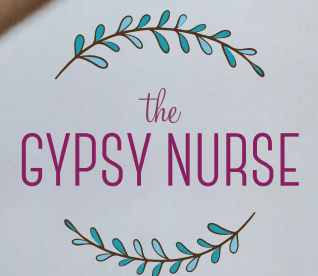




The Voice of the Travel Nurse

Insights from over 1,000 travel nurses on the state of their profession



The onset of Covid-19 thrust our healthcare system into the spotlight.

While we witnessed the perseverance of medical teams working under enormous pressure, we also realized the alarming shortages they faced: not enough equipment, beds, and in many cases, nurses, to care for the huge influx of critically ill patients.

For many years, facilities have looked to travel nurses —RNs willing to move to work multi-week contracts at hospitals around the United States — to supplement their staff. At the start of the pandemic and during its surges, demand for travel nurses soared to unprecedented levels. Pay rates increased dramatically to attract the short supply of skilled professionals to facilities requiring additional support. Many hospitals continue to depend on the travel nurse community for a variety of needs and to staff vacancies while they try to hire full-time staff.

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OUR ROLE

As the world's largest community of travel nurses,

The Gypsy Nurse serves an audience of over 500,000 members across multiple channels, including TheGypsyNurse.com and TravCon, the leading healthcare traveler conference. Our mission is to provide compelling resources to raise awareness of travel healthcare as a career option and to enable career success. With that mission in mind and recognizing that much has been written about staff nurse experiences over the last couple of years, we wanted to provide a resource that examined the perspective of travel nurses specifically.

We conducted this Voice of the Travel Nurse research to learn more about travel nurses' thoughts about their work — what they like, what they don't, and their plans to continue working or depart the profession. By understanding their perspectives more clearly, we are able to adjust how we serve the travel nurse community while also encouraging more professionals to consider a career in travel nursing.

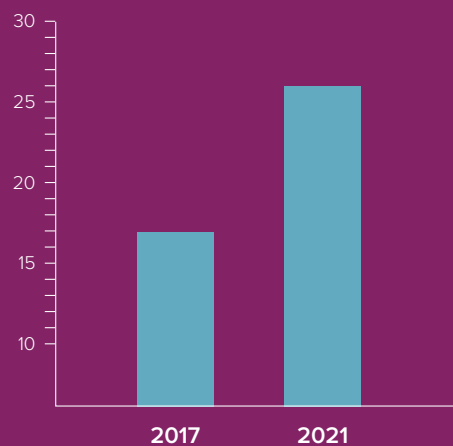
WHAT'S AHEAD

The nursing shortage we face today is likely to intensify in the near future. The rate of nurse turnover has increased from 17 percent in 2017 to 26 percent in 2021.* In a recent McKinsey survey, 29 percent of nurses surveyed said they planned to leave their role in direct patient care.** By 2025, McKinsey predicts there may be up to a 10–20 percent gap between supply and demand of registered nurses.

In order to meet demand both now and in the future, we must address the factors that cause dissatisfaction and lead to departures in the profession. In addition, we must create new pipelines to introduce all who are interested in nursing to the right opportunities and incentives to become registered nurses.

The findings presented in this report suggest that travel nurses share a different perspective on the current situation than their staff nurse colleagues, and are in fact a bright spot in the nursing profession as highlighted on the next page.

Rate of Nurse Turnover



29%
of nurses
plan to leave their
role in direct
patient care

*Source: 2022 NSI national healthcare retention & RN Staffing Report, NSI Nursing Solutions, March 2022, as cited by McKinsey

**Source: "Assessing the lingering impact of COVID-19 on the nursing workforce," McKinsey, May 11, 2022 <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/healthcare-systems-and-services/our-insights/assessing-the-lingering-impact-of-covid-19-on-the-nursing-workforce>



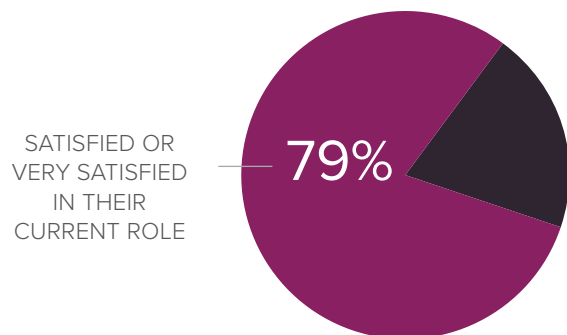
Summary of Key Findings

As we noted on page four, much has been written about high dissatisfaction rates among staff nurses and their desire to leave the profession. Our study, focusing exclusively on travel nurses, revealed quite different viewpoints, with 79% indicating that they are either satisfied or very satisfied in their current role.

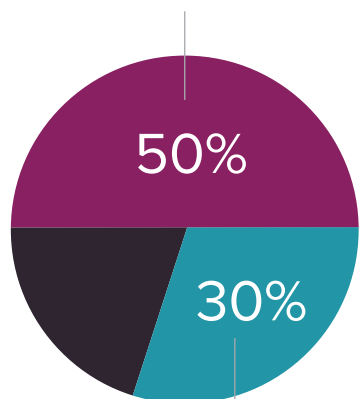


BY THE NUMBERS

How satisfied are Travel Nurses today:

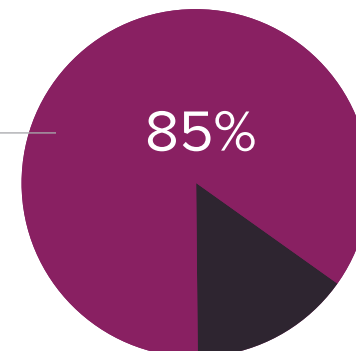


AS SATISFIED TODAY COMPARED TO BEFORE THE PANDEMIC



MORE SATISFIED TODAY COMPARED TO BEFORE THE PANDEMIC

HAVE STRONG EXPECTATIONS TO CONTINUE AS A TRAVEL NURSE



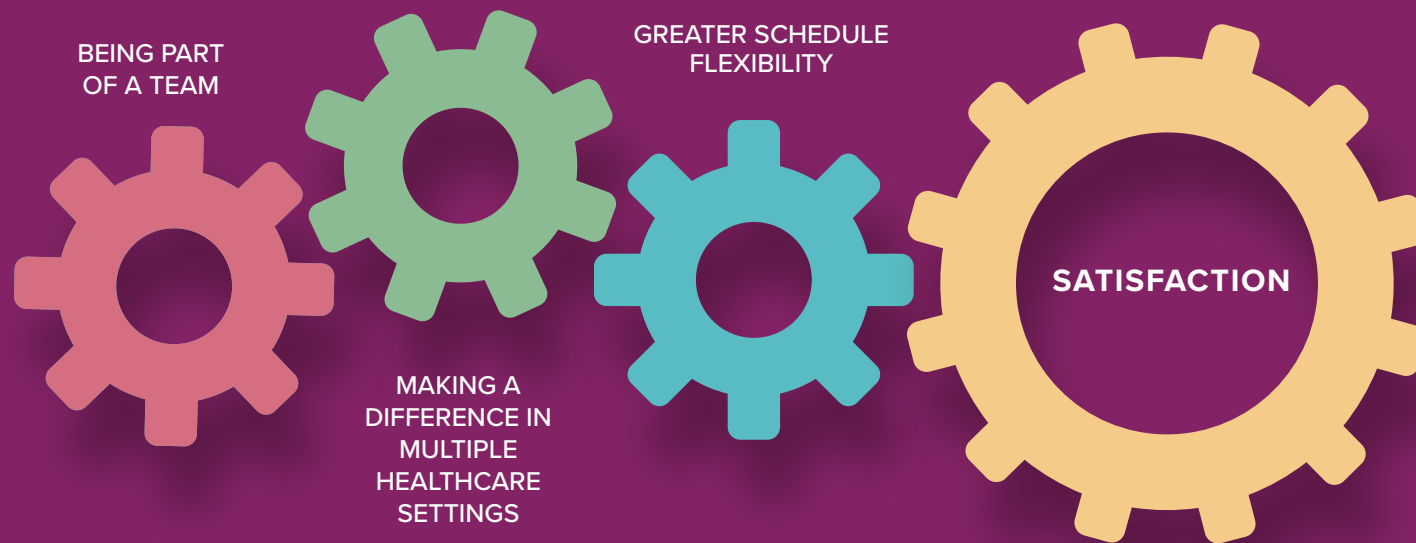
OTHER MOTIVATING FACTORS FOR TRAVEL NURSES

Competitive pay certainly helps bring nurses into travel roles. But once they've established themselves as travelers, factors other than money take on greater significance in retaining them.

Healthcare facilities and travel agencies also contribute to travel nurses' satisfaction. How can they improve?

- **Facilities:** Treat travel nurses with same level of respect as staff nurses
- **Travel agencies:** Provide resources and support beyond the recruiter

Key Drivers of Satisfaction



A close-up photograph of a nurse in an operating room. The nurse is wearing a blue surgical cap, clear safety goggles, and a blue surgical mask. They are looking directly at the camera with a focused expression. In the background, other medical professionals in similar attire are visible but out of focus. The lighting is bright and clinical.

1. The State of the Nursing Profession

Before we take an in-depth look at the Voice of the Travel Nurse, it may be helpful to look beyond just travel nursing to the overall state of the nursing profession in the United States.

WHY NURSES WANT TO LEAVE

Burnout – They saw tragedy after tragedy during the pandemic, and lost colleagues to Covid-19. As visitors were not allowed, nurses also took on bigger roles for communicating with family members electronically, and providing comfort to critically ill and dying patients. There was no time to grieve or recharge, as there were no staff members to take their place.

Lack of Recognition – Early in the pandemic the public showed their appreciation for nurses in various ways. This subsided as the pandemic wore on. In many cases, nurses had to care for angry patients who denied the pandemic or the effectiveness of the vaccines. Some health systems provided weak recognition to staff in the form of pizza or t-shirts, instead of bonuses, salary increases or other meaningful perks.

Concern for Patient Safety – Many do not believe they can provide adequate care given high patient ratios.

Inadequate Training – New nursing graduates who started bedside roles in the pandemic did so without the benefit of full onboarding and preceptor support. This left some feeling inadequately prepared and not as confident as their colleagues.

Better Opportunities in Other Fields – Nurses are finding their skills and experience are in solid demand in other areas, like telemedicine, insurance and law. They can earn a solid income without having the stresses of direct patient care.

Not Enough Flexibility – Other roles offer alternatives to 12-hour shifts. Some prefer the option to work shorter days or on a remote basis.

A photograph of a nurse with blonde hair tied back, wearing blue scrubs and a stethoscope. She is looking out a window with white blinds. The lighting is soft and blue-toned.

“Most hospitals run themselves as businesses, looking to churn a profit for shareholders. Nurses ... are deemed an “expense.” Therefore, nurse to patient ratios are becoming unfair, unrealistic, & unsafe.”

— RN 5+ years

*“ I was so burnt out and unmotivated...
due to low pay, horrible management, and
nurse on nurse hostility/bullying. ”*

— RN 5+ years



THE NURSE SHORTAGE

While we already face a nursing shortage, it is expected to greatly intensify in the next three years (as noted on page 4). As Covid-19 variants continue to evolve and impact the population, healthcare professionals may again be faced with cancelling surgeries working through subsequent backlogs. Aging populations will require more substantial care in a variety of specialty areas.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Multiple issues have created dissatisfaction and departures in the nursing profession. There is no single solution – not even increasing pay rates – that can resolve these issues entirely. Healthcare systems and their partners, educational institutions, government agencies and communities must work together to bring more people to the nursing profession and encourage seasoned professionals to continue working.



