



Survey: Evaluating Healthcare Organizations' Abilities to Address Common Challenges



Introduction

The world is aging. While there are currently 703 million people 65 years of age or older worldwide, by 2050, that number is expected to reach [1.5 billion](#). Similarly, the [US Census](#) predicts that older adults will outnumber children for the first time in US history by 2030. Many of these older adults are expected to [age in place](#) with the support of home health and home care assistance.

Especially with the US population aging at its current rate, reducing financial risk remains a significant challenge. For the past 60 years, US healthcare costs have increased every year. By 2028, US healthcare spending is expected to reach [\\$6.2 trillion](#) and account for almost 20 percent of the GDP.

As the older adult population continues to grow and as costs continue to rise, healthcare professionals and companies are innovating to deliver more comprehensive solutions along the care continuum. Optimizing patient outcomes, reducing financial risk, and improving operational efficiency are all top of mind for healthcare providers and companies—and they are increasingly looking to address these significant challenges with technology solutions.

A record amount of money is being invested into healthcare startups with the promise of digital transformation. Accelerated by glaring inefficiencies made transparent by the pandemic, private funding for healthcare companies has increased significantly. During the first quarter of 2021, \$6.7 billion

was invested in US digital health startups in an effort to improve care, streamline operations, and increase revenue through digital technology solutions.

While technology solutions abound, there appears to be a gap between available technology and user adoption among healthcare professionals. This survey aims to better understand the challenges facing healthcare providers, especially in the skilled nursing industry, and how healthcare workers in all job functions are engaging with technology to solve challenges, from acquiring patients to enforcing safety measures. Ultimately, we hope to understand from this study how to create and implement solutions that best address the needs and preferences of end users to improve adoption.

Inspiren, a nurse-led technology company that is dedicated to protecting the residents and caregivers of skilled nursing facilities, sought to find partial answers to these questions by initiating a primary study alongside partners Osmond Marketing, the Association of Skilled Nursing Providers, and Caring.com. In this quantitative survey, the investigators' primary motivation was to understand how medical professionals engage with technology to solve challenges and improve efficiencies and patient care. The 18-question survey addressed topics such as respondents' highest priorities, resourcing needs, current technology solutions, EHR use, and demographics. Following is a short description of each partner.

Who Was Involved?

Inspiren

Inspiren is a nurse-led technology company that has created a hybrid sensing platform called AUGi, which leverages artificial intelligence, computer vision, environmental sensing, and IoT connectivity to analyze and understand the physical and digital environment of a patient or resident. The technology is shown to be effective in increasing staff efficiency, patient safety, and infection control by providing real-time insight into patient activities and staff interactions.

Osmond Marketing

Osmond Marketing is a full-service, full-funnel marketing organization with a focus on content and education. Osmond Marketing provides a comprehensive suite of business and marketing services along the customer journey for clients in the healthcare industry.

ASN

The Association of Skilled Nursing Providers is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to educating providers, organizations, and the public about best practices in post-acute care—especially skilled nursing.

Caring.com

Caring.com is an online resource offering expert guidance through phone support to seniors and their caregivers nationwide. As the number one site for senior care reviews, their overall objective is to help those caring for seniors make good, informed decisions while also saving time and money.

These organizations came together to design and distribute a survey illuminating the perspectives of medical professionals about technology, particularly in the skilled nursing industry. This effort was to gain a better understanding of the common challenges that healthcare professionals face as well as the confidence those individuals have in their organizations' ability to address those challenges with their current technology solutions.

Survey Methods

The survey was created using SurveyMonkey and distributed to medical professionals working specifically in skilled nursing at various healthcare organizations. Volunteer participants were found through Osmond Marketing's healthcare network relationships, Caring.com's newsletter database, and targeted phone calls to healthcare facilities. The survey was distributed twice over the period of two months, and no monetary incentives were used. There were a total of 133 respondents.

Once all of the responses had been collected, the investigators analyzed the results. For