



A NEW ERA IN HEALTHCARE

The State of New Graduate Nurses



Versant 2020
Annual Report

A LETTER FROM OUR PRESIDENT

▼ 2020 was one of the most devastating years for the country, and no single group of workers faced more hardship than nurses. In conversations, nurse leaders shared tearful accounts of 16-hour shifts for months on end. They shared moments of grief and sadness, and moments of great camaraderie.

While the best of nurses was revealed, leaders continued to express concern for the emotional health and well-being of staff, frustrations with staffing shortages, and a desire for more adaptive transition models. From these conversations, it is evident that many of healthcare's underlying fears are no longer distant realities. COVID-19 has shed light on the vulnerabilities of every health system, exposing pain points that have been ignored for years.



These tests have led Versant to redouble its mission to fundamentally transform healthcare outcomes by developing the workforce's ability to provide safe, efficient, competency-based care. While there is a lot of work to be done in the post-pandemic world, we believe now is the time to begin responding to the needs of nurses and to begin altering the course of healthcare for decades to come.

In 2020, we began optimizing our system to provide organizations with an adaptive workforce model to assist with their pandemic response. Going forward, we vow to stand beside our partners as they adapt to the changes in healthcare and begin to reassess their future operations and workforce models.

Best Regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Larissa".

Larissa Africa
President

“COVID-19 challenged us in profound ways, making us aware that we needed to implement an adaptive workforce model. Versant’s competency-based system made it easier for our new graduate resident nurses to adapt quickly. When they look back on this time, they will be grateful for the support. Our organization as a whole will benefit immensely.”

Shelley Harris, DNP, CPPS, FACHE
Senior Vice President, Chief Nursing Officer at Centra Health



▼ EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

An AONL COVID-19 nurse leadership impact survey reported that 69% of facilities that increased ICU bed capacity indicated surge staffing, training, and reallocation was a primary challenge.ⁱ

In the same AONL study, 50% of nurse leaders indicated that the emotional health and well-being of staff was a primary challenge, rating it as one of the most difficult challenges to address.ⁱⁱ

An ANA COVID-19 survey found that 87% of nurses are very or somewhat afraid to go to work and that 50% of nurses lack training to conduct COVID-19 testing.ⁱⁱⁱ

In the above AONL study, rapid cross-training and competency-validation tools were identified by nurse leaders as key adaptations or innovations to address the nursing shortage, with 27% saying new staffing models are needed in the future.^{iv}

Nurses at Versant partner organizations reported stable results for nurse-work satisfaction, commitment, nurse incivility, conditions of work effectiveness, group cohesion, and psychological capital. Additionally, intent to leave was down for new graduate nurses.^v

▼ BACKGROUND

With 20 years of healthcare experience, we are honored to have worked closely with our client organizations through these difficult times. While health systems struggled with the impact of COVID-19, we aimed to provide stability, continuity, and positive results. We are humbled by encouraging reports of our partner's resilience and sustained outcomes even in a time of crisis.

Based on our 2020 metrics, we see a strong response from our partners as they adapt to new challenges. Healthcare organizations that have implemented Versant's Competency-Based System™ have reported numbers that indicate stability and, at times, improved outcomes. We believe this stability is a testament to decades of experience, expert knowledge, preceptor and participant buy-in, and clinical competency development that meet the needs of healthcare organizations.

The following report focuses on retention, emotional health, and the need for a standardized staffing strategy with an adaptive nursing model. Attention is primarily on Versant new graduate nurses and their 2020 data outcomes. The report is supported largely by two recent studies, including Versant's own.



