



Navigating the
Age-Diverse
Healthcare
Workforce

Considerations for supporting each generation in the workplace to increase employee engagement and retention.

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Introduction

There is an expected shortage of **3.2 million** healthcare workers by 2026.²



In today's ever-evolving healthcare landscape, senior leaders in the healthcare services industry find themselves navigating largely uncharted waters, grappling with the task of managing staffing needs while continuing to provide quality patient care.

As the industry contends with unprecedented challenges, one factor stands out prominently: the "great resignation." This phenomenon, capturing widespread attention, has seen a significant number of experienced nurses opting for early retirement while new graduates explore alternative career paths in light of the pandemic.

The "Great Resignation"

Coined in 2021, refers to the notable surge in voluntary job resignations during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. It represents a widespread phenomenon where workers leave their jobs to seek better work-life balance, fulfillment, and career opportunities.¹

At GHR Healthcare, we understand the profound challenges today's healthcare leaders are facing. Among their primary concerns is the urgent shortage and retention of full-time staff, which directly impacts their capacity to maintain accessible healthcare services and improve patient outcomes.

Strained for Staff

According to AACN's report on 2021-2022 Enrollment and Graduations in Baccalaureate and Graduate Programs in Nursing, U.S. nursing schools turned away 91,938 qualified applications from baccalaureate and graduate nursing programs in 2021 due to an insufficient number of faculty, clinical sites, classroom space, clinical preceptors, and budget constraints.³

70%

of organizations surveyed said leading multigenerational workforces would be important or very important for their success over the next year.⁴

6%

said their team leaders were equipped to effectively manage a multigenerational workforce.⁴

In this whitepaper, we delve into a pivotal aspect: understanding the diverse dynamics of all age groups. It is essential to grasp their unique attitudes, values, realities, and goals, as this understanding, when effectively applied, can significantly bolster retention, attraction, and decrease the costs associated with churn. Moreover, it can help reduce reliance on contingent labor, fostering a more stable workforce that can better meet the demands of the healthcare industry.



The Advantages of Generational Diversity in the Workplace

How healthcare leaders can tap into the power of their age-diverse workforce.

THE AGE-DIVERSE WORKFORCE

Today's healthcare workforce spans across multiple generations, each with its distinct characteristics and perspectives. Understanding these generational dynamics is crucial for effectively managing the workforce and ensuring overall success. Let's explore the generational realities and their implications for staffing in the healthcare industry.

ENHANCED PATIENT CARE

Diverse generations within healthcare teams offer multiple perspectives on healthcare needs, resulting in a wholistic view of the patient. This approach ensures personalized attention, considering the unique preferences, communication styles, and healthcare expectations of each generation.

89% of survey respondents (9 in 10) considered generation diversity in the workplace as something positive.⁵

87% of survey takers viewed it as a chance for different generations to learn from each other.⁵

KNOWLEDGE SHARING

Each generation brings a unique set of skills, experiences, and perspectives to the table. Younger generations contribute modern technology expertise, while older generations offer extensive clinical knowledge. This knowledge-sharing fosters collective growth of skills and expertise.



IMPROVED PROBLEM-SOLVING

Collaboration among diverse generations brings diverse perspectives to problem-solving, stimulating creativity, critical thinking, and innovative solutions. By considering multiple viewpoints, healthcare teams can effectively address challenges and make well-informed decisions.

“Statements such as 'he’s too old to learn a new computer program' or 'she’s too young to lead a team' diminish the value and qualifications of the people involved. An employee’s knowledge and experience increase with age. **And a young person with strong skills and talent should not be held back because of his or her age.**”⁵

– LORI A. TRAWINSKI, PH.D., AARP PUBLIC POLICY INSTITUTE

INCREASED EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AND RETENTION

A healthcare workplace that values generational diversity fosters inclusivity, leading to employee engagement, job satisfaction, and a sense of belonging. This inclusive environment attracts and retains top talent, resulting in a stable and skilled workforce.

ADAPTABILITY TO THE CHANGING HEALTHCARE LANDSCAPE

Generational diversity equips the healthcare workforce to navigate the evolving healthcare landscape. Younger generations offer fresh insights into emerging technologies and evolving patient needs, while older generations provide historical context and industry expertise. This combination enables healthcare organizations to stay current, embrace innovation, and remain responsive to the dynamic nature of healthcare delivery.

