



**ONE MILLION NURSES
RETIRING:
PREPARE AND RETAIN THE
NEXT GENERATION**





The U.S. nursing workforce is at a critical inflection point. As health systems face rising turnover, burnout, and an impending wave of retirements, new clinical nurses report feeling only partially prepared for the realities of modern healthcare. While clinical competence remains essential, growing evidence shows that professional skills—such as communication, critical thinking, resiliency, and navigating complexity—are equally vital to patient outcomes, nurse satisfaction, and retention.

This whitepaper shares data from Lead for Care’s accredited leadership development and mentorship program. This report spans multiple years, numerous and geographically disperse client organizations, and includes both programmatic and external outcomes data. The findings demonstrate that short-form, practical learning paired with guided mentorship significantly improves nurse competency, confidence, professional clarity, and retention—while also strengthening organizational culture and reducing workforce instability.

The Challenge Facing Today’s Nursing Workforce

A growing body of research points to a deepening nursing crisis. An estimated one million nurses are expected to retire by 2030, while many newly licensed nurses leave the profession within their first few years of practice.¹ This turnover creates instability for care teams, financial strain for organizations, and risks to patient quality and safety.

Research increasingly shows that nurses’ ability to deliver high-quality care depends not only on clinical skills, but also on so-called “soft” or professional skills. These include self-awareness, flexibility, communication, critical thinking, collaboration, and resilience. Studies link these competencies to higher job satisfaction, healthier workplace cultures, stronger teamwork, and improved patient outcomes.²⁻⁶

Despite this evidence, most development pathways for nurses—particularly new graduate nurses—remain heavily focused on clinical task mastery. As a result, many direct care nurses report feeling only partially prepared to navigate the interpersonal, organizational, and bedside demands of daily practice.

“From this program I’ve learned how being a leader doesn’t mean having a formal position, leadership skills impact patient care. As nurses, patient focused care is engraved in our brains, so it was nice to learn how leadership skills can positively affect the patient experience and our day to day work.”

- Mentee participant

“Improving nursing skills occurs at every shift and it is important to continue to develop leadership skills for better patient care and outcomes.”

- Mentee participant





Redefining Leadership at the Bedside

At Lead for Care, we see leadership as not defined by title or position. Instead, leadership is understood as the mindset and behaviors nurses bring to their work every day—how they communicate, collaborate, advocate, solve problems, and support both patients and colleagues.

Lead for Care's Bedside Leadership Framework



These competencies enable nurses to influence care quality, team dynamics, and patient experience—regardless of whether they ever pursue a formal leadership role.

What the Data Show: Nurses Want Leadership Skills

Lead for Care's data reveal strong demand for leadership development among bedside nurses:



Nurses consistently rate communication, collaboration, and self-awareness as strengths, while understanding the business of healthcare ranks lowest—yet shows the greatest growth potential when intentionally addressed.

These findings suggest a significant opportunity: when nurses are given accessible, relevant leadership development, they not only grow professionally but also immediately strengthen the care environment around them.





The Lead for Care Model: Mentor-Enabled Nurse Development

Lead for Care delivers leadership development through a simple, scalable, and nurse-centered model anchored on three pillars:



At Lead for Care, we pull two vital initiatives together (foundational leadership skill development and mentorship) into a cohort-style program. The curriculum includes nine core modules, covering topics such as self-awareness, communication, critical thinking, problem-solving, resilience, and professional impact.

LFC was custom-built for nurses to develop a leadership mindset through three key elements. By combining (1) 10-minute microlearning videos, (2) real-time application exercises, and (3) guided mentorship, we ensure mentees in the program develop leadership skills they can immediately put into practice. Mentees are empowered through building a leadership mindset, increasing their leadership confidence, growing professional relationships, and developing a deeper passion for the nursing profession.

LFC also trains mentors on effective mentorship strategies and provides a host of resources to support them in serving as a mentor in the LFC Program and beyond (from promoting and finding hidden mentors in your organization, to resources to initiate conversations, build rapport, and navigate mentee/mentor connections). Mentors do not have to go through the program beforehand and are given prompts for all touchpoints in the program, making serving as a mentor effective and efficient.