▼ VERSANT 2020 OUTCOMES

Versant partner organizations engage in a data collection process at various occasions of measurement (i.e., beginning of immersion, 100% competency validation, month 8, and annually up to five [5] years). Versant utilizes a wide variety of assessments, metrics, and evaluations to analyze process and performance outcomes impacting transition to practice. The data provides input into three areas: 1) they allow Versant to assist client organizations in achieving positive outcomes towards patient safety, organizational capacity, sustainability, and economic benefit; 2) they provide Versant with the feedback needed to improve Versant's Competency-Based System as a whole; and 3) they offer insight and benchmarking at the national level reflecting the status of practice transition programs.



Over 25,000 transition to practice RNs have completed Versant's program.

Our industry benchmark is supported by data collected from more than 12,000 new graduate nurses who have completed outcomes to date.

Throughout the report, we draw comparisons between 2019 and 2020 to identify any changes. For both 2019 and 2020, we collected insight from over 2,000 new graduate RNs. At times, we compare scores to Pre-Versant Comparison Groups to illustrate perceptions of recent new graduate nurses who have been in the client organizations no more than two years prior to partnering with Versant. Only the Pre-Versant Comparison Groups scores within the last seven years are included in this comparison, therefore it is a much smaller number.

AONL COVID-19 INSIGHT STUDY

The American Organization for Nursing Leadership (AONL) and Joslin Marketing partnered to conduct a longitudinal study on the impact of COVID-19 on nurse leaders beginning in July 2020. The research used qualitative interviews and a survey to measure nurse leaders' key concerns, challenges, and future readiness. The survey was completed by 1,824 healthcare leaders.^{vi}

▼ THE GROWING IMPORTANCE OF RETENTION

One of Versant's primary goals is to help organizations manage nursing shortages by providing them with tools to improve retention, especially within the first critical years of a new graduate's professional experience. In a paper released in 2018, we reported that the nursing shortage poses one of the largest threats to healthcare and that by 2020 an average of 70,000 nurses will exit nursing annually.^{vii} With the sudden impact of COVID-19, retention has become a top priority. Hospitals have been forced to rapidly expand to accommodate surge capacity while nurses are exiting due to family need and mental fatigue.

Nurse leaders who were interviewed as part of the AONL study indicated they are under immense pressure due to a lack of personnel. 69% indicated surge staffing, training, and reallocation was an issue. Additionally, they stated that inconsistent staffing is a challenge as they are forced to train travel nurses, temp nurses, and nurses from other units on a daily basis. From a separate survey conducted by the American Nurses Association (ANA), staff shortage was also noted as an issue, with 68% of participants worried about being short-staffed, stating 50% of their nurses lacked the training to conduct COVID-19 testing.^{viii}

69% of nurse leaders indicated surge staffing, training, and reallocation was a primary issue.^{ix}

In a study by the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN), it states that, while there was a 5.1% increase in entry-level baccalaureate programs in 2019, admissions levels are insufficient to meet the rising demand for nurses.^x The report indicates that U.S. nursing schools turned away 80,407 qualified applicants in 2019 due to a lack of "faculty, clinical sites, classroom space, and clinical preceptors, as well as budget constraints."^{xi} The reduction in entry-level baccalaureate admissions underscores the importance of new graduate nurse retention.

HOW VERSANT IS MEASURING RETENTION

The nursing shortage is driven by an aging workforce and the increase of baby boomers seeking direct care. The issue has been worsened by COVID-19 as health systems are overwhelmed by cases. Knowing the extent of this challenge, Versant recognizes the role nurse leaders play in improving retention. Over the past 20 years, we have measured intent-to-leave, turnover, and several underlying metrics linked to retention efforts. It is our belief that new graduates and experienced RNs who are supported by a transition-to-practice program are more likely to remain at their organization. **For new graduate nurses in 2020, we saw a 2.69% decrease in respondents who selected likely or very likely intent to leave, even amid a crisis.** Those who are intending to leave have cited reasons such as family-work balance, desire for inter-departmental transfer, and professional development. In 2020, there is a small but nevertheless significant number of respondents who are considering leaving the nursing profession, which further necessitates for support systems to be provided for nurses overall.

