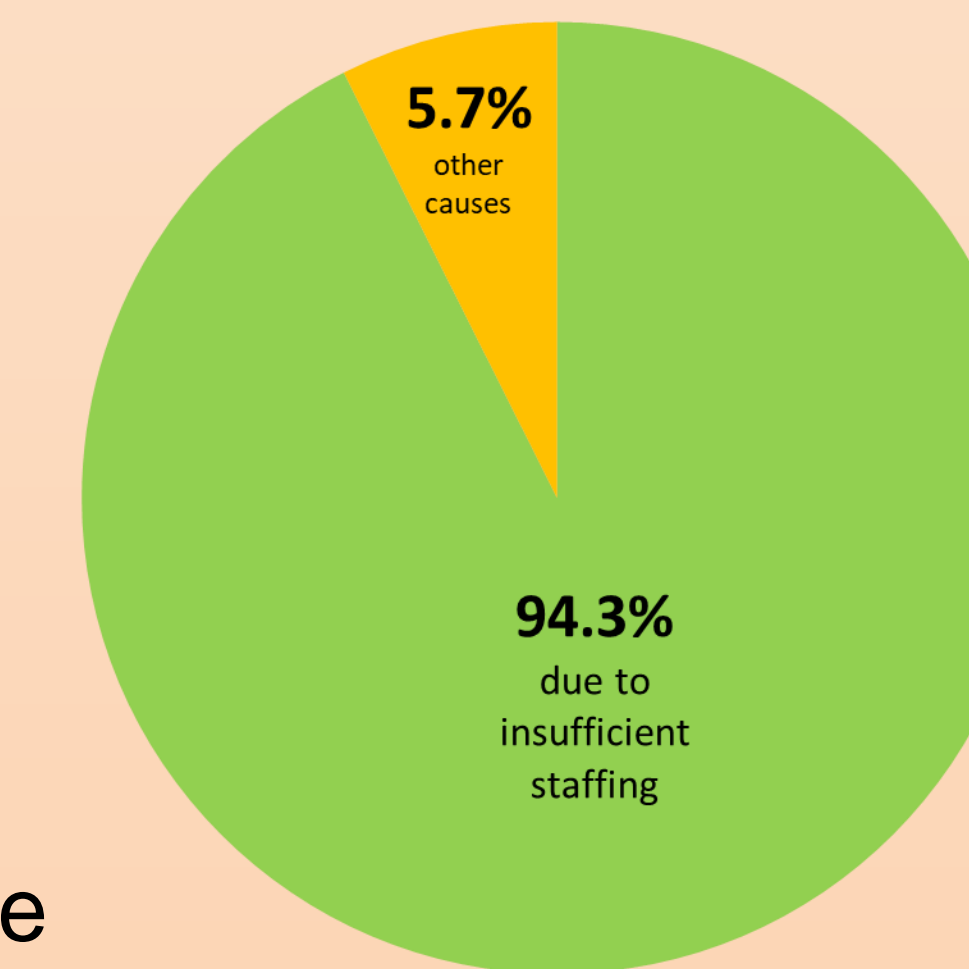
Assisted vs. Unassisted Patient falls per 1000 patient days