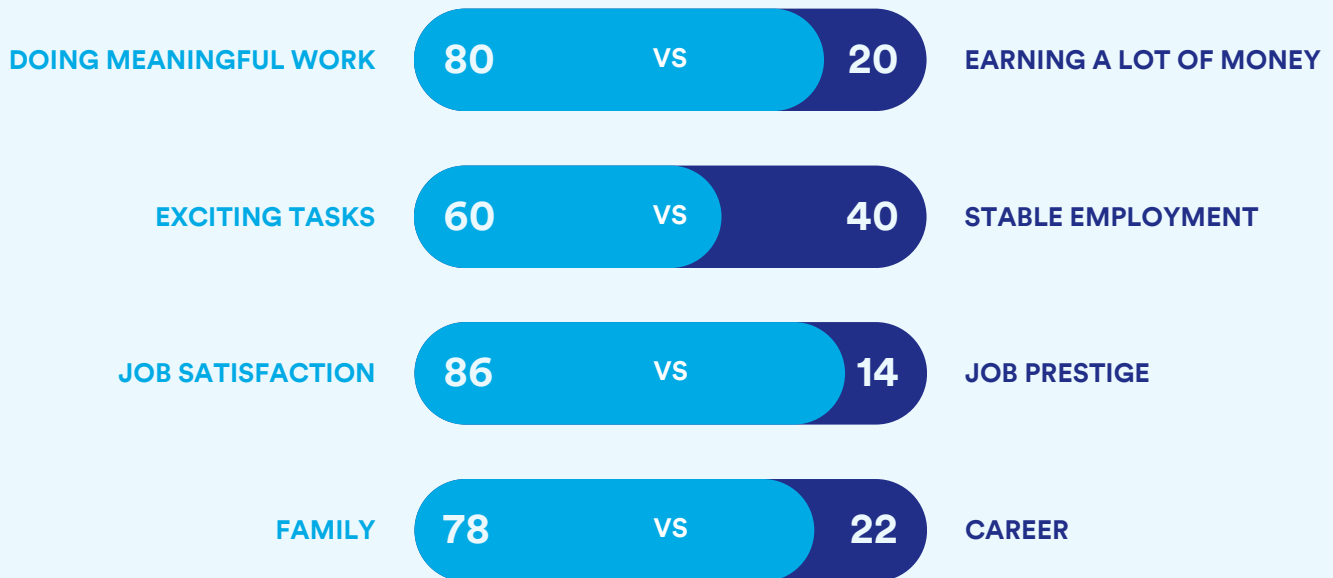
Generation Z
will compose
30%
of the workforce
by 2030.⁶

38%
of Gen Z plans to
pursue a career in
healthcare.⁶



A Snapshot of Employee Values

Before we dive into profiles of each generation's values, priorities, and perspectives, see what a survey of participants from all generations reveals:



5

32%

More than 1 in 3 Millennials valued career higher than family.

48%

Nearly a half of Gen Xers preferred stable employment to doing exciting tasks.

92%

More than 9 in 10 survey takers declared that work-life balance was important to them.

