Developing Skillful Communication:
Bridging Multidisciplinary Teams and Generational Gaps



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Disclosures



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Part of the CHRISTUS Health System
197-bed, free-standing children's hospital in the heart of downtown San Antonio, committed to serving the underserved

ELSO Award for Excellence in Life Support – Center of Excellence – Gold

AACN Beacon Award for Excellence

Baby-Friendly USA

The Joint Commission – National Quality Approval

Magnet Recognized – American Nurses Credentialing Center

Emergency Nurses Association – 2023-2026 Lantern Award

Top Work Places 2025 – San Antonio Express-News

USA Today – Top Work Places 2023-2024 – USA

Children's Miracle Network Hospitals

AORN Excellence in Surgical Safety – GO CLEAR AWARD™ – Surgical Smoke Evacuation Recognition

SPS – Society for Pediatric Sedation – Center of Excellence in Pediatric Sedation

National Association of Epilepsy Centers – NAEC – Level 3 Epilepsy Center

AACN HWE – Healthy Work Environments

Learning Outcomes



After completing this session, participants will be able to:

1. Describe how scenario-based videos and guided team discussions strengthen skillful communication and collaboration in healthcare teams.
2. Apply a scalable framework for teaching skillful communication across interdisciplinary and multigenerational teams.
3. Identify practical strategies to sustain a healthy work environment through improved communication, feedback, and psychological safety.

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Background – Traditional Training



Healthcare Training Prioritizes Technical Competence – Why?



- Regulatory and competency focus
- Time constraints
- Assumption of innate ability
- Crisis-driven priorities



- Interpersonal soft skills frequently receive less emphasis or are treated as secondary.

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Background – Lingering Impact of COVID-19



Challenges

- Chronic Stress & Anxiety
- Loss of Nuance in Remote Interactions
- Soft Skills Erosion

Lingering Effects

- Burnout Remains HIGH
- Communication Gaps & Misunderstandings
- Loss of Empathy & Civility

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Background – Multigenerational Team



Challenges within Multigenerational Healthcare Team

- Communication Styles
- Technology Comfort Levels
- Workplace Expectations
- Soft Skills & Emotional Intelligence

Challenges in Caring for Multiple Generations of Patients

- Health Literacy & Communication
- Cultural & Generational Beliefs About Health
- Family Dynamics

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Impact on Associates



Communication Gaps

Conflict Escalation

Reduced Psychological Safety

Team Dysfunction

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Background and Overview

AACN HWE Healthy Work Environments



Local Context

- Opportunity to participate in the AACN HWE National Collaborative
- Teams expressed a need for practical, real-world tools to navigate tone, feedback, and conflict more effectively

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Background and Overview



Opportunity Identified

- Hospital-wide data identified Skilled Communication and True Collaboration as priority areas for growth (HWEAT 4.0 baseline)



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Background and Overview



Our Initiative

- Introduced Communication Corner — short, scenario-based videos paired with guided huddles.
- Scenarios model both unskillful and skillful interactions drawn from real hospital experiences.
- Designed as a sustainable, low-cost strategy to strengthen collaboration, trust, and psychological safety.

Purpose

- To cultivate a culture of skilled communication that enhances collaboration and safety across all teams.