▼ NURSE-WORK SATISFACTION

From our data, we have found that even in a time of crisis, Versant participants have remained consistently satisfied at their organization. Of the 2,155 new graduate nurses who completed the survey in 2020, there was a **2.26% increase in those who are satisfied or very satisfied compared to new graduate nurses surveyed in 2019**. Notably, one of the primary impactors for nurse-work satisfaction is salary. Salary dissatisfaction (\leq average) for new graduate nurses increased by 1.50% in 2020.

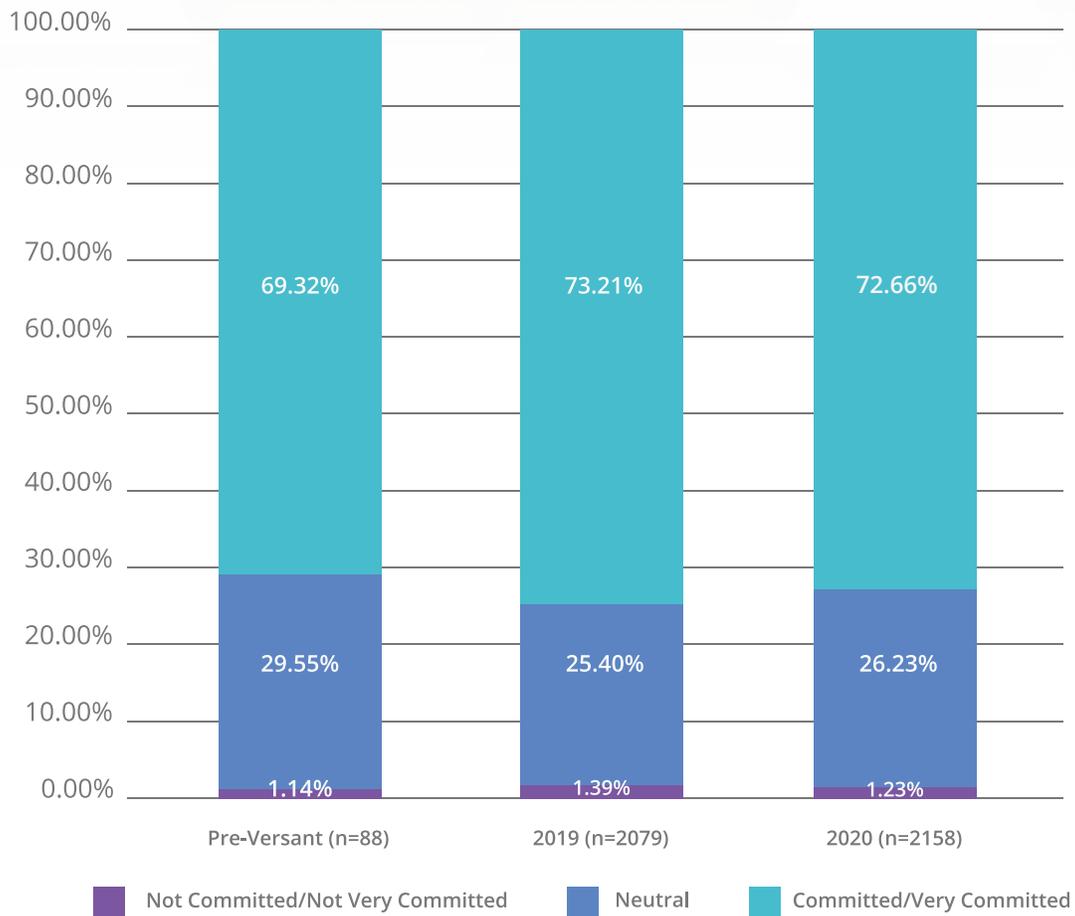
Level of Satisfaction



▼ ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT

In the AONL COVID-19 insight study conducted in July 2020 on the impact of the pandemic on nurse leaders, 73.37% of respondents stated the support from their organization exceeded or far exceeded expectations. Versant new graduate nurses have shown similar commitment to their organizations.