2. Satisfaction Levels for Travel Nurses

As nursing faces multiple challenges, travel nurses are a bright spot within the profession. Consider the statistics on the following page from our survey.

LEVELS OF SATISFACTION WITHIN THE TRAVEL NURSING PROFESSION

As nursing faces multiple challenges, travel nurses are a bright spot within the profession. Consider the following statistics from our survey:

Nearly 8 in 10 travel nurses are satisfied or highly satisfied with the profession



CURRENT LEVELS OF SATISFACTION COMPARED TO BEFORE THE PANDEMIC

While Covid has had multiple negative impacts on healthcare staff, travel nurses appear to be resilient — and in some cases — galvanized by it:

50% of travel nurses are as satisfied and 30% are more satisfied now than before the pandemic



CAREER SATISFACTION

Travel nurses were asked to rate their levels of satisfaction on key factors that pertain to their profession. These results are displayed in the diagram below, plotted into quadrants which reflect degrees of importance as retention drivers.

Key satisfaction drivers for travel nurses likely to continue in the profession:



SATISFACTION: PAY RATES

Money isn't everything, is it?

It's a reasonable question to ask, especially considering the pay rates some travel nurses have earned at the pandemic's onset and during its surges. In 2021, Bloomberg* reported advertisements for travel nursing roles hitting \$8,000 a week. Many healthcare organizations struggled to retain full-time staff, who were shocked at the high pay rates. Some full-time nurses, seeing the opportunity to earn considerably more, resigned their roles to join the ranks of traveling nurses.

Competitive pay certainly helps bring nurses into travel roles. But once they've established themselves as travelers, factors other than money take on greater significance in retaining them. These factors include the ability to make a difference in multiple locations, feeling part of a team, and schedule flexibility.

*<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-08-31/there-s-a-market-for-8k-a-week-nurses-in-u-s-as-delta-spreads>

The Takeaway

Pay rates can attract nurses to traveling, but rate increases won't have a substantive role in keeping them engaged in the travel community. Health systems that are known for having a poor working environment, for example, can't expect to solve the problem simply by paying people more. Instead, the root problem of poor culture must be addressed. Money indeed is not everything when it comes to travel nursing.





3. The Role of Healthcare Facilities

The likelihood of travel nurses remaining in the profession depends largely on their experiences with the healthcare organizations at which they work and the staffing agencies that arrange their contract assignments.

Both factors are important, with healthcare facilities contributing at a slightly higher rate to overall satisfaction levels.

In this section, we'll look more closely at satisfaction drivers as well as "driver gaps," those factors that facilities need to improve if they want to build greater satisfaction and retention levels.

