While health care is projected to be the fastest-growing industry between 2014 and 2024,¹ there is a growing shortage of perioperative nurses—20% of those currently employed in this specialty are expected to retire in the next five years.²³⁴ Simultaneously, the demand for perioperative nurses is on the rise—growing 1% to 2% each year—and it is anticipated that this upward trend will continue as baby boomers live longer and surgical volumes increase.²

To help you succeed in this challenging environment, this ebook presents you with an overview of today's perioperative nursing workforce and some of the latest recruitment and retention strategies that will help you build a high-performance team.

**The topics that follow include:**
1. Assessing the perioperative nurse shortage and its impact on business
2. How to prepare for the generational shift in the American workforce
3. 10 ways to attract and retain millennial nurses

20% of those currently employed in this specialty are expected to retire in the next five years.
The shortages in perioperative nursing are a result of many trends that are intensifying in the workplace today, including:

- decreased exposure to perioperative nursing in both classroom and clinical settings,
- a perioperative workforce that is aging and nearing retirement,
- a patient population that requires more intense nursing care and complex interventions, and
- technological advancements that require intense education and skill adaptations.

The perioperative nursing shortage is not only a staffing issue but an economic one as well. Surgery departments are often referred to as the economic engines of health care facilities as they can generate as much as 60% of a hospital’s revenue. According to Susan Root, MSN, RN, CNOR, manager of perioperative education at AORN, it can cost up to $120,000 to train and prepare a new perioperative nurse. It’s a very worthy investment to properly prepare your staff, and a more lucrative one if you can retain those you hire and train, particularly when it can take an average of 94 days to fill an OR nurse position (see Figure 1).5

Figure 1
RN Recruitment Difficulty Index in Days

RNAs in surgical services continue to be the most difficult to recruit. To strengthen the bottom line, hospitals need to build retention capacity, manage vacancy rates, bolster recruitment initiatives, and control labor expenses.
In 2016, the millennials (born 1980-2000) were the largest generation to enter the workforce since the baby boomers, and this number is expected to pass boomer numbers. At the same time, a large wave of baby boomers have arrived at retirement age, and the perioperative specialty is starting to experience a significant loss in clinical knowledge. See more statistics about America’s perioperative workforce in Figure 2. To address this generational shift—and the growing nursing shortage—employers must learn how to attract millennials and create opportunities for a transfer in knowledge.

**AORN’S RECOMMENDED SOLUTION TO RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION PROBLEMS—EDUCATE YOUR NURSES**

Periop 101 is a comprehensive, blended educational program developed by AORN’s expert perioperative nurse-authors.

Periop 101 is based on AORN’s latest, evidence-based Guidelines for Perioperative Practice. There are currently over 12,000 Periop 101 graduates and counting. This program, featuring nearly 30 learning modules, combines a standardized, evidence-based online curriculum and textbook readings with hands-on skills labs and a clinical practicum led by experienced perioperative nurses.

**Who Should Take Periop 101?**

Hospitals and ambulatory surgery centers offer this program for:

- Novice perioperative nurses
- Experienced nurses switching specialties
- Nurses returning to work after an extended absence as a refresher course
- Experienced nurses who never had any formal, didactic education to improve their patient assessment, decision-making, and clinical reasoning skills
- Entire OR nursing staffs for educational consistency and to aid in prevention of potential risk issues

Learn more at aorn.org/periop-101

**HOW TO PREPARE FOR THE GENERATIONAL SHIFT IN THE AMERICAN WORKFORCE**

64% of millennials say it’s a priority for them to make the world a better place.

79% of millennials want a boss to serve more as a coach or mentor.
Expected to represent 40% of America’s workforce by 2020, millennials are transforming recruiting and retention strategies. The millennial generation has been shaped by profound historical changes to the labor market, workforce, workplace, the nature of employment, and even the very nature of work. This uncertain environment, along with advancements in technology, have led millennials to develop different goals and expectations than those of previous generations. As a result, employers will need to establish workforce policies, benefits plans, communication practices, and cultural standards that align to the needs of this young, emerging generation.

So, what makes millennials unique, and what are they looking for in their careers? The Intelligence Group, which is a division of the Creative Artists Agency, concentrates on analysis of youth-focused consumer preferences and trend forecasting. They found that:

- 64% of millennials say it’s a priority for them to make the world a better place.
- 72% would like to be their own boss. But if they do have to work for a boss, 79% of them would want that boss to serve more as a coach or mentor.
- 88% prefer a collaborative work culture rather than a competitive one.
- 74% want flexible work schedules.
- 88% want “work-life integration,” which isn’t the same as work-life balance, since work and life now blend together inextricably.

Millennials are very interested in engagement, culture, and mission, and while addressing their priorities might seem challenging, employers might consider bringing together a team of millennial staff to help develop recruiting and retention strategies. You might even ask them to participate in job interviews.