Organizational Commitment



▼ NURSE INCIVILITY

In our commitment to support nurses, Versant is dedicated to diligently tracking nurse incivility. Over the years, we have found that incivility decreases at Year 5 at most organizations, but we suspect that incivility does not decrease; rather, experienced RNs become desensitized to problematic treatment.

During the pandemic, new graduate nurses were put under significant pressure, yet incivility scores were not drastically affected. There was a 0.65% increase in perceptions of incivility behaviors among new graduate nurses from 2019 to 2020, with 5.57% reporting high or very high levels. Typically, the main impactor has been displaced frustration by patients, families, and visitors; however, in comparing scores between 2019 and 2020, fewer new graduate nurses were experiencing such behaviors. There is a 2.67% increase in the number of new graduate nurses experiencing hostile climate in 2020, which is predictable given the healthcare environment.

Perceptions of Behaviors Occurring Frequently: 2019 to 2020 Comparison	
Abusive Supervision	↓ 33.32%
Displaced Frustrations	↓ 4.06%
Free-Riding	↓ 17.00%
Gossip/Rumors	↓ 12.02%
Hostile Climate	↑ 2.67%
Inconsiderate Behaviors	↓ 5.75%
Inappropriate Jokes	↓ 7.39%
Lack of Respect	↓ 19.98%



▼ ATTENDING TO EMOTIONAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

The emotional health and well-being of nurses has been a major underlying problem in healthcare as nurses are stretched to their capacity, but COVID-19 has brought the issue center stage. Anxiety, depression, insomnia, and post-traumatic stress have become increasingly prevalent among nurses and nurse leaders during the pandemic. The toll on new graduate nurses is even higher as they are launched into a demanding profession, oftentimes with insufficient training.

In a study distributed by the National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI), it was reported that “the burden of COVID-19 has resulted in failure of essential management systems that have resulted in devastating outcomes extending far beyond the COVID-19 disease related statistics to culminate in harm to the nursing workforce through stress and suicide.”^{xii}

According to the AONL study, 50% of nurse leaders indicated that the emotional health and well-being of their staff was one of the top three challenges at their organization. When these same leaders were asked to rate their ability to respond to this challenge, emotional health and well-being received the lowest score.

Years of research will be required to fully realize the impact COVID-19 has had on America’s four million nurses emotionally. In the meantime, there is a clear need for healthcare organizations to determine effective solutions. Today, associations

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like ANA and AONL are ramping up their support by providing programs such as the Well-Being Initiative, Moodlift, and Happy. These provide nurses resources for coping with emotional health, including online support, mobile apps, and platforms for connecting with other nurses. Healthcare organizations must also act.



▼ HOW VERSANT IS MEASURING EMOTIONAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