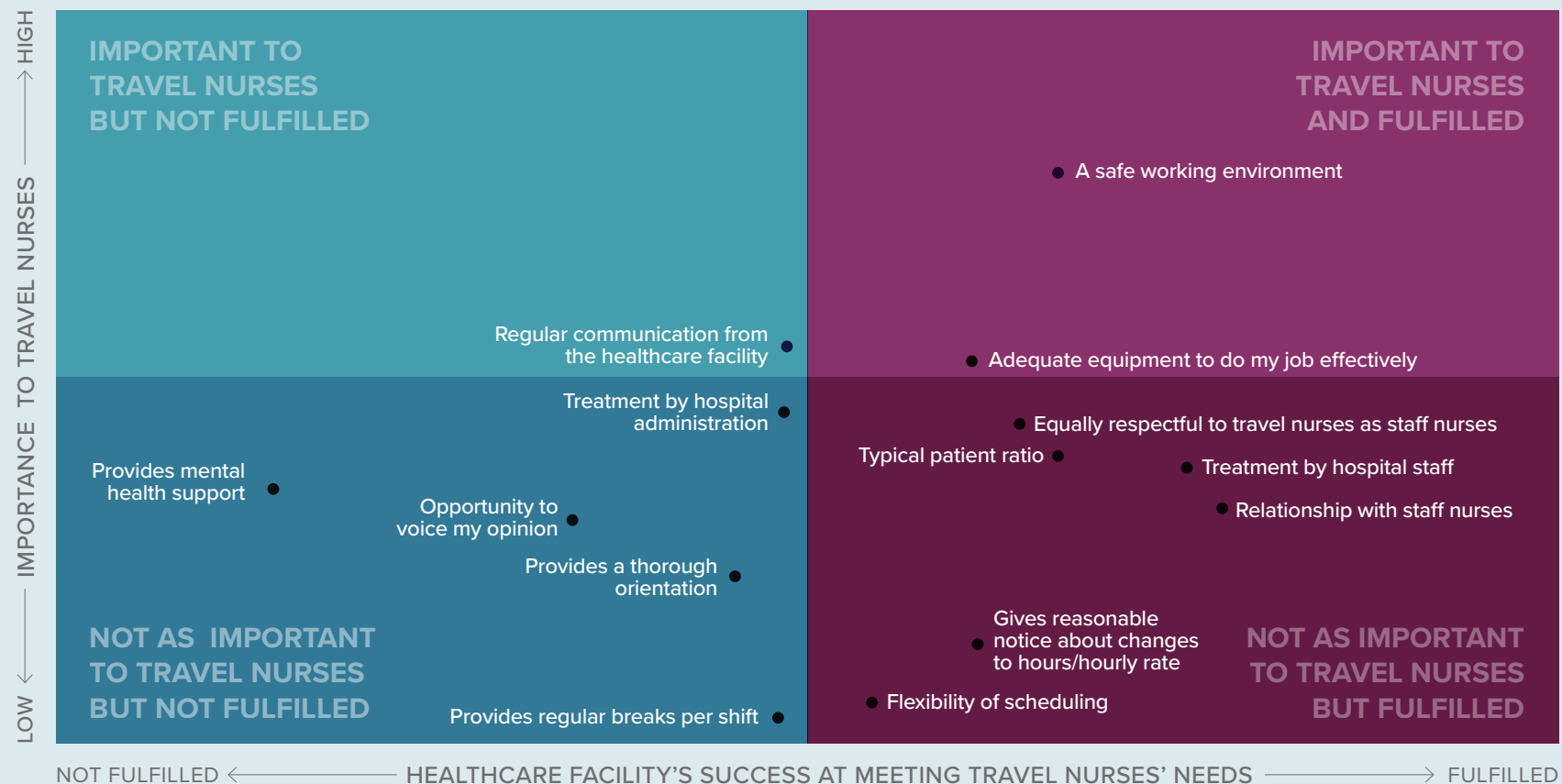
HEALTHCARE FACILITIES: MAIN DRIVERS OF SATISFACTION

Our survey asked travel nurses about their level of satisfaction with their most recent healthcare facility across 14 separate attributes. We determined the importance of each attribute based on how it correlates with overall healthcare facility satisfaction, and then overlaid the assessment of performance on each of the 14 attributes.

FINDINGS: Overall, travel nurses are looking for a higher level of respect and commitment, and for the facility they work for to provide the environment for proper patient care.

THE TOP THREE DRIVERS ARE HIGHLIGHTED ON THE NEXT PAGE

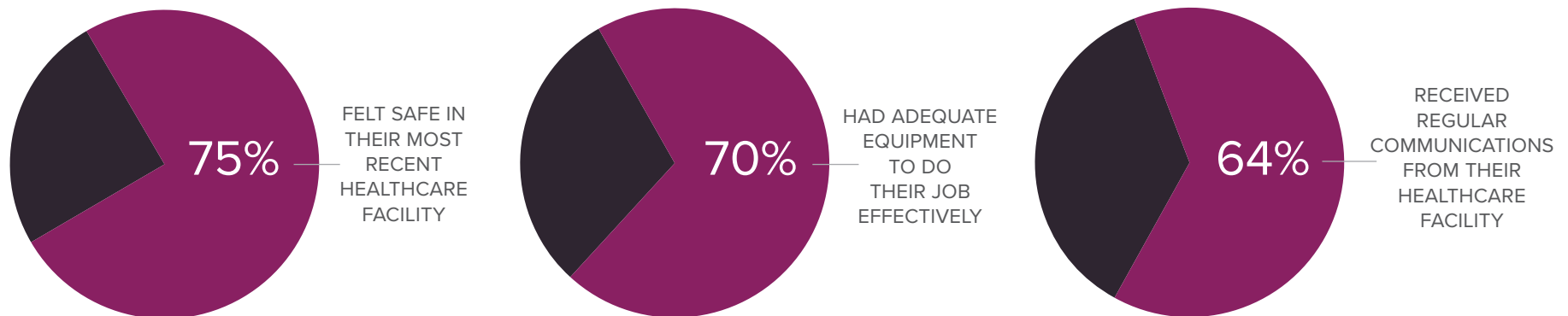
For travel nurses likely to continue in the profession:



HEALTHCARE FACILITIES: MAIN DRIVERS OF SATISFACTION (CONTINUED)

BY THE NUMBERS

For travel nurses likely to continue in the profession:



The Takeaway

The satisfaction drivers themselves are not surprising. However, the percentages reported by travel nurses point to areas requiring significant improvement. One in four nurses did not feel safe on their most recent assignment. Three in ten did not have the equipment they needed to do their jobs. More than one-third didn't receive regular communication from their healthcare facility.

Facilities should examine their current efforts to support a safe, productive and inclusive environment, and work to make improvements where necessary. Doing so will be critical in their efforts to engage travel nurses and enable them to do their best work.