Medication Errors

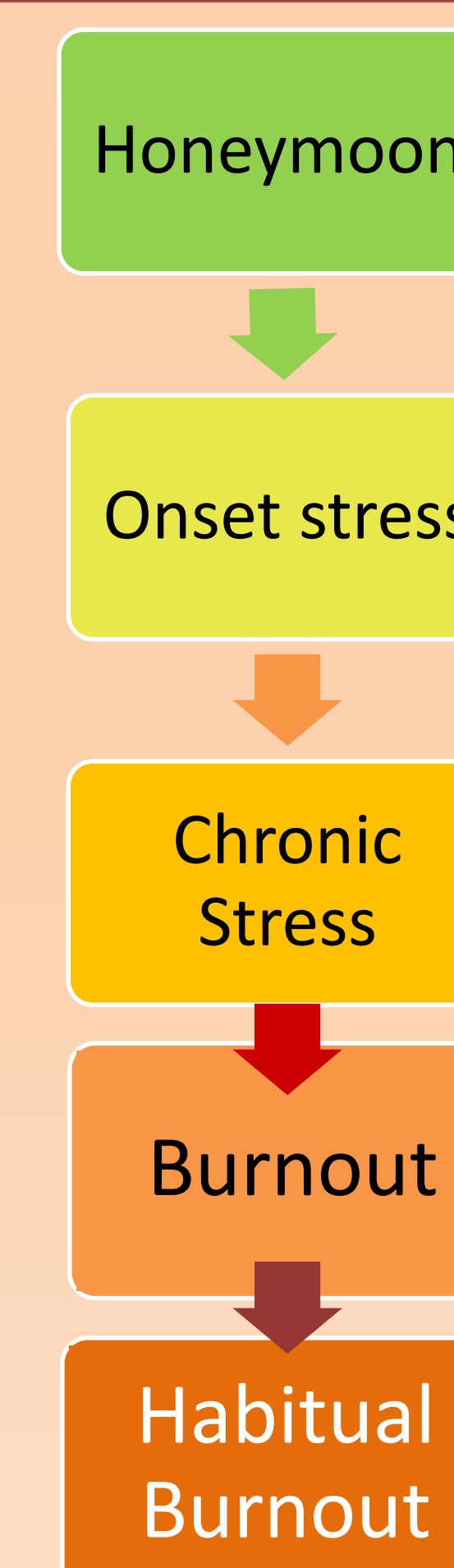
Staffing shortages may result in large nurse-to-patient ratios. With few staff on the floor, employees are assigned an additional workload. As an abundance of tasks are compiled, employees are prone to interruptions. A survey was conducted for 54 nurses in long-term care facilities. 50 nurses claimed medication errors occurred due to staff shortages, while 4 nurses claimed that medication errors occurred due to environmental considerations (lighting, high noise levels, etc) ⁴

Reasons for Medication Errors in Long-Term Care Facility



Burnout – COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic immensely impacted the decline in hospital staff. The influx of patients significantly contributed to the exhaustion and burnout of staff. Increasing rates of burnout have increased staff turnover rates while decreasing staff retention. In a 2020 cross-sectional study surveying 3030 nurses in New Jersey, 80.1% of respondents reported physical exhaustion. 64.3% of respondents had reported to have reached burnout. 36.5% of respondents reported with an intent to resign ⁵. A primary reason for burnout was constantly being short-staffed. More resignations leads to an increased shortage of staff, continuing the cycle. A continuation of this cycle will significantly reduce quality of care as less staff are available to take care of patients.⁵



What is Causing this Issue?

Lack of supportive work environment

Aggressive recruitment & retention

Overworked – Declining work-life balance

Burnout

Aging Population ⁶

Strategies to Optimize Safety and Maintain Staff Retention

- ❖ Customize Retention Strategies
- ❖ Increase Inclusivity of Mid-level Providers
- ❖ Integrate Workforce Planning with Strategic Planning
- ❖ Creating Internal Staffing Agencies ⁷

Focus Areas

- Team Satisfaction
- Engagement
- Eliminating Gaps ⁷

References

- Hooiveld, J. (2022, April 12). How staffing shortages affect patient safety. Patient safety software to improve safety in healthcare. <https://www.patientsafety.com/en/blog/staffing-shortages-affects-patient-safety>
- de Cordova, P. B., Johansen, M. L., Grafova, I. B., Crincoli, S., Prado, J., & Pogorzelska-Maziarz, M. (2022, May 11). Burnout and intent to leave during COVID-19: A cross-sectional study of New Jersey Hospital Nurses. *Journal of nursing management*. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9115191/>
- Staggs, V. S., & Dunton, N. (2014). Associations between rates of unassisted inpatient falls and levels of registered and non-registered nurse staffing. *International journal for quality in health care : journal of the International Society for Quality in Health Care*, 26(1), 87–92. <https://doi.org/10.1093/intqhc/mzt080>
- Mahmood, A., Chaudhury, H., Gaumont, A., & Rust, T. (2012). Long-term care physical environments - effect on medication errors. *International Journal of Health Care Quality Assurance*, 25(5), 431-41. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09526861211235928>
- de Cordova, P. B., Johansen, M. L., Grafova, I. B., Crincoli, S., Prado, J., & Pogorzelska-Maziarz, M. (2022). Burnout and intent to leave during COVID-19: A cross-sectional study of New Jersey hospital nurses. *Journal of nursing management*, 30(6), 1913–1921. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jonm.13647>
- University of Southern California. (2023, March 13). A public health crisis: Staffing shortages in health care: USC MPH. A Public Health Crisis: Staffing Shortages in Health Care. <https://mphdegree.usc.edu/blog/staffing-shortages-in-health-care/>
- American Hospital Association. (2022, February). 5 ways to ease staffing shortages now and into the future: AHA. American Hospital Association. <https://www.aha.org/aha-center-health-innovation-market-scan/2022-02-15-5-ways-ease-staffing-shortages-now-and-future>