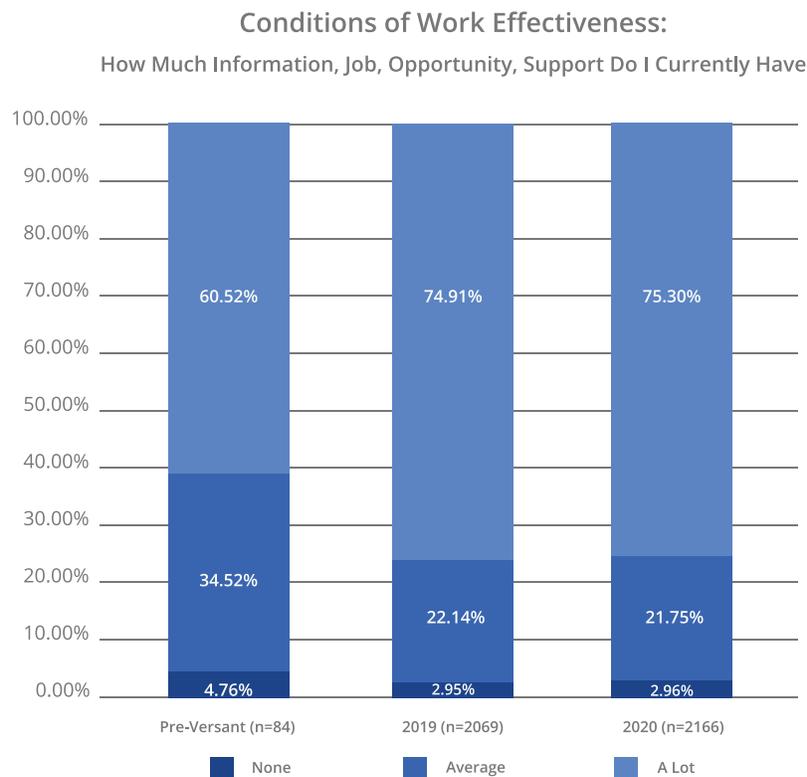
Emotional health and well-being have been magnified by COVID-19 as nurses face one of the most challenging times in history. Given the importance of this topic and the challenge organizations face to address it, Versant is intensifying its efforts to provide additional support. For 20 years, we have measured the underlying metrics linked to emotional health and well-being, and we believe new graduate RNs who are supported by leadership are more likely to feel empowered.

PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL

In terms of emotional health and well-being, our psychological capital metric is our most direct. **For 2020, 99.33% of new graduate registered nurses perceived themselves as having above average or very above average levels of efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience.** There was a 1.95% decrease in very above average scores for overall psychological capital from 2019 to 2020 for new graduate nurses. This is not surprising given the pandemic and, when looking at the data, we cannot help but feel for the new nurses who reported these scores.

CONDITIONS OF WORK EFFECTIVENESS

New graduate nurses thrive on receiving feedback on a job well done. They want to hear how they can improve and whether there are future opportunities to grow. For this reason, we survey our participants to measure the level of knowledge, support, and opportunities they feel they have in their current role. **In comparing the results of new graduate nurses surveyed in 2019 and 2020, the percentage of those who perceive that they have the information, opportunity, job, and support to perform their duties remains steady.** Notably, nurses whose program culminated during the pandemic measured an increase of nearly 1%.