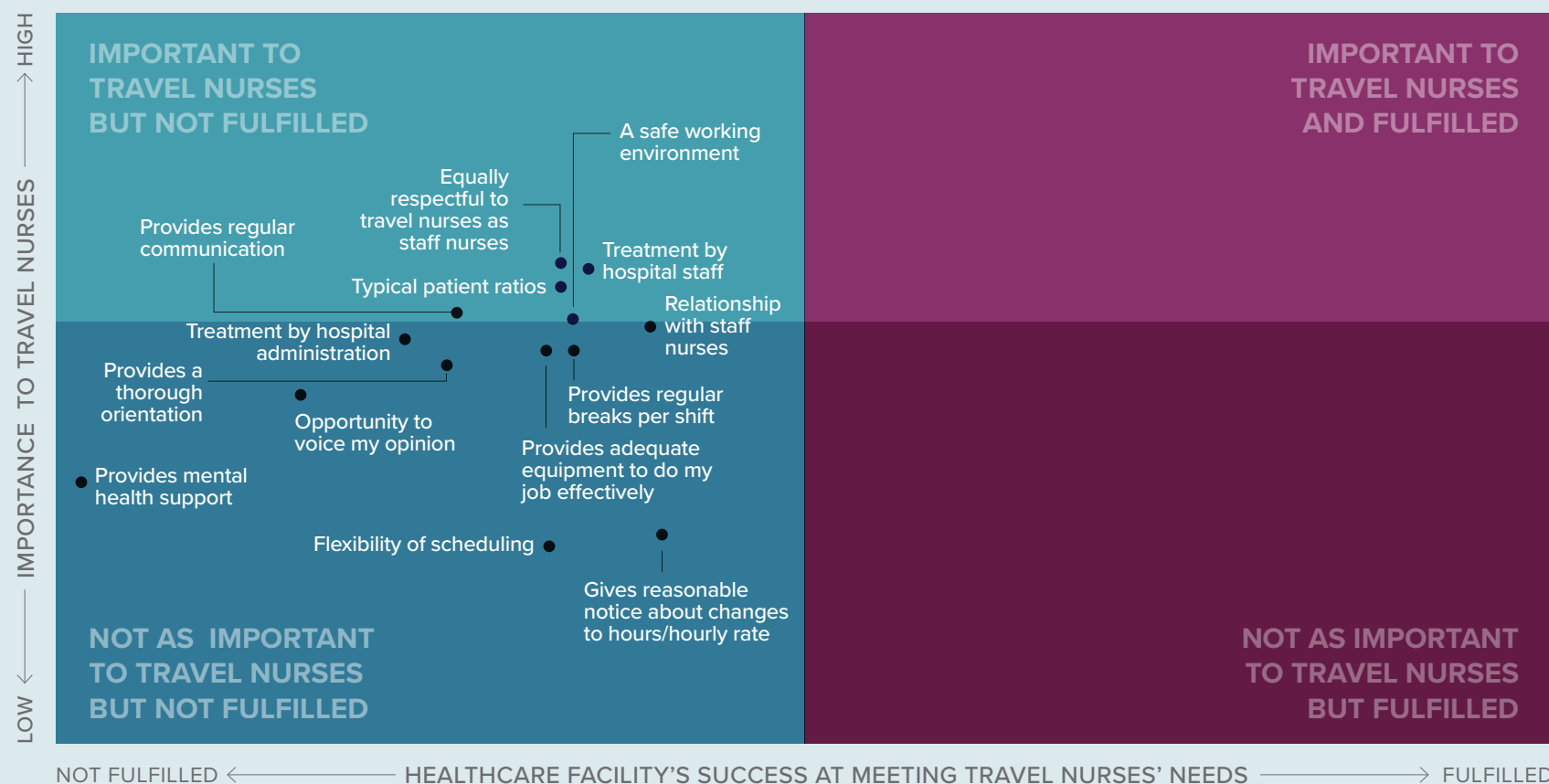
HEALTHCARE FACILITIES: MAIN DRIVER GAPS

Now that we've looked at travel nurses who are likely to continue in the profession, let's turn our focus to the "uncommitted" group — those unlikely or unsure about continuing to work in travel nursing.

FINDINGS: Rather than a few distinct issues, there are a cluster of related reasons centered on relationship issues between the travel nurses and the hospital administration and staff.

THE TOP THREE DRIVER GAPS ARE HIGHLIGHTED ON THE NEXT PAGE

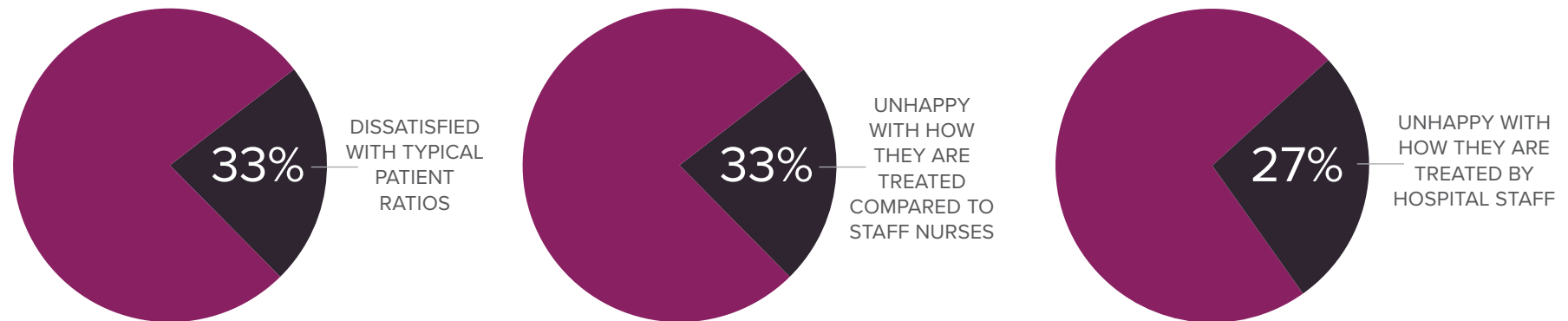
For travel nurses uncertain about continuing in the profession:



HEALTHCARE FACILITIES: MAIN DRIVER GAPS (CONTINUED)