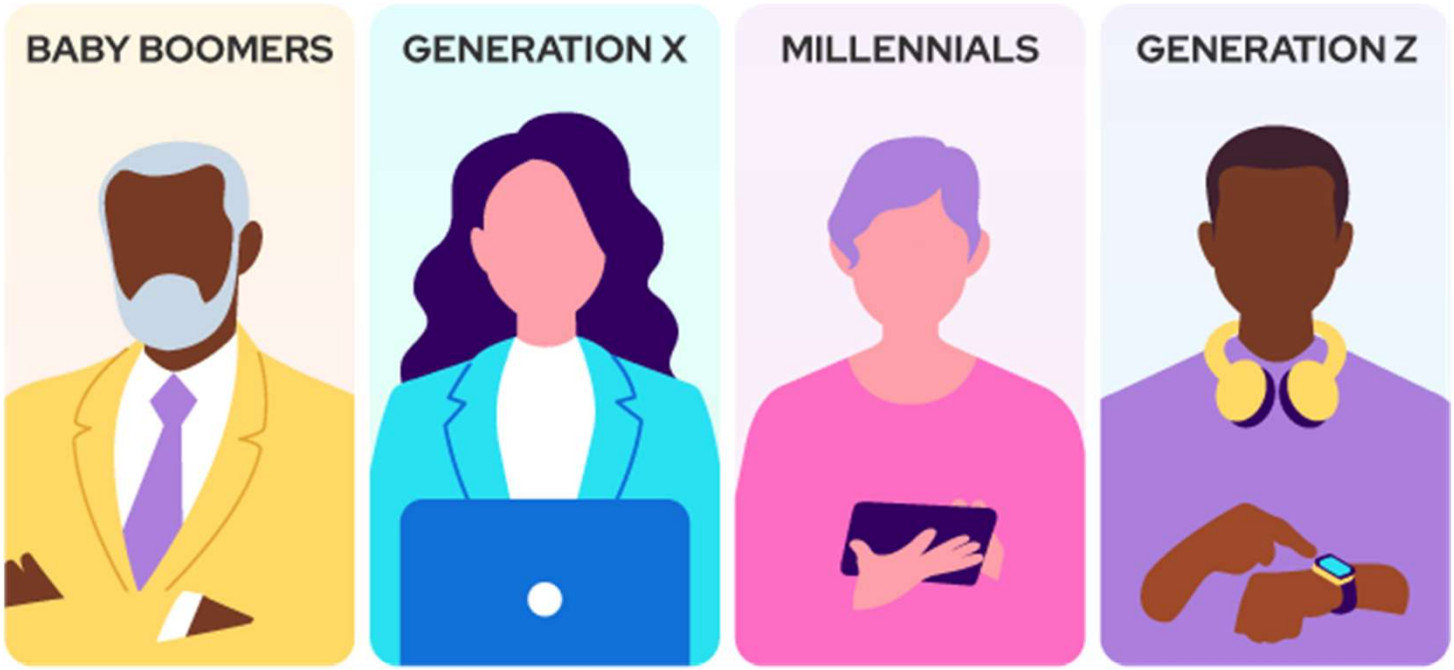
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Generational Gap Overview