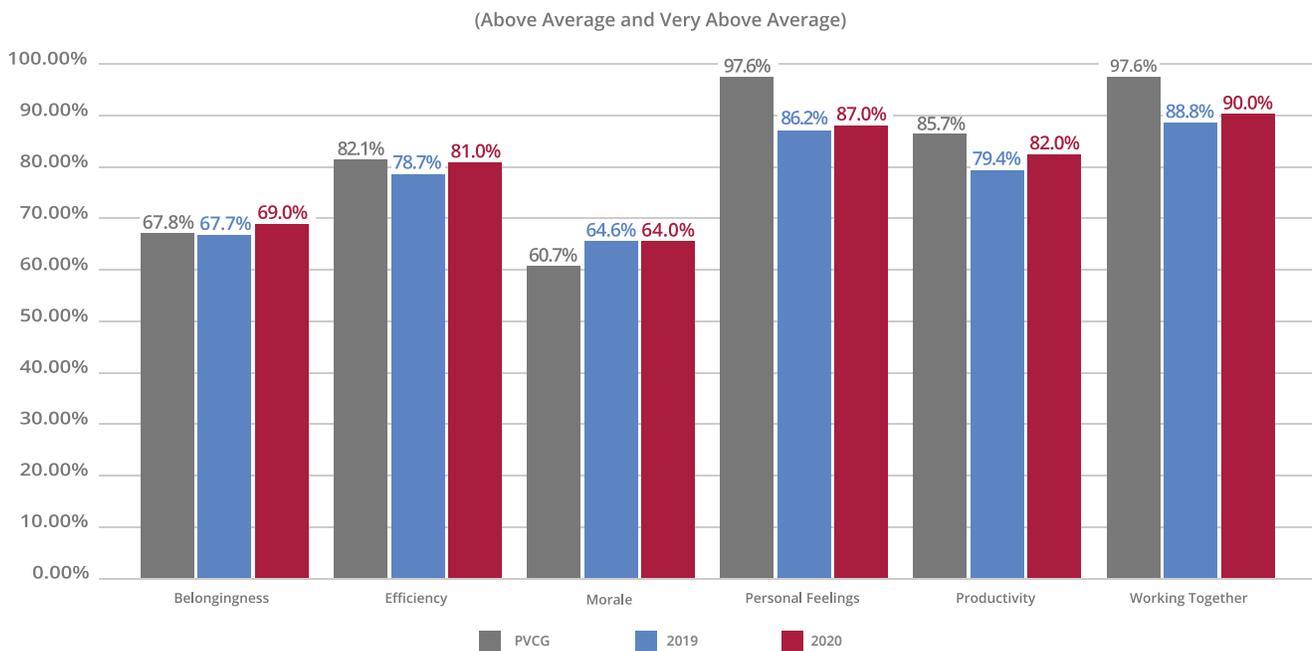
GROUP COHESION

Group cohesion is one of the most important measures for new graduate nurses to identify how well they are immersing into their new organization. It is also a clear indicator of overall emotional well-being. For this measurement, we have included subscales for morale, belongingness, efficiency, personal feelings, productivity, and working together to pinpoint areas where our partners may improve.

Typically, Pre-Versant Comparison Group perception of group cohesion is higher than new graduate nurses due to their history at an organization and experience with their team. However, with the pandemic, this gap is being bridged as teams grow closer.

Notably, morale is consistently one of the lower scores. In 2020, 6.18% of new graduate RNs rated morale as either below average or very below.

In 2020, 86.19% of new graduate RNs rated overall perception of group cohesion as either above average or very above average, a 2% increase from 2019.



▼ NURSE VOICES: WHAT VERSANT NURSES ARE SAYING

Nurses face many challenges when making the daunting leap into a new world, especially during a pandemic. It is the fortunate new nurse who joins a healthcare organization that provides a competency-based transition to practice program. Here are the words of a few Versant participants on a program that provided them with not only hands-on learning but guidance, support, and positive recognition.

"My mentors were amazing! They were all very supportive throughout the transition and I know that I can count on them even when I am no longer a resident."

Victoria, Texas Health Resources

"The best thing was not letting me give up on my dream when I felt hopeless."

Kindra, Baxter Regional Medical Center

"My unit manager and educator were checking in on me weekly to see how I was doing and if education or experience was needed in any competency area. It really made me feel as if I had everything I needed for success."

Tyler, Premier Health

"Everyone has been approachable, resourceful, patient, and informative."

Antoine, Martin Luther King, Jr.
Community Hospital

"My preceptor built my comfort level in asking questions and being able to do procedures without being talked down to."

Jolane, Arkansas Children's Hospital

▼ VERSANT ACCELERATES COMPETENCY-BASED STAFFING

From Versant's inception in 1999, our mission has been to fundamentally transform healthcare outcomes by developing the workforce's ability to provide safe, efficient, competency-based care. By creating a competency-based solution versus a time-structured learning model, Versant maintains the delivery of safe patient care that is reliable and consistent across the board.

At the outset of the pandemic, we immediately offered a new online solution that could be accessed from anywhere. Versant's Rapid Competency Validation for Clinical Practice™ is uniquely suited to providing staffing solutions in a time of crisis, now and in the future, allowing for aggressive deployment of staffing resources.

With Versant, our partners can implement a competency baseline rapidly across every healthcare professional throughout the organization. To further ensure retention and well-being, self-care and professional development components are included.