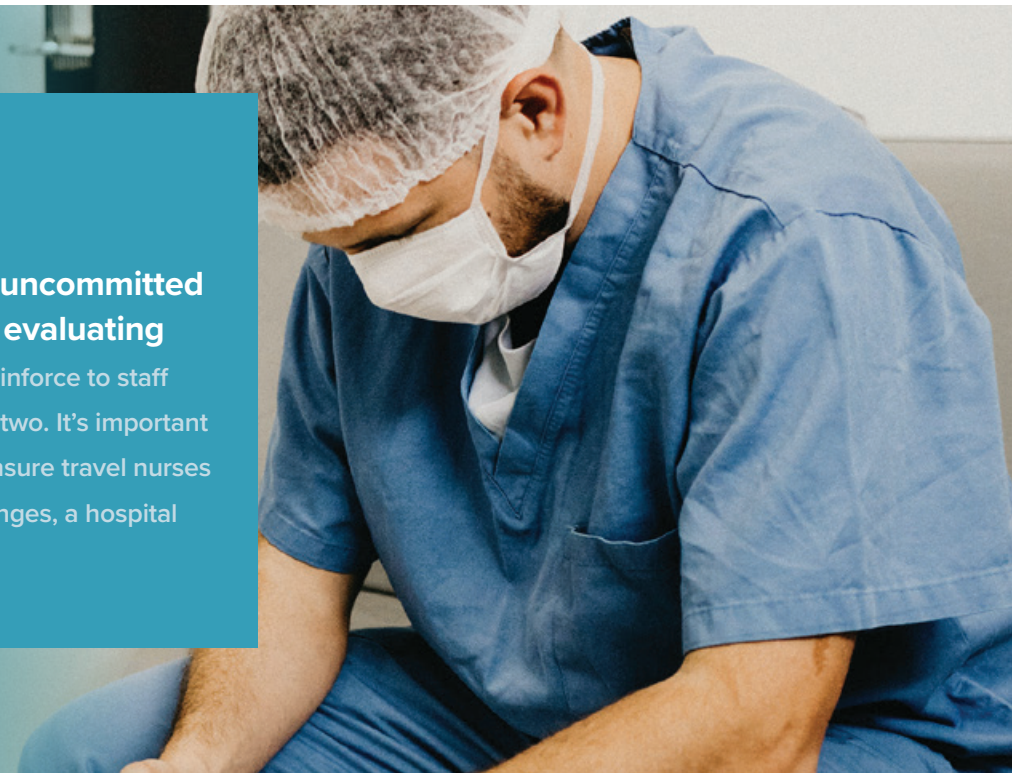
BY THE NUMBERS

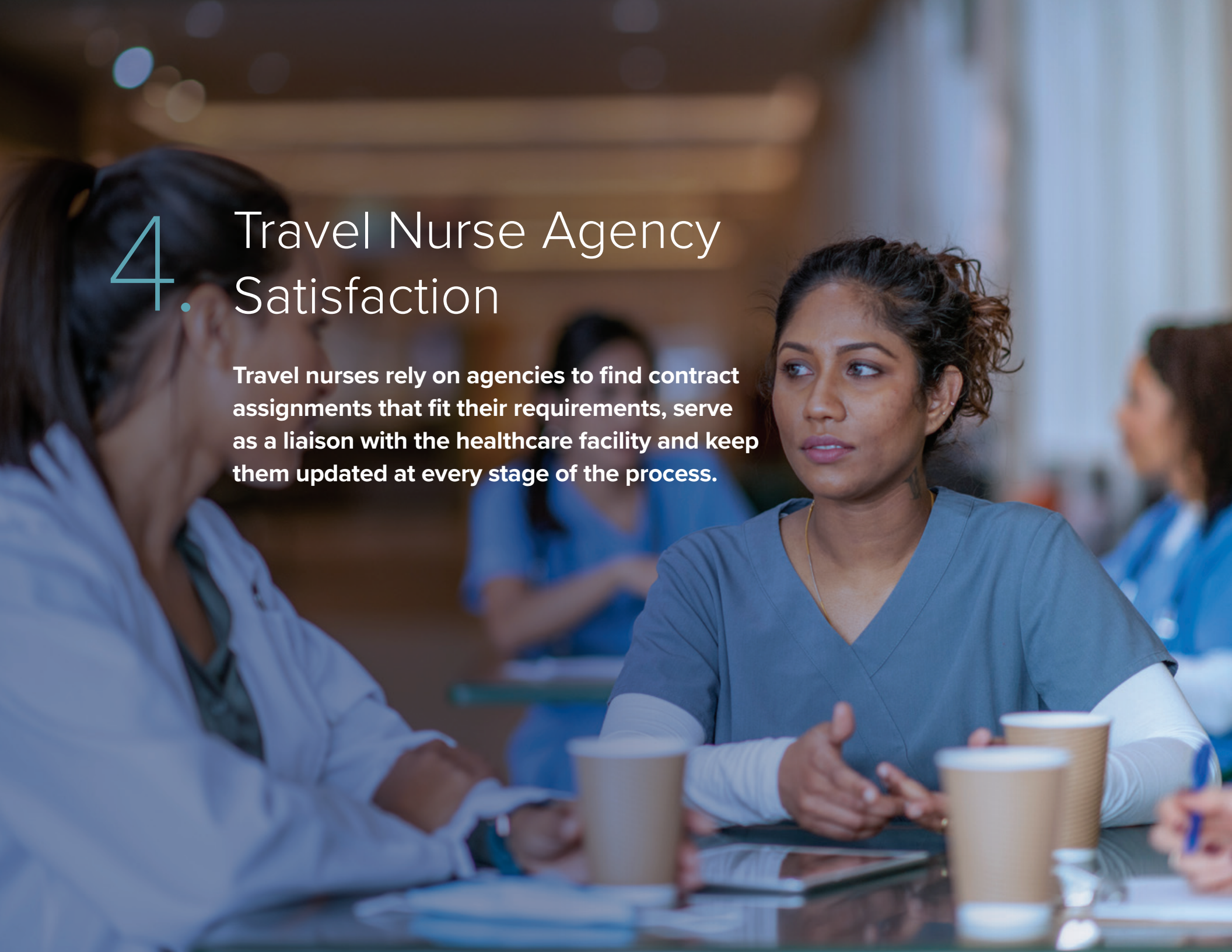
For travel nurses uncertain about continuing in the profession:



The Takeaway

There may be opportunities to shift travel nurses from the uncommitted to the committed group, if healthcare systems are open to evaluating their work culture and making improvements. Leaders must reinforce to staff that full-time and travel nurses work as one team to provide patient care, not two. It's important to look at onboarding, orientation, floor meetings and other interactions to ensure travel nurses are included and not feeling slighted or "less than" other staff. In making changes, a hospital can build its reputation as a great place to work.



A blurred background image showing several healthcare professionals, likely nurses, sitting around a table in a meeting or training session. They are wearing scrubs, and there are coffee cups and papers on the table. The lighting is warm and indoor.

4. Travel Nurse Agency Satisfaction

Travel nurses rely on agencies to find contract assignments that fit their requirements, serve as a liaison with the healthcare facility and keep them updated at every stage of the process.

TRAVEL NURSE AGENCIES: MAIN DRIVERS OF SATISFACTION

As with healthcare facilities, we asked travel nurses about their level of satisfaction with agencies, this time across ten distinct attributes. We determined the importance of each attribute based on how it correlates with their overall travel agency satisfaction, then overlaid their assessment of performance on each of the ten attributes.

FINDINGS: Almost all the reasons for satisfaction centered on how well travel nurses felt their agency regarded them as a person and helped in their professional development.