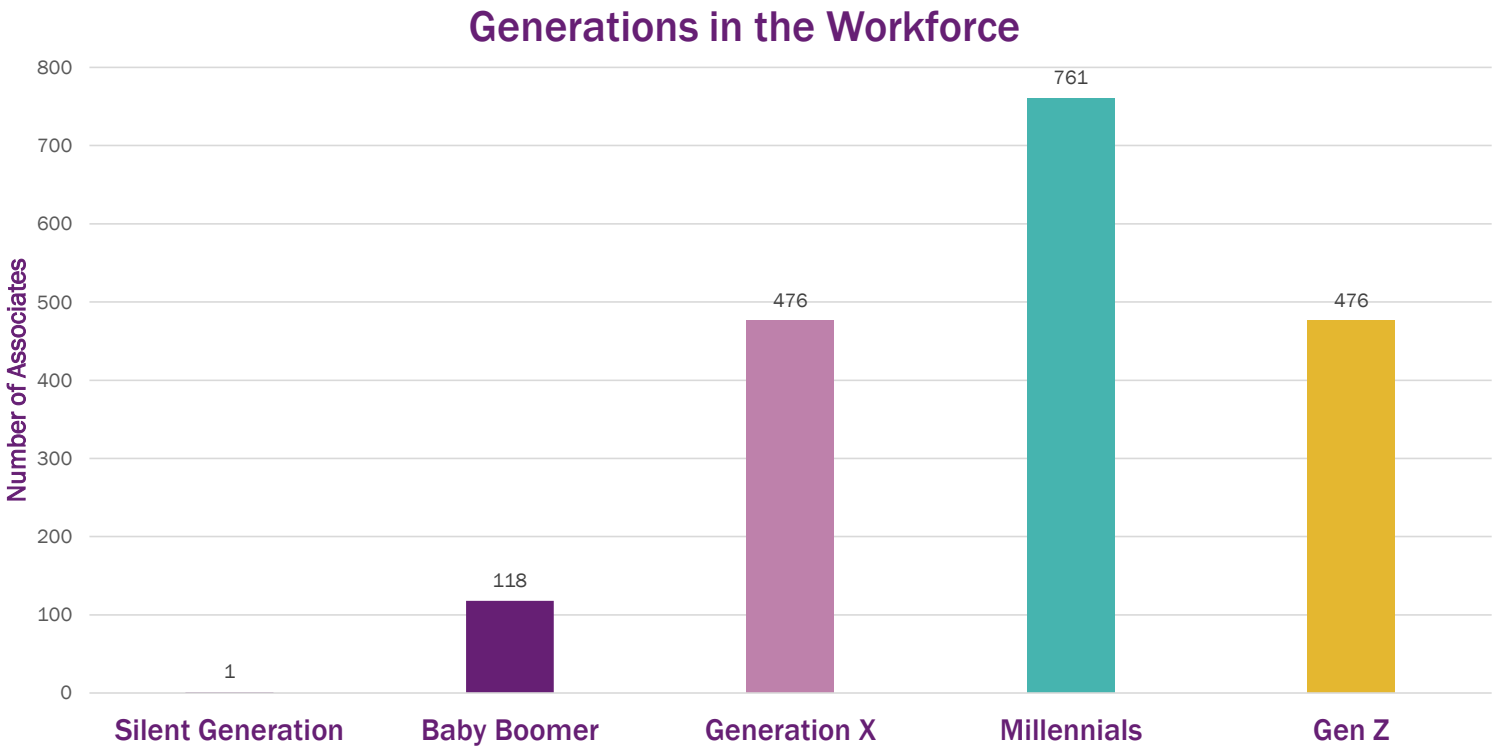
Generations in the Workforce



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Multigenerational Team





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Multigenerational Audience



Let's Vote

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Generations Gaps: Patterns, Not Boxes



Why This Matters

- Four generations — **Baby Boomers, Gen X, Millennials, and Gen Z** — now work side by side in healthcare.
- Each brings distinct communication styles, motivators, and expectations shaped by their social, economic, and technological era.
- Misunderstandings between generations can lead to conflict, turnover, and collaboration breakdowns, while awareness can strengthen trust, engagement, and patient safety.
- Recognizing patterns in how we communicate helps us anticipate tension and teach teams how to connect more skillfully.

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Generations Gaps: Patterns, Not Boxes



According to Research

- Younger nurses prefer digital, rapid communication, while older nurses value face-to-face dialogue and hierarchy.
- Generational diversity is dynamic, shaped by global trends and tech adoption—not just age.
- Generational diversity blends biology and history; it's real, but context-specific.
- Well-managed team conflict can be functional, improving creativity and collaboration when psychological safety is present.

Abujaber et al., BMC Nursing 2024; Schwartz et al., 2021; Twenge 2014; Lyons et al., 2015; Amason 1996; DeChurch & Marks 2001

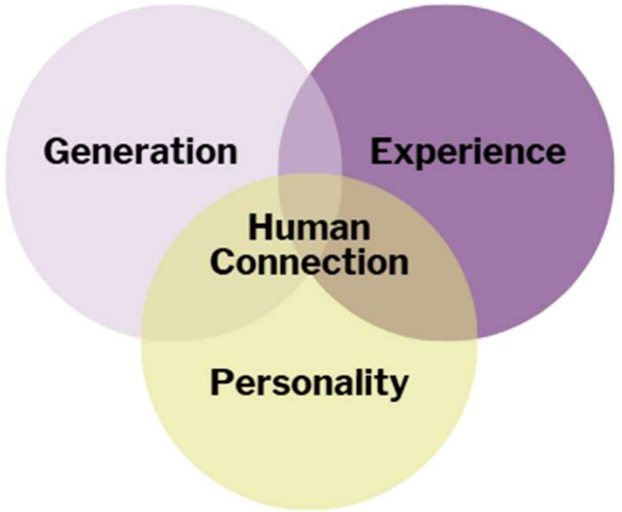
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The Caveat: People Are More Than A Generation



“Generational labels are heuristics —not rigid truths. There is overlap and individual variation.” *(OJIN, 2024)*

- Individuals often span multiple generational traits depending on personality, life stage, and experience.
- Overlap and variation exist within every team; these categories describe *trends*, not *types*.
- Cultural background, role, and organizational climate often shape communication as much as generational identity.
- Our goal isn’t to label — it’s to listen, adapt, and model skillful communication across all backgrounds.