The millennial generation has been shaped by profound historical changes to the labor market, workforce, workplace, the nature of employment, and even the very nature of work.
Figure 2

AMERICA’S PERIOPERATIVE WORKFORCE AT A GLANCE

20% of perioperative workforce will retire within five years²³⁴

40% of America’s workforce will be made up of millennials by 2020⁶

54% of job seekers use a mobile phone to perform their job search (2015)⁷

45% Health care workers still use networking as their #1 resource for finding a new job⁷

1-2% increase in demand for perioperative nurses each year²

$120K cost to train and prepare a new perioperative nurse³
There are a variety of solutions you can implement to attract and retain millennial nurses, and many (if not all) will also appeal to other generations you have on staff.
1. Take advantage of new recruiting technology

To appeal to the tech-savvy millennials, mobile optimization and video technology should be a part of every facility’s recruiting strategy. A CareerBuilder survey predicted that 54% of job seekers would use a mobile phone to perform their job search in 2015 compared to just 18% in 2012. Optimizing your website for mobile devices will make it easier for applicants to interact with your organization.

Using video technology offers a lot of flexibility; it can shorten your hiring cycle and reduce costs with the right strategy. Ask job candidates to send, along with their resume, a short video of themselves answering specific screening questions. This can save you time in identifying a good cultural match, and it also prevents qualified candidates from being eliminated because of something on their resume.

Not only will these new technologies help simplify your hiring process, but they will create a more personal experience for candidates as well.

2. Communicate your purpose and provide ways to give back

Mission-focused millennials want to make the world a better place, and they are committed to finding a company that helps them achieve this goal. This characteristic aligns with many nurses who chose their profession to make a difference in patients’ lives. Utilize your organization’s mission in your communications to appeal to these younger professionals.

3. Leverage the old-school tactic of networking

The advanced technology we have today has many benefits, but even millennials will agree that it does little to help engage job candidates on a personal level. Try going back to the old-school tactic of networking. The afore-mentioned CareerBuilder survey found that health care workers still use networking as their #1 resource (45%) for finding a new job.

Tap into employee connections, or even former alumni and health care workers, to meet new potential candidates. This could be done by hosting a hiring event or coffee meet-up, for example. Meeting through a shared connection builds a path to trust, which is good for both the employer and employee.
Spend more time mentoring new employees and focus on development

Millennials are driven by their goals and actions; they want ownership over projects and many aspire to be leaders themselves. Millennial expert and author Bruce Tulgan recommends mentoring these younger employees, providing them with regular feedback and guidance. Ask your nurse supervisors to allocate some of their time to coach new nurses and address their concerns and questions.

Invest in up-to-date technology and equipment

Because millennials have grown up in the digital age, they are accustomed to using the latest computers and devices at home and in the workplace. Invest in up-to-date technology for streamlined, efficient processes. Millennials will push for this, as they are more easily frustrated with out-of-date or slow equipment, and it’s truly a win-win for your business.

Provide open communication from executives and leaders

One of the quickest ways to lose employees is to keep them in the dark about important news or make big decisions without any input from them. Millennials are used to having information at their fingertips. Learning about important company news at the same time as the general public will only lower their trust in leadership and make them feel undervalued.

Try to create a positive work-life balance

While it can be difficult to do in a busy health care setting, it’s vital to give your employees a better work-life balance. Younger nurses want more flexibility with their schedules in order to leave work early to pick up children or attend an important event like a wedding or funeral. They expect to have a generous amount of paid time off and the ability to adjust their hours when necessary.

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Offer programs that support your employees’ financial wellbeing
Financial health is connected to physical health and wellbeing. As such, HR leaders should consider offering programs that help employees to improve their financial wellbeing. This could be anything from financial classes on budgeting, home buying, and college planning to onsite banking services and retirement packages aimed at multiple generations. Starting early with millennials will help them reach financial wellbeing at a younger age.  

Design creative onboarding, training, and education initiatives
Filling positions vacated by baby boomers will become increasingly more difficult as nursing students today have little or no exposure to the area and are less likely to select the OR. According to AORN’s Susan Root, new nurses require a standardized and evidence-based, basic perioperative education, an opportunity to practice new skills, and an individualized clinical preceptorship that is measured by successful competency assessment.

Root says, “Many facilities try to meet their perioperative needs by only hiring experienced OR nurses. However, this supply is quickly drying up. Hospitals will need to be more creative and open to training inexperienced nurses and new grads.” One way to do this would be to develop a collaborative partnership between your facility or hospital system and a local nursing school to create a perioperative nursing program. This would offer greater exposure to the perioperative specialty among student nurses and potentially increase the workforce to help meet the growing demand.

Offer perioperative nurse residencies
Opening perioperative areas for nurse residencies would meet the IOM recommendations for smoother transition to practice, ease nurses into the OR specialty, and potentially increase retention of new nurses. Offer a residency program to new graduates using AORN Periop 101 to ensure evidence-based teaching and learning practices are employed. New nurse success in residency programs has been well documented.
CONCLUSION

Addressing both immediate and long-term needs, these latest recruitment and retention strategies can significantly increase the number of nurses who move into the perioperative specialty, and keep those who are already on the OR path moving forward. Research shows that both new and experienced professionals look for training and development opportunities in order to thrive in their careers. They want to contribute to making the world a better place, and to leverage the most current technology and best practices to do so. Following these new trends in attracting perioperative talent can only be a win-win for hospitals—preparing your staff to go above and beyond will be positive for patient safety and your bottom line.

“Hospitals will need to be more creative and open to training inexperienced nurses and new grads.”
- Susan Root, MSN, RN, CNOR, manager of perioperative education at AORN

*Look for information on creating a perioperative nursing program in AORN’s next ebook, which will be available in spring 2017.

REFERENCES