THE TOP THREE DRIVERS ARE HIGHLIGHTED ON THE NEXT PAGE

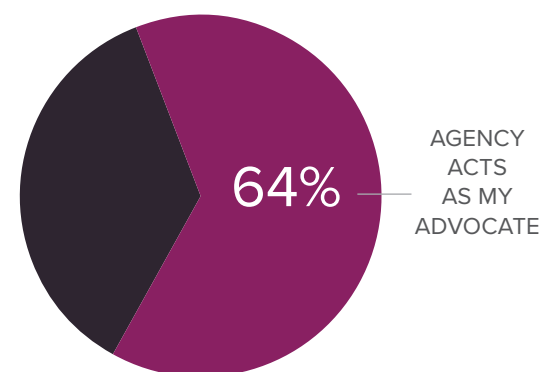
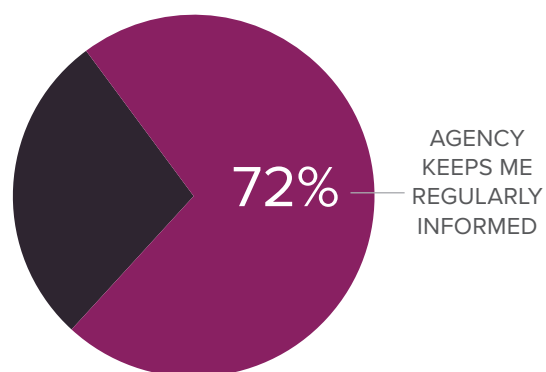
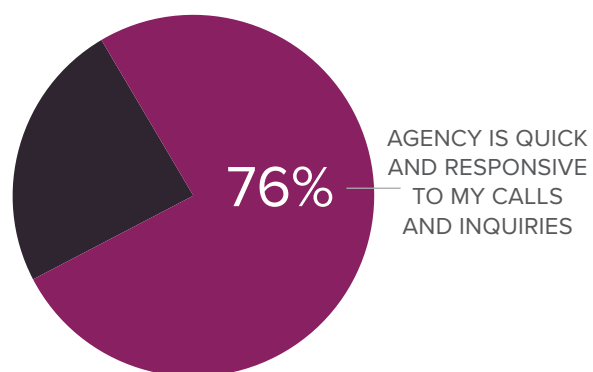
For travel nurses likely to continue in the profession:



TRAVEL NURSE AGENCIES: MAIN DRIVERS OF SATISFACTION (CONTINUED)

BY THE NUMBERS

For travel nurses likely to continue in the profession:



The Takeaway

Many agencies operate in the travel nursing sector, competing to place talent with their client health facilities. The best agencies develop trusted relationships with travel nurses to encourage loyalty and referrals, and clearly travel nurse sentiment toward agencies is strongly positive. Given that some travel nurses don't receive regular communications at hospitals or feel part of the team there, agency staff can stand out by showing travel nurses they support them from their first conversation to the completion of the contract.



TRAVEL NURSE AGENCIES: DRIVER GAPS

There are several areas in which agencies can improve their service, according to the responses of travel nurses unlikely or unsure about continuing in the profession. Driver gaps are those attributes that are highly important, but for which performance is very low.

FINDINGS: Interestingly, many of the attributes important to travel nurses continuing in the profession are also important to those less likely to, indicating different agency experiences between the two groups.

THE TOP THREE DRIVER GAPS ARE HIGHLIGHTED ON THE NEXT PAGE

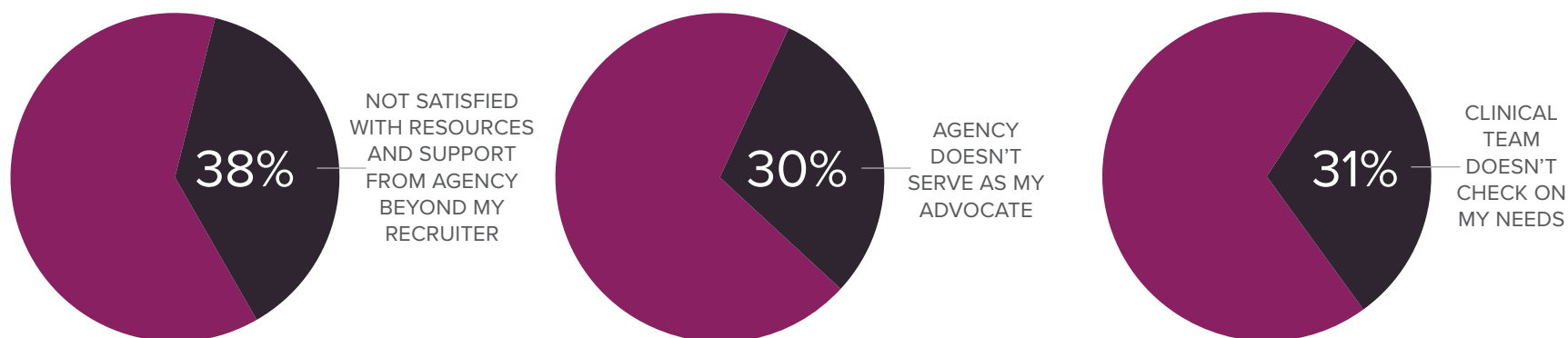
For travel nurses uncertain about continuing in the profession:



TRAVEL NURSE AGENCIES: DRIVER GAPS (CONTINUED)

BY THE NUMBERS

For travel nurses uncertain about continuing in the profession:




The Takeaway

Agencies may be able to retain more travel nurses for their firm, and perhaps convince uncommitted nurses to stick with the profession, by enhancing their service levels. Taking complete job orders from hospitals at the start can help minimize the need for multiple back-and-forth communications to clarify details, helping the travel nurse make a decision more quickly. Recruiters who have empathy for the travel nurses' situation often provide higher levels of service: These recruiters know they may be the only consistent source of support the nurses receive and will do their best to show them they value their work.



5. What the Future Holds for Travel Nursing






“I love being able to constantly change my work environment. It really helps to prevent burnout... I love having so much flexibility with when I work and... where I work.”

— RN 5+ years, TN 2 to 4 years

There's no question that the nursing profession faces significant challenges in the months and years ahead.