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Generational Strength & Tendencies



Each Generation Brings Unique Strengths and Communication Preferences

Generation	Motivation	Preferred Communication	Strengths To Leverage
Baby Boomers	Loyalty, teamwork, recognition	Face-to-face, phone, formal updates	Deep experience & mentorship mindset
Gen X	Independence, efficiency, balance	Direct and concise (email or quick check-ins)	Adaptability & results orientation
Millennials	Purpose, feedback, collaboration	Text, chat platforms, transparent dialogue	Creativity & growth mindset
Gen Z	Authenticity, inclusion, well-being	Digital-first, brief, visual messages	Innovation, tech fluency & social awareness

Misunderstandings & How to Bridge Them



Conflict often arises from **interpretation**, not **intention**.

Differences in tone, feedback, and communication style can be misread across generations.

	Tone & Urgency	Feedback & Expectations	Communication Channels
Common Tension Point	Direct vs. relational communication styles — what one generation sees as "efficient," another may perceive as "abrupt."	Different views on what "feedback" means — some see brevity as respect for time; others expect context and coaching.	Different comfort levels with technology — some prefer face-to-face, others rely on text or chat.
Bridge Strategy	*Clarify intent early; lead with empathy and curiosity.* *"I want to make sure we're aligned."*	*Pair brevity with reasoning; invite two-way dialogue.* *"Here's the why — what are your thoughts?"*	*Set clear team norms for communication tools.* *Clarify which messages require in-person updates.* *Teach phone and tech etiquette*

Who Sent This Text?



“bruh 💀 not another one lol 😭 😭 i’ll take it tho”

a. Baby Boomer
b. Gen X
c. Millennial
d. Gen Z

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Text from a Gen Z Nurse



Gen Z Text Messages



- **Punctuation:** Usually omitted. If it is included, go ahead and imply meaning.
- **Capitalization:** Rarely used—text is intentionally lowercase.
- **Tone:** Highly expressive, casual, humorous, and direct.
- **Emojis:** Heavy use, often stacked for emotional effect—😭💀😂.
- **Implied Meaning:** “This is chaos and I’m screaming inside—but I’ll do it.”

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Who Sent This Text?



“Ok. I’ll be ready. Let me know if there is anything else. Thanks.”

a. Baby Boomer
b. Gen X
c. Millennial
d. Gen Z

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Text from a Baby Boomer



Baby Boomer Text Messages



- **Punctuation:** Always uses proper grammar and punctuation (periods, commas).
- **Capitalization:** Formal, consistent with sentence case.
- **Tone:** Respectful and professional, often using full sentences.
- **Emojis:** Rarely uses emojis unless they're very tech-savvy.
- **Implied Meaning:** "This is frustrating, but I won't say it. I've been doing this long enough—I'll handle it."

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Who Sent This Text?



“Ugh. Got it. I’ll make it work.”

a. Baby Boomer
b. Gen X
c. Millennial
d. Gen Z

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Text from a Gen X Nurse



Gen X Text Messages



- **Punctuation:** Casual but structured; might omit a period if feeling annoyed.
- **Capitalization:** Usually correct, sometimes minimal.
- **Tone:** Dry, pragmatic, a hint of sarcasm or weariness.
- **Emojis:** Unlikely, but may use one if they want to soften tone: 🙄 or 😬
- **Implied Meaning:** “This is annoying but I’m a team player. I’ve seen worse.”

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Who Sent This Text?



“Oof ok 😅 I got you”

a. Baby Boomer
b. Gen X
c. Millennial
d. Gen Z

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Text from a Millennial Nurse



Millennial Text Messages



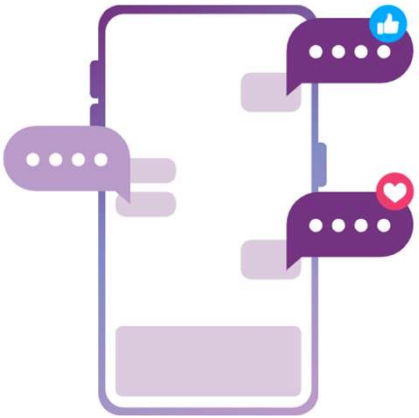
- **Punctuation:** Minimal, more conversational.
- **Capitalization:** Rarely uses caps unless emphasizing something.
- **Tone:** Informal, flexible, using humor or emoji to convey mood.
- **Emojis:** Frequently used to signal tone and soften response— 😅, 😬, 💪.
- **Implied Meaning:** "Yikes, not ideal, but I'll handle it. Trying to keep it light."