5



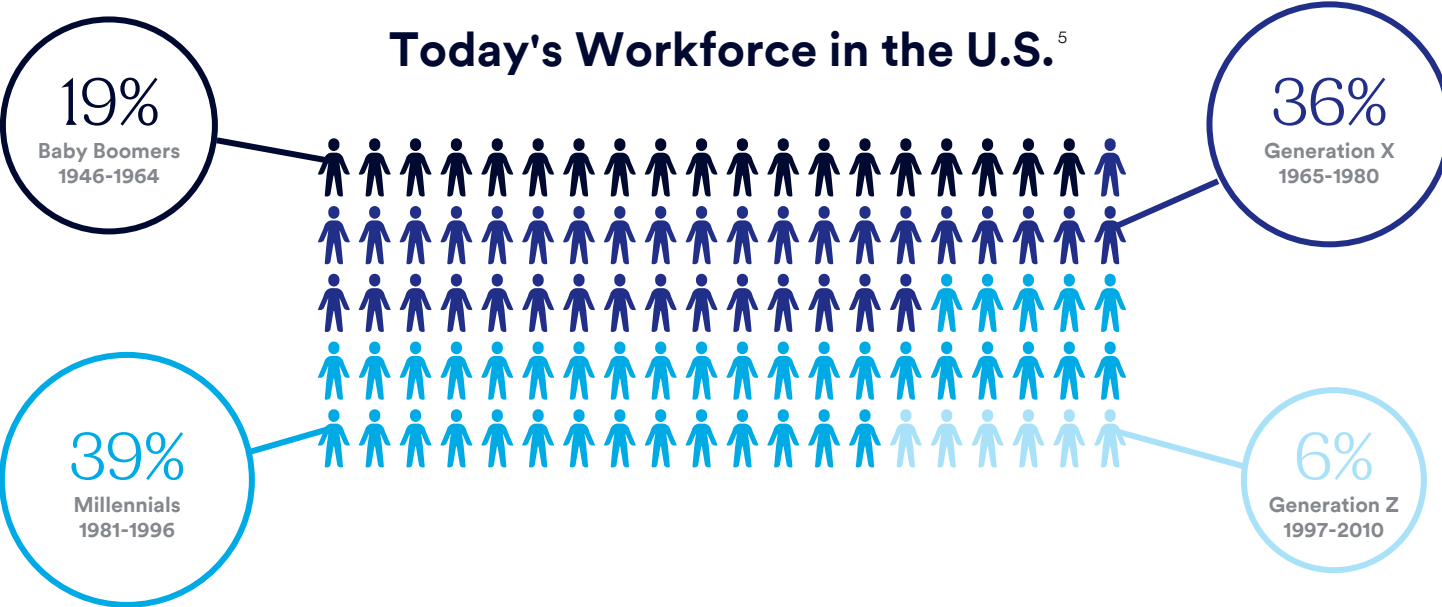
"While Gen-Z's viral phrase "OK, Boomer"—and Boomers' swift comeback "OK, Zoomer"—may be unique to our time, this kind of intergenerational friction isn't. Even Boomers faced similar criticism when they began working alongside members of the post-war Silent and Greatest Generations. It's just human nature to be wary of something new, especially when it's the next generation energetically championing a different way of thinking and working." ⁷



The Different Generations in Today's Workforce

Before we delve into the profiles of each generation in the workplace, it is important to acknowledge that discussing generational diversity involves making generalizations, as they can provide valuable insights into broad trends; however, it is crucial to remember that every individual is unique and should be treated as such.

Now, let's explore the characteristics, experiences, and expectations of each generation to gain a deeper understanding of how to foster an inclusive and collaborative workplace for all.



Baby Boomers
1946 - 1964

- DEPENDABLE
- RESPONSIBLE
- COMPETITIVE
- HIGH ACHIEVERS
- TEAM-ORIENTED

Generation X
1965 - 1980

- INDEPENDENT
- RESILIENT
- PRAGMATIC
- CONNECTORS
- GOAL-ORIENTED

Millennials
1981 - 1996

- EMPATHETIC
- TECH-SAVVY
- COMMUNICATORS
- RESOURCEFUL
- CHANGE-MAKERS

Generation Z
1997- 2010

- DIGITAL NATIVES
- PASSIONATE
- INCLUSIVE
- INNOVATORS
- SELF-STARTERS



The Baby Boom Generation

(Baby Boomers, Boomers)

1946
1964

With 75 million Baby Boomers retiring by 2030, The Great Retirement is looking to supersede The Great Resignation as the biggest hiring trend for 2022.⁸



Meet Richard,

a dedicated and highly experienced ICU RN who has spent 36 years at a community teaching hospital and is approaching retirement.

He is respected and admired by his junior colleagues, who seek his guidance and advice. As his retirement approaches in two years, Richard sees himself as a mentor figure, not just an employee. He finds joy in guiding others and making a positive impact on their lives.

having spent his earlier years focused on climbing the career ladder, Richard now approaches each day with a sense of commitment and purpose. He remains optimistic and calm, even when faced with new technology platforms or processes that he believes are premature and not adequately tested or trained. He's never hesitant to express his opinions to his unit manager and hopes that his feedback is considered in the future.

Richard values the retirement planning assistance provided by his employer, especially at this stage of his life where he prioritizes spending time with his children and grandchildren. After years of being a hardworking professional, Richard appreciates the flexible scheduling and extended PTO offered to him as a token of appreciation for his loyalty and service. He takes pride in his contributions to the hospital and looks forward to the next phase of his life.



