



**STRENGTHENING NURSES.
EMPOWERING VETERANS.**

Recruitment and Retention: Overcoming Barriers to More Efficient and Effective VA Staffing

The Nurses Organization of Veterans Affairs (NOVA) – the professional association for VA nurses - has identified retention and recruitment of health care professionals as a critical issue to providing the best care for our veterans and would like to offer the following observations and suggestions for review.

NOVA OBSERVATIONS:

- VHA lacks a strong infrastructure and a shortage of corporate experience within Human Resources to support the multiple priorities required for hiring health care professionals.
- The current complex hiring system, which VHA utilizes for hiring staff, impedes the process and causes significant delays in employing health care professionals quickly.
- VHA is facing unnecessary delays in recruitment and retention due to outdated policies and incentives in hiring personnel.
- All levels of support personnel are impacted by the current inflexibilities in pay structure and years of flat lined and non-existent pay increases.
- Locality pay challenges, and lack of knowledge among staff within HR on how to maximize the pay process remains an obstacle in hiring qualified health care providers.
- Negative impact of reclassification and downgrading of essential positions has led to vacancies in critical areas.
- Any future changes to VHA 's Integrated Community Care providers, will mean more frontline staff needed to enable proper access to outside care.

NOVA SOLUTIONS:

- Increase the number of Human Resources staff by improving recruitment and retention efforts for HR personnel. Vacancies for HR positions remain hard to fill nationally and the frequent changes in HR personnel makes it difficult for consistency in hiring at every level.
- Provide adequate training and support for all Human Resource staff and Nurse Recruiters. This must include ensuring each VA facility has a full-time nurse recruiter who can actively focus on all aspects of the hiring process - recruitment, program support and retention efforts.
- Streamline the hiring process to include user friendly IT programs and quicker hiring and credentialing of Title 38 employees - the current system, USA jobs, is not user friendly.
- Undertake a thorough review of downgrades and reclassification of critical positions across VA
- Increase training and utilization of Locality Pay Laws.
- Revise and increase pay caps on Nurse Pay Structures and RN pay schedules and reclassify critical positions. This will help to alleviate compressed pay schedules especially for those in high locality pay areas.
- Continue to implement Full Practice Authority to allow APRN's employed by VA to function in partnership with their healthcare colleagues.
- Amend the current regulation to also allow CRNA's to practice to their full license and education.
- Congress must increase funding to allow VA properly to address barriers to recruiting, training and retaining medical and support staff nationwide.

NOVA understands that the Department of Veteran Affairs is planning to revise the system of hiring and promoting all Title 38 Registered Nurses through the proposed elimination of *Professional Standards Boards*. NOVA has concerns about this process and the potential for inconsistency between HR and hiring managers. We will provide more input when the new regulation drafts are shared. It is hoped that professionalism and consistency will be a key part of this process.