Recruiting, retention and a focus on quality of life for the nurse must be top priorities. Healthcare systems that want to be known as a top place to work will continually evaluate and evolve their culture, offer equitable pay for permanent and travel nursing staff, and provide attractive incentives to new and experienced professionals. Failing to build the pipeline of new nursing talent and retain seasoned workers will have catastrophic consequences on our medical facilities and the health of our population.

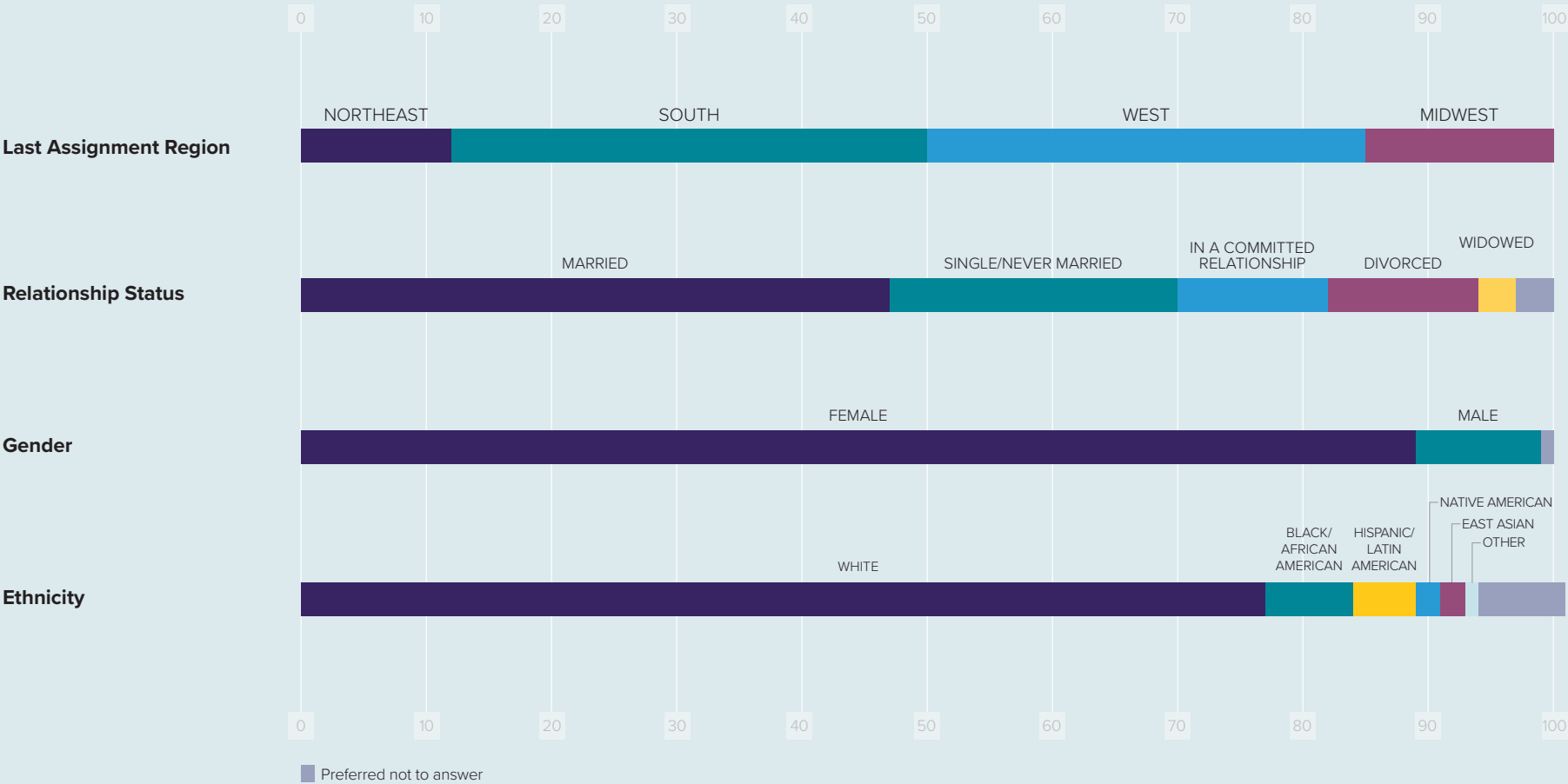
While the situation is urgent, The Voice of the Travel Nurse research provides glimmers of hope, as travel nurses overall are satisfied and committed to their work. They have high satisfaction levels, intend to remain in the field, and are interested in referring others to their profession. Maintaining a robust and satisfied travel nursing workforce is essential to the viability of the American healthcare system as long as the current and projected systemic imbalance between healthcare demand and the supply of capable healthcare staff exists.

A healthcare worker, likely a nurse, is shown in profile, wearing a light blue surgical mask and dark blue scrubs over a white shirt. She is holding a crumpled blue cloth or piece of paper. In the foreground, a patient's arm is visible, wearing a white hospital gown. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be a hospital room with shelves and equipment.

Survey Methodology, Demographics, and Analytics

A total of 1,002 online survey interviews were conducted, along with 20 phone interviews, in the period between March 8–April 8, 2002. Interviews were approximately 20 minutes in length. Respondents were screened to ensure each had been a registered nurse for two or more years and had at least one travel nurse assignment since 2020.

Demographics





The Gypsy Nurse is the world's largest community of travel nurses with an audience of more than 500,000 members across multiple channels including TheGypsyNurse.com and TravCon, the leading healthcare traveler conference. The organization builds awareness of travel healthcare career options and offers travel healthcare professionals the knowledge, tools, and social connectivity required to build successful careers supported by a community of like-minded professionals.

For more information about this study, contact marketing@thegypsynurse.com

For media inquiries, contact maureen@carrigcommunications.com

For advertising opportunities to engage The Gypsy Nurse online communities, contact sales@thegypsynurse.com



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