INFLUENCES

- Vietnam War
- Civil Rights
- Women's Rights
- Gay Rights
- Space travel
- TV & movies
- Rock n' roll culture
- Post-WWII economic boom

Only 36% of baby boomers say they are confident using new technology.⁹

VALUES

- Loyalty and stability
- Relationships (think: before the rise of social media)
- Quality and competency
- Hard work - sacrificing for success

CHARACTERISTICS

- Dedicated, hard-working, optimistic, team-players
- Effective communicators and relationship builders
- Tend to stay with their employer longer
- Appreciate the opportunity to share their expertise

CONCERNS

- Leaving a mark on the industry/workplace
- Ability to retire
- Quality of life and relationships
- Policies affecting them
- Keeping up with the rapid speed of technological advancement

Workplace Considerations for Employers

- Implement succession planning strategies to transfer knowledge as they retire.
- Consider flexible working arrangements to accommodate their healthcare needs, energy levels, and shifting values.
- Recognize and appreciate their experience through mentorship programs.
- Offer opportunities for leadership roles to leverage their expertise.
- Provide training and support with technology to help them adapt to their changing work environment.
- Foster a respectful and inclusive work environment that values their unique contributions.



Generation X

(Gen X, The Latchkey Generation)

1965
1980

IN THE WORKPLACE

Gen X

When asked about their professional skills, 850 Gen Xers ranked them in the following order:¹⁰

①

communication skills

②

analytical thinking

③

problem solving

④

logical thinking

⑤

researching information



Meet Tamara,

a devoted respiratory therapist with a strong work ethic and a passion for helping others. She works at an acute care pediatric unit, where her expertise in respiratory therapy provides comfort to young patients and their families. She's able to adapt to changing staffing ratios and reporting processes, solving problems as they come up with a calm and focused demeanor.

Outside of work, Tamara is a loving mother to two active teenagers. Despite her busy schedule, she believes in maintaining a well-rounded life for personal growth and fulfillment— often engaging in fitness activities and spending time outdoors with her family.

As her children approach college age, Tamara plans to repurpose her time and rediscover herself. She intends to revisit old hobbies, prioritize savings, reassess her retirement planning, and potentially adjust her income to support her children's higher education.

In the workplace, Tamara believes in transparent communication, teamwork, and a collaborative work environment— she might struggle in an environment where information is not shared openly or where individuals are not encouraged to work together effectively. She values career advancement opportunities and continuous skill development to remain relevant in the job market. Having experienced times of economic uncertainty, job stability is important to her. She values employers who prioritize retention, creating thriving work environments, and having a sense of financial security.



INFLUENCES

- Cold War
- 1970s Energy Crisis
- Cable television
- MTV
- Grunge music
- 1980s economic recession
- Rise of technology (personal computers, internet)
- Dual-income households
- Latchkey kids

"Sandwiched between Baby Boomers and Millennials. The neglected middle child. Often considered the Forgotten Generation."

In a survey of 850 Gen Xers, 79% of respondents agreed that Gen X is the forgotten generation.¹⁰

VALUES

- Work-independence and self-sufficiency
- Entrepreneurship and innovation
- Adaptability and resourcefulness
- Honesty and integrity

CHARACTERISTICS

- Pragmatic, self-reliant, goal-oriented
- Resourceful and resilient
- Tech-adaptive
- Value competence and results over tenure
- Comfortable with diverse work styles and collaboration, natural leader

CONCERNS

- Job security and financial stability
- Balancing family responsibilities with career advancement
- Keeping up with technological advancements
- Financial preparedness and retirement planning
- Maintaining clear communication and collaboration

Workplace Considerations for Employers

- Provide opportunities for professional growth and advancement.
- Embrace technology and provide training to keep them up-to-date.
- Model work-life balance and encourage the use of their breaks, PTO.
- Encourage collaboration and provide a variety of work styles.
- Support their entrepreneurial spirit and innovation.
- Offer retirement planning resources and financial wellness programs.



Millennials

(Generation Y)

1981
1996

Millennials are
17%
more likely to
seek career
development
opportunities
than other
groups.¹¹



Meet Anya,

a skilled and compassionate cardiac nurse from the millennial generation. She excels in dynamic patient care; blending technology, empathy, and experience to deliver top-quality healthcare. Her patient-centered approach ensures clear understanding of treatment plans by simplifying complex medical information for her patients.

Outside of nursing, Anya gracefully manages both work and motherhood, being an attentive parent to her 2-year-old son. Thanks to the flexibility offered by her organization, she can easily swap shifts with coworkers when necessary. The provided app simplifies shift management, allowing her to integrate work and family life seamlessly. This balance gives her the peace of mind she needs to provide high-quality patient care with a growth mindset, compassion, and dedication, knowing she can be there for her family when needed.

Anya's dedication to patient care and innovation can be hindered by administrative obstacles. She wishes her employer would recognize the benefits of user-friendly digital platforms for documentation and streamlined approval processes. An advocate of patient-centered care, Anya desires greater involvement of frontline healthcare providers, including herself, in decision-making to improve healthcare solutions with their valuable insights.