The pandemic allowed us to see how our program, and participants, operate in a crisis. During 2020, it was this ability that allowed our partners to respond rapidly while effectively remediating gaps. At any given moment, nursing leadership could access the staff they required efficiently and with confidence.

From nurse leader testimony, and from our 2020 metrics, we believe we hit the mark. Our competency-based solution provided a systematic approach to validate nurses across the continuum of care, ensuring competency that improved patient safety and instilled confidence. It might be years before we know the full extent of how our programs helped, but the numbers suggest a positive story.

▼ HOW NURSE LEADERS ARE TAKING ACTION



Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Hospital

Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Hospital (MLKCH) is a safety-net hospital serving 1.3 million residents in South Los Angeles, one of the worst COVID-19 hotspots. For most of 2020, MLKCH scrambled to ensure they had supplies, staff, and the physical space needed to care for patients. Fortunately, they made the decision in 2016 to focus on patient safety by ensuring the competency of every nurse. As a result, they have been able to recruit a high number of talented nurses year after year and maintain high satisfaction and self-efficacy scores. The retention rate has reached 94% for Year 2 as a result of leadership's focus on safety and the creation of an inclusive environment.



Baxter Regional Medical Center

Serving a 14-county rural community, **Baxter Regional Medical Center** has a severely limited applicant pool making recruiting and retention critical. Struggling with both, a situational analysis showed a lack of engagement and collaboration as well as uncivil behaviors and training deficiencies. With COVID-19, Baxter found itself as the community's center for patient care and vaccination coordination. Having implemented Versant's competency-based residency program that improved engagement and satisfaction, Baxter was well-positioned to take on the challenge with less than 10% turnover and strong managers that had come up through the Versant residency program.



Children's Hospital Los Angeles is where our story began in 1999. For over 20 years, the residency program at Children's Hospital has supported the development of their nurses to ensure that they have the expertise to provide quality care for children with the most complex and challenging medical conditions. The Versant residency program provides a foundation for their excellence of care as they have managed to retain quality nurses for decades. To date, as a result of the program's longevity, the average tenure of a Children's Hospital nurse is close to 10 years.

▼ GOING FORWARD

This is our first annual report, and it comes at a unique time in Versant's history. It is undoubtedly a unique experience for all organizations around the world. We cannot overstate our respect for the nursing community and all frontline workers who have faced a deadly pandemic with selflessness and great courage. We owe them a measure of gratitude that cannot possibly be weighed.

We have said that 2020 revealed to us the effectiveness of our program. While healthcare systems have been overwhelmed, we have had the honor of seeing what our hard work and dedication has accomplished in a time of crisis. We are beyond grateful for our partners and for the opportunity to work with them for years and, in some cases, decades. Our work has been made meaningful because of the men and women we work with and the nurses we help support.

We aim to be the gold standard in competency-based transition programs, but we know the path is not easy. After two decades preparing new grads for the difficult task of nursing, we know that a program's success depends upon the commitment of everyone. From our team, to our partners' leadership and preceptors, to Versant managers and client success teams, the success of our competency-based program depends on cohesion and a desire to transform healthcare. Our vision, in the end, is to ensure the competency and readiness of every nurse.

When we consider these trying times, we must accept the reality of healthcare's shortcomings. Nurses are overworked. The experience gap is increasing as more senior nurses exit. Healthcare organizations are understaffed, and not enough nurses are in the pipeline. There is a genuine concern for what the nursing shortage may bring, but with COVID-19 it is evident that many of healthcare's greatest vulnerabilities are here and must be addressed.

We hope that our system may benefit organizations as they look to the future, identifying ways to solve the emotional health and well-being crisis while improving staffing models. We know a lot of work is to be done, but our sole purpose in healthcare is to help. It is possible to change how we operate as an industry, and we know that a competency-based model is one piece of the puzzle. We also know that it is an effective instrument in the effort to establish a standardized staffing program that produces the best nurses for the best healthcare.

▼ SOURCES

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