

# Workforce Engagement During COVID-19: Early Data Highlight Management Priorities

Even though the COVID-19 pandemic has caused extraordinary stresses, early engagement data from multiple organizations indicate that caregivers feel good about the work they are doing and are confident that it makes a real difference.

These findings complement the positive trends in patient experience observed nationally in March, April, and May, and collectively they paint a picture of pride and appreciation for the courage, hard work, and resilience of hospitals and health care workers who have adapted to meet the acute care needs of patients. The data are also consistent with reports in social media and on the news highlighting the incredible commitment of front-line caregivers and illustrating how collaboration and innovation have addressed resource challenges such as lack of PPE and limited testing.

Closer examination of these data help identify segments of the workforce for whom the stresses are particularly great and can guide management in their efforts to support personnel. For hospitals in regions where COVID-19 admissions are surging, stresses are most intense for clinical personnel in COVID-19 units—particularly nurses and other clinical personnel such as respiratory technicians. These data are consistent with the experiences at many institutions that the durability of these clinical personnel may be a resource that should be monitored as closely as ventilator and ICU bed supply.

## Methods

Press Ganey's COVID-19 Caregiver Needs and Support Pulse Survey was administered to employees across 20 acute care facilities from late April through late May of 2020. The survey was aimed at identifying caregiver needs and supports relative to the COVID-19 crisis and included items reflecting known key drivers of engagement that managers and leaders felt were actionable. This analysis is based on responses from 11,794 employees across the participating facilities, all of which treated patients with and without COVID-19 during the period of study.

## Results

Overall, health care professionals are overwhelmingly positive that the work they are doing makes a real difference (Figure 1). They also understand the crisis response plans, procedures, and resources their organizations have put in place. **These results indicate that leaders have largely been successful in their efforts to communicate with their employees.**

Performance on measures of teamwork and collaboration was slightly lower, but the average scores for these items were actually better than those obtained during pre-COVID-19 periods (not shown). This suggests that **the overall workforce is more engaged and prouder of their organizations since the onset of the pandemic but that there is still room for improvement.**

Figure 1

## COVID-19 Workforce Pulse Surveys



### Data Summary

- 6 pulse surveys, administered from late April through late May 2020
- Restrict analysis to acute care hospitals only
- 11,794 respondents at 20 locations
- 10 scored items, 2 comment items, respondent demographic information

Segmentation of the dataset enabled deeper analysis, including performance comparisons based on such variables as caregiver setting (ED, hospital/facility, virtual), job category, and diagnosis of patients being treated (COVID-19 vs. non-COVID-19).

In these analyses, caregivers treating COVID-19 patients scored lower than average for virtually all survey questions (Figure 2). Areas of especially strong concern were resource needs (including PPE and staffing), **collaboration needs** (including teamwork and coordination across departments), **communication**, and workplace **safety**, with the largest score deviations reflecting concerns with workplace safety and senior leadership.

One notable positive highlight from ED caregivers treating COVID-19 patients is the high rating for effective teamwork between nurses and physicians. Scores for this item were higher than those observed in pre-COVID-19 surveys.

The responses from caregivers working from home compared with those working on-site were dramatically different. Remote caregivers across job categories gave higher scores on average for all questions. These findings emphasize that **the stresses on the caregivers on the front line are intense and warrant close attention by senior leaders**. “Walk rounds” and ongoing surveying are essential tools for monitoring caregiver well-being.

Figure 2

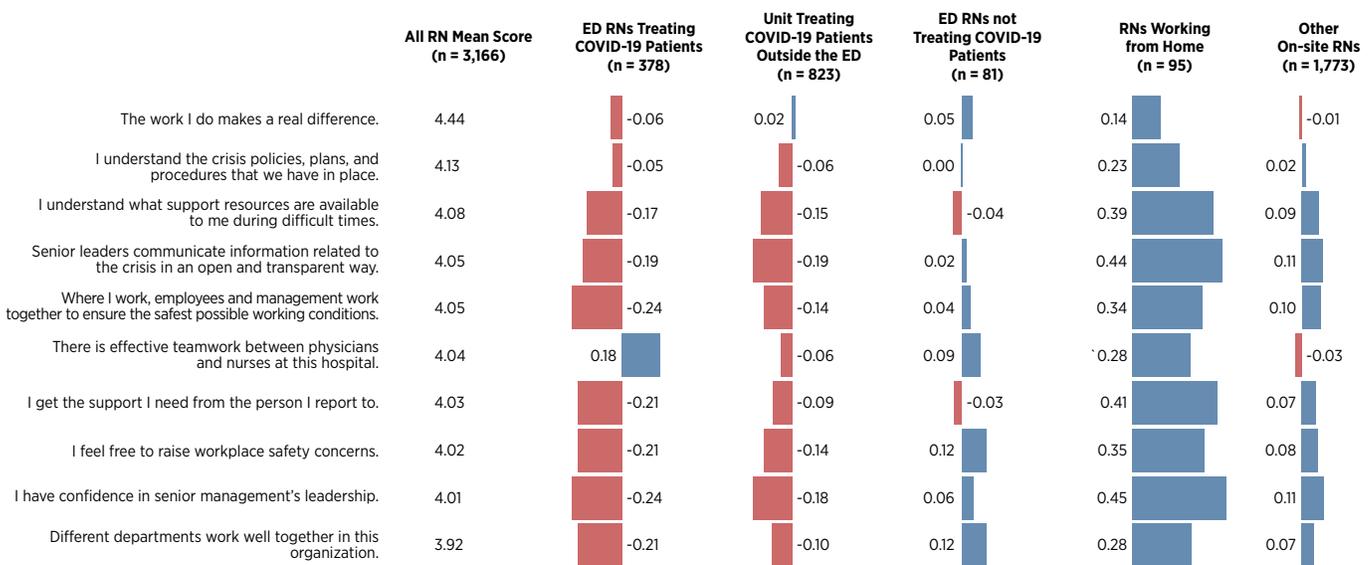
### Caregivers, especially those treating COVID-19 patients, score much lower than average.