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How To Respond to a Text



What does your 👍 or ❤ mean?



- Reactions vary by generation from appreciation to confusion or sarcasm
- May be ambiguous or even dismissive
- May generate the following range of responses:
  - Boomer - “Did you mean to like that?” or “Not sure what the thumbs-up means but OK.”
  - Gen X - “Thanks for the 👍” or “Cool. Got it.”
- Millennial - “LOL not the heart on that message 😭” or “Awww u liked it 🥹”
- Gen Z - “lol not u hearting that 😭😭” or “wait why’d u like that 💀”

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Generational Awareness Improves



Team Performance



Improves Team Communication



Reduces Conflict & Incivility



Enhances Collaboration & Trust

Patient Safety



Improves Patient-Centered Care

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Our Approach: Communication Corner



A scalable framework designed to teach communication skills with intentionality

- Quarterly, scenario-based videos that depict unskillful communication in a relatable way followed by the scene replayed in a healthy, skillful communication
- Development of team discussion guides to promote for reflection and learning
- Addresses real tensions—tone, urgency, feedback, and communication styles across generations
- Reflects multiple disciplines, units, roles, and generations with an aim to truly represent our hospital's team
- Integrates AACN's Healthy Work Environment Standards

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Communication Corner



Intergenerational Training



Standardized Communication Tool



Mentorship/Modeling Opportunity



Psychological Safety

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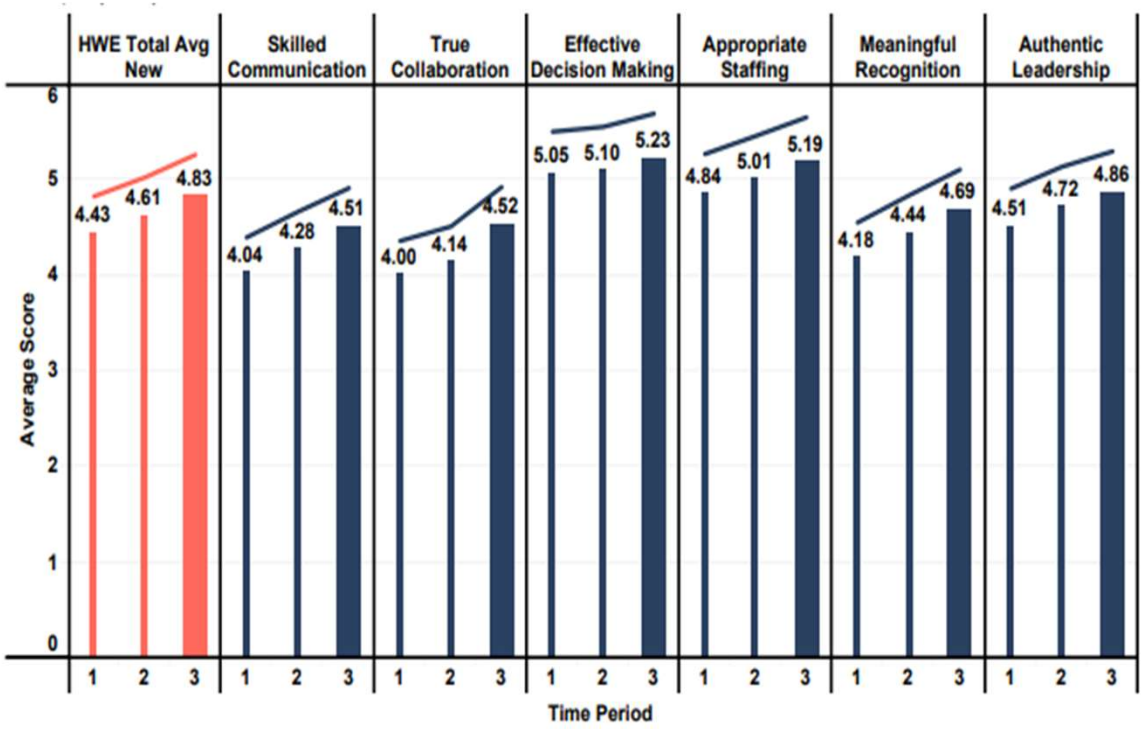
Welcome to Communication Corner!