INFLUENCES

- Digital revolution
- Globalization
- 9/11 terrorist attacks
- The Great Recession
- Social media
- Diverse family structures
- 1st account news consumption
- Growing concern for environmental issues and climate change

88% of millennials “wish they could, within certain limits, have greater opportunity to start and finish work at the times they choose.”¹²

VALUES

- Work-life integration and autonomy
- Communication and fostering relationships
- Purpose and societal contribution
- Diversity and inclusion
- Efficiency and improvement

CHARACTERISTICS

- Digitally resourceful, creators of digital communities
- Collaborative and team-oriented; prefer to leverage strengths of collective
- Seek continuous learning and personal development
- Value social impact and ethical practices
- Hard-working; define success by purpose, advancement, and quality of life.

CONCERNS

- Work-life balance, burnout, mental health support
- Student loan debt, inflation, and cost of healthcare, financial stability
- Career progression and job security
- Workplace diversity and inclusion Technology limitations and outdated systems

Workplace Considerations for Employers

- Provide flexible scheduling and coverage options to support work-life balance.
- Offer clear career development programs for continuous learning and growth.
- Foster open and transparent communication within the organization.
- Implement regular feedback and recognition to boost morale.
- Utilize millennials' tech-savvy skills for sustainable innovation.
- Offer competitive compensation and benefits, including healthcare coverage and parental leave.
- Prioritize Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) to improve retention and align with social and environmental impact initiatives.



Generation Z

(Gen Z)

1997
2010

Gen Z

When it comes to favorite job perks, Gen Zers pick:⁵

flexible schedules
(59%)

remote work
(53%)

The key reasons for which Gen Z workers quit are:

a clash of values between them and an employer
(72%)

poor work-life balance
(50%)

a toxic work environment
(47%)



Meet Luis,

a tech-savvy and forward-thinking X-ray technologist from Gen Z. He operates cutting-edge imaging equipment with precision, contributing to exceptional patient care and ensuring a caring and welcoming experience for his patients.

Luis is driven by ambition and maintains open communication with his manager, embracing personal growth and welcoming new challenges in the ever-evolving healthcare field. Besides his technical expertise, he takes immense pride in leading the creation of a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Employee Resource Group (ERG) at his workplace, striving to foster a positive and inclusive work environment.

Outside of work, Luis finds joy in organizing and volunteering at community events, fueled by his passion for making a positive impact and giving back to society. During his free time, he stays connected with friends on social media, engaging with comedic and educational content related to his role and other interests, which he often applies to his work.

Without meaningful projects, like the DEI ERG, Luis could become frustrated at work. Opportunities to engage in such projects, be involved in decision-making, and make the workplace a more inclusive, flexible environment allow Luis to show up at work eager to contribute and leave feeling fulfilled.



INFLUENCES

- Climate Change
- Streaming
- Mass shootings
- Declining middle class
- Digital business
- Mental health awareness
- LGBTQ Rights
- 1st hand news
- Media consumption
- The first generation to grow up digitally immersed

95% of Gen Zers want to do a meaningful job that goes beyond making ends meet.⁵

VALUES

- Inclusivity and diversity
- Work-life blend and flexibility
- Technological fluency and digital connection
- Interactive learning environments
- Social and environmental activism
- Autonomy, trust/respect, and efficiency

CHARACTERISTICS

- Digital natives with a deeply ingrained ability to multitask
- Entrepreneurial and self-starting
- Motivated by purpose and authenticity
- Prefer collaborative, interactive, and socially conscious environments.

CONCERNS

- Finding meaningful work and career opportunities aligned with their values.
- Mental health and well-being in a hyper-connected world
- Student loan debt and financial stability
- Climate change and sustainability
- Constant adaptation to an ever-changing technological landscape

Workplace Considerations for Employers

- Provide opportunities for innovation of task completion and autonomy of time.
- Emphasize social and environmental impact in the company's mission.
- Integrate mental health and well-being in benefit programs and work policies.
- Leverage their need for efficiency and their entrepreneurial mindset: listen to their ideas, and consider a results-only-work-environment (ROWE) mindset for nonclinical departments.
- Facilitate a strong digital presence and foster digital collaboration and community.
- Provide mentorship and guidance to help them navigate the professional world effectively.