A deeper dive into the responses from nurses across settings shows marked differences between front-line nurses treating COVID-19 patients and those treating patients remotely (Figure 3). In addition, **nurses on the front lines of COVID-19 care, particularly in the ED, gave lower scores for most items than their nursing colleagues elsewhere in the organization.** Again, teamwork in the ED was a bright spot in this analysis.

Figure 3

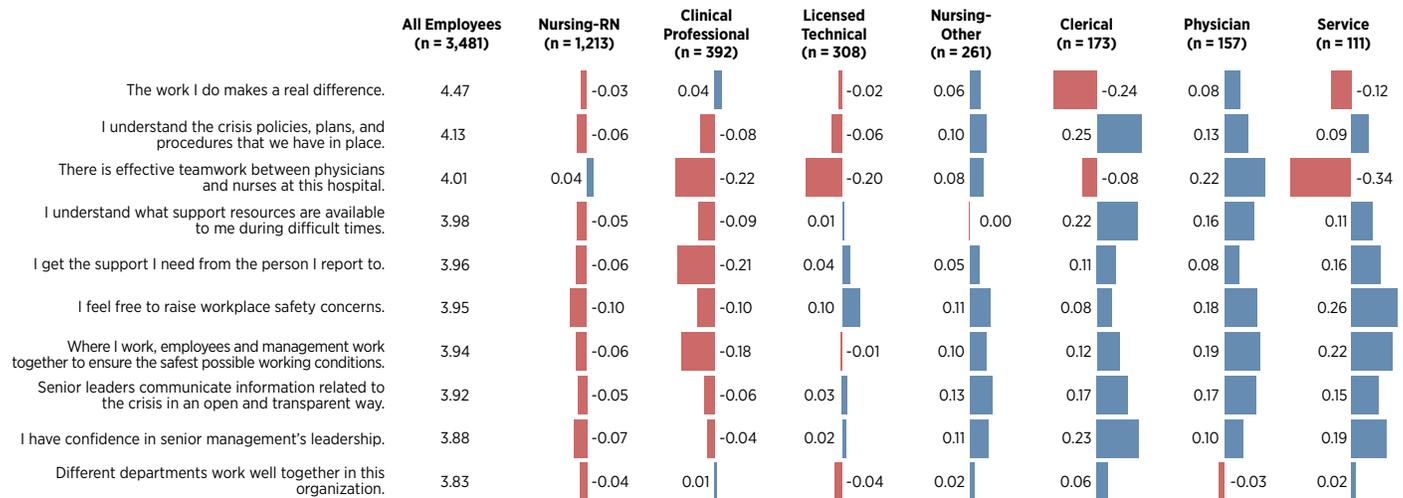
### Nurses treating COVID-19 patients score much lower than the nursing average.



Within units that care for COVID-19 patients, nurses and nonphysician clinical professionals (e.g., respiratory therapists and other licensed professionals who provide direct patient care) gave lower scores for most items compared with physicians, clerical, and other providers (Figure 4). **The most striking difference was in the perception of teamwork, which was much better among physicians and nurses than among the licensed technical professionals, clerical, and service providers with whom they work.** Another notable finding was that physicians seemed to have more comfort with their access to information and resources, suggesting that leadership might be concentrating their communication efforts on this segment of their workforce.

Figure 4

### Breakdown of Scores by Position: Employees in Units That Care for COVID-19 Patients



## Conclusion

These findings reflect cultural strengths of health care organizations and their personnel and suggest they have risen to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic in ways that bring them pride. However, the data also reveal that **segments of the health care workforce vary in the extent to which they feel that teamwork, communication, and support are ideal. Front-line nurses and other clinical professionals caring for COVID-19 patients are especially likely to express concerns about these issues.**

These data offer an early glimpse of what is surely a long-term challenge and reveal that the experience and engagement of caregivers is likely to vary over time, across organizations, across units within organizations, and among different types of caregivers, even on the same patient unit.

Managing these challenges over time and across different segments requires collecting actionable, timely data through ongoing surveying, developing insights and planned responses, and building trust within the workforce. Press Ganey looks forward to partnering with organizations on this very important journey.

Consult Press Ganey's guide, "Top 3 Actions to Support Safe, Exceptional Care in Crisis Situations," on the COVID-19 resources page at [pressganey.com/COVID19](https://pressganey.com/COVID19).