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Quantitative Results

AACN HWEAT Scores

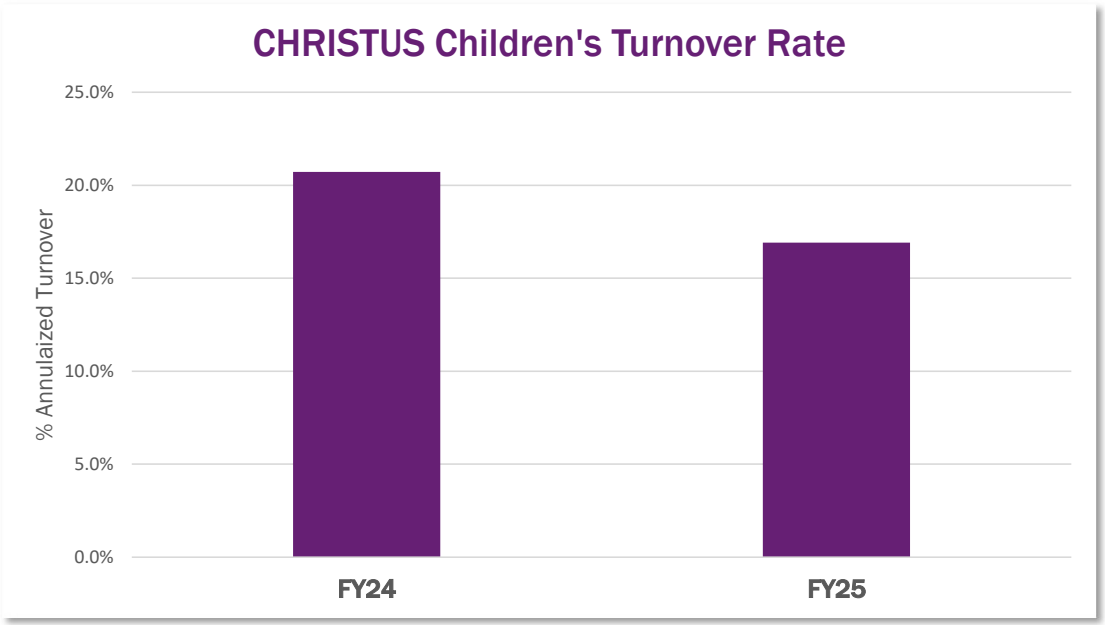


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Quantitative Results

Reduced Turnover

- Preliminary Results



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Qualitative Results





Qualitative Staff Feedback

- Attending recognized a resident, following training, for a witnessed phone conversation with a Respiratory Therapist regarding albuterol vs more HFNC for a respiratory patient.
  - "He did an amazing job validating, being compassionate, and staying flexible to consider the patient's needs and the other care team members concerns."
- RN shared a positive experience providing feedback to a peer
  - "She was grateful I told her directly what the patient's family reported so she could adjust her care. She didn't get defensive at all like I feared."

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Impact on Culture and Team



- Improved Team Morale
- Improved Patient Experience
- Strengthens Magnet & Accreditation Status

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Bottom Line - Financial Impact

- Reducing Turnover Costs
- Lower Liability by Improving Safety
- Boosting Operational Efficiency



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Lessons Learned & Sustainability



1. Realism Drives Engagement

Associates were more likely to participate when they saw situations that felt authentic and relevant.

2. Short, Focused Content Works Best

Brief videos paired with guided huddles fit easily into busy clinical workflows.

3. Modeling Both Unskillful and Skillful Communication is Powerful

Showing “what not to do” alongside “what to do” helped staff recognize gaps and apply better strategies.

It created a safe space for reflection without judgment.

4. Low-Cost, Sustainable Approach is Feasible

Leveraging internal resources for video production and discussion guides kept costs minimal.

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Transferability



- **Low Costs** – All videos were created by amateurs with iPhones
- **Scalable Across Units** – Department, hospital, or system-wide
- **Easily Replicable** – Simple format, easily adaptable
- **Simple Toolkits** – Ready to use discussion guides with facilitator tips

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Next Steps





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Thank you for your attention!

Questions?

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