“Being able to listen to the modules was really helpful. I was able to listen to them as I'm driving. They were easily accessible and easy to listen to.”

– Mentee Participant





Program Outcomes

→ Mentees

Participation in the Lead for Care program drives measurable growth:

-  Average **12% improvement** across all nine leadership competencies
-  **85% of participants** report confidence in leadership skills post-program
-  **82% prefer** the combined approach of content plus mentorship
-  **90%** find developing leadership skills valuable

Qualitative feedback reinforces these results. Nurses report increased awareness of burnout, stronger communication and teamwork skills, and greater confidence in navigating complex clinical and organizational challenges. They also highlight the value mentors bring in their development journeys.

Importantly, the program helps nurses gain clarity about their career paths—identifying who is ready for formal leadership roles and who prefers to remain in direct care while excelling at the bedside.

“It was nice to have the mentor meetings with guided prompts and be able to meet someone you don't know and otherwise wouldn't have met.”

– Mentee Participant

“I loved the mentor connections. I felt like my mentor genuinely cared and was supportive. It was very helpful to have someone not on my unit to be a sounding board and help me identify my strengths and passions in my career and how to pursue a career path.”

– Mentee Participant

From this program I've learned how leadership, even if not at the bedside directly, impacts patient care. As nurses, patient focused care is engraved in our brains, so it was nice to learn how our leadership towards our peers and team can positively affect the patient experience.

- Mentee participant





→ Mentors

Mentors benefit significantly as well:

- ✔ **88% would recommend** the program
- ✔ **92% are likely** to continue serving as mentors
- ✔ **82% report growth** in their mentoring skills
- ✔ **84% find** program resources helpful

Many mentors describe the experience as unexpectedly rewarding, strengthening professional relationships and reinforcing their own leadership and coaching capabilities.

“I appreciated how the program helped me develop a positive and productive professional relationship with my mentee. The program was very helpful in guiding him on his new journey.”

-Mentor Participant

“I just wanted to let you know what a wonderful experience Lead for Care has been thus far. I hadn't expected this program to be just as rewarding for the mentors as the mentees!”

- Mentor Participant

→ Organizational Impact

Organizations partnering with Lead for Care report meaningful workforce and financial benefits:

- ✔ **Retention rates of 92–99%** among program participants (up to two years post-program)
- ✔ Calculated savings of **\$600,000 to over \$1 million** through retention alone
- ✔ Improvements in survey results tied to culture, satisfaction, engagement, empowerment, and resilience
- ✔ **100% of program leads** would recommend the Lead for Care program

By handling operational aspects of leadership development and mentorship, Lead for Care enables internal leaders to focus on strategic priorities such as career ladders, Magnet designation, and workforce stabilization.

“Working with the Lead for Care team allows me to strategically align our programs with vital initiatives like career advancement, retention, and mentorship. LFC handles operational tasks, freeing me to focus on career ladder alignment, magnet designation efforts, and sharing results with leaders. I value seeing our nurses discover their “why” in nursing and excel in their careers, something made possible by partnering with Lead for Care.”

- Program lead, large hospital in southeast



Key Takeaways

National data underscore the urgent need to expand nurse development beyond clinical skills alone. Building leadership skills—delivered in practical, accessible ways, and with mentorship connections—plays a critical role in retaining nurses, strengthening bedside care, and preparing the workforce for the future.

Lead for Care's outcomes demonstrate that:

Nurses value leadership development

Micro-leadership content learning paired with mentorship works

Both mentees and mentors grow

Organizations see lasting cultural and financial returns

Questions to Consider

1. Is your organization's early career nurse turnover above national averages?
2. Are current development programs focused primarily on clinical skills?
3. Do nurses report dissatisfaction with professional growth opportunities?
4. Are mentorship and leadership development programs focused solely on formal leaders?

If the answer to any of these is 'yes', Lead for Care's Mentor-Supported Bedside Leadership Development Program may be the missing piece to unlock retention, professional satisfaction, and cultural change.

"Lead for Care delivers outcomes we couldn't achieve on our own — from retention to recruitment and competency development."

- VP Nursing, large healthcare organization in southwest

Learn More

To learn how Lead for Care can support your workforce through scalable leadership development and mentorship, contact:

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Citations

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