

Return to Nursing Retired nurses head back to work at MidMichigan Health System.

By Beth Puliti

MidMichigan Health System surveyed its nurses and learned that many like to stay connected to their work—even after they retire.

So, instead of losing their talented and skilled employees to retirement, MidMichigan decided to hire them back to work in its retiree return-to-work program, MyTimeGold.

"The program has kept our most experienced nurses in the workforce. It also helps fill situational staffing needs, such as vacations and time off," said Tonia VanWieren, BSN, RN, director of the maternity unit and pediatrics, nursing office and shift administrators, My Time Select and system staffing at MidMichigan Medical Center-Midland.



Benefits on Both Sides

When a nurse retires, a letter is sent to them after 6 months asking if they are interested in rejoining MidMichigan Health System through MyTimeGold. Many are "very interested in coming back," noted VanWieren.

And why wouldn't they be?

The program allows recently retired and rehired nurses who choose to spend time in Florida during the cold winter months to pick up shifts when they're home during the summer months. It also offers rehired employees additional income and a flexible work schedule.

"They can sign up for shifts that will work for them, times that will work for them, special projects that are out there that might include nursing expertise, such as the electronic medical records implementation. They can choose to either help out in the field that they were an expert in or another area. It's totally up to them," VanWieren said.

Of course, nurses who want to return to work must be up to speed in MidMichigan Health System's processes and technologies - especially with the new electronic medical records implemented. Mini orientations are available for them to catch up.

A Win-Win Program

JoEllen Hays, BSN, RN, noted that her participation in MidMichigan Health's return-to-work program has allowed her to continue to use her education and nursing experience in a completely different type of job for nurses.

"My current area is vastly different from my previous area of work. I have been accepted totally by my new 'peers' and feel very comfortable in my new role," Hays said. "Working as a casual employee allows me to enjoy the 'retired' part of my life while still giving me the autonomy that comes with work. Working because I want to and am needed is much different than working as a full-time employee. I continue to learn, which is important to me also."

Karen Lovelace was employed by MidMichigan Medical Center for 38 years as a registered nurse, and managed the emergency department for more than 27 years before retiring in 2006.

"I decided to be a retire/rehire employee for the return-to-work program because after I retired I missed the people contact that I had while working," she explained. "I also felt that I still had a lot of knowledge and expertise that I could offer to both new and experienced nurses."

Unlike others she knew who pursued a hobby after retiring, Lovelace didn't have a passion as strong as nursing. So, after 6 months of retirement, she rejoined the medical center on an on-call status in a nursing supervisor level where she was able to satisfy her needs, and be of help to others needing time off.

"In my job, I am able to pick up hours that are convenient for me, allowing me to be free when I need to be. With this arrangement, I work the allowed time permitted by Social Security," Lovelace said. "Although many of the staff and my friends think that I am crazy for going back to work, I believe that it has been the best way for me to have the benefits of both the working and retirement worlds."

She believes the program not only benefits her, but also the medical center. "Both of us have our needs met," she said.

Retaining 'Invaluable' Nurses

Lynn Bruchhof, MS, SPHR, system vice president of people resources, commented that the program allows soon-to-be retired clinicians the ability to reduce their work hours, but also stay in touch with the organization.

"Many 60-year-olds still want to work and contribute to the organization," she said.

By implementing MyTimeGold, MidMichigan is able to retain highly experienced nurses who are invaluable at the bedside and ideal teachers and preceptors for new graduates, Bruchhof said.

"At MidMichigan Health we will need over 75 new RNs in the next 5 years, based on nurses who hit 60 and are retiring," Bruchhof explained. With this program "we can utilize the skills of a seasoned nurse and one who is familiar with the floor and the patient care needs."

Beth Puliti is a frequent contributor to ADVANCE.