Best Practices in a Multigenerational Workplace

The generational turnover in the healthcare industry presents significant challenges in staffing, with potential shortages and knowledge gaps. To address these issues, healthcare service providers must take proactive measures to attract and retain talent while ensuring consistent quality patient care. Here are some strategies to consider:

ESTABLISH EFFECTIVE SUCCESSION PLANNING

Implement comprehensive succession plans to mitigate the impact of retiring Traditionalists and Baby Boomers. Identify potential successors, provide mentoring opportunities, and facilitate knowledge transfer through structured programs.

EMBRACE TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENTS WITH DIVERSE INPUT

Leverage technology to bridge generational gaps and enhance communication, collaboration, and productivity. Integrate digital tools, electronic health records, and telehealth solutions to streamline workflows and appeal to tech-savvy younger generations. Invite each generation to the table, and know what for. By leveraging each generation's strengths, you find innovative solutions with practicality regarding timelines, training requirements, and mitigating risk.

FOSTER A CULTURE OF LEARNING AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Offer continuous learning and development programs to nurture the skills and career aspirations of your staff. Take inventory and have a way to measure the success of these programs to ensure your limited resources are going to the worthiest causes. Engaging and supporting a multigenerational workforce requires a multi-pronged approach. Understanding and applying this will help stabilize your workforce for years to come.



PROMOTE WORK-LIFE BALANCE AND FLEXIBILITY

For Healthcare Service Providers, it's a daunting topic, but because not all will try, the smallest initiatives can have amazing impacts of productivity, happiness levels, and mutual respect with staff. Recognize the importance of work-life balance and flexibility in attracting and retaining talent. Provide flexible scheduling solutions with an easy-to-use app, remote work opportunities when applicable, and wellness initiatives to accommodate the diverse needs and preferences of different generations.

"When it comes to age diversity specifically, one report noted that **only 8% of organizations include age as part of their DEI strategy.**

By incorporating age into your conception and definition of workplace diversity, you can create an inclusive and supportive team environment that recognizes team members as individuals rather than generational caricatures."¹³

EMPHASIZE PURPOSE AND SOCIAL IMPACT

Highlight the meaningful nature of healthcare work and the positive impact on patients' lives. Showcase the organization's mission, community involvement, and opportunities for social impact to appeal to younger generations seeking purposeful work.



Managing and leveraging the generational diversity within the healthcare workforce is paramount for organizations striving to provide exceptional patient care and attract top talent. Understanding the unique values, attitudes, and challenges associated with each generation empowers healthcare leaders to implement effective strategies that support and engage their diverse workforce. By embracing generational diversity and cultivating a culture of collaboration and inclusivity, healthcare organizations position themselves for success in an ever-changing industry. Moreover, proactively addressing the implications of the "great resignation" and tailoring strategies to meet the needs of different generations will help organizations overcome staffing challenges and foster an environment conducive to delivering consistent, high-quality care.

Key Takeaways

- Generational diversity in the healthcare workforce offers advantages such as enhanced patient care, knowledge-sharing, and improved problem-solving abilities.
- Embracing generational diversity promotes employee engagement and retention, leading to a stable and skilled workforce.
- Each generation has unique characteristics and workplace considerations that need to be understood and accommodated.
- Baby Boomers value stability, loyalty, and teamwork. Succession planning and flexible working arrangements are essential for this generation.
- Generation X seeks work-life balance, professional development, and open communication in the workplace.
- Millennials (Generation Y) prioritize work-life integration, personal growth, and collaboration. They value digital tools and meaningful work.
- Generation Z is tech-savvy, seeks diversity and inclusion, and desires flexibility and career advancement.
- Common challenges in a multigenerational healthcare workforce include differences in communication styles, work expectations, and technology usage.
- Best practices for managing a multigenerational workforce include establishing effective succession planning, embracing technology advancements, fostering a culture of learning and development, and promoting work-life balance and flexibility.
- By implementing these strategies, healthcare service providers can attract and retain talent while ensuring consistent quality patient care in an age-diverse workforce.






We are GHR Healthcare.

Since 1993, GHR Healthcare has been a reliable provider of integrated staffing and workforce management solutions for the healthcare services industry. Our comprehensive, technology-driven solutions empower healthcare workers to advance their careers, while HSPs benefit from our committed partnership in addressing all aspects of staff recruitment, development, and management.

At GHR Healthcare, we believe that success in healthcare depends on positive outcomes for candidates, healthcare facilities, and patients. That's why we prioritize insights-driven, collaborative partnerships at the core of our operations, measuring our success by the success of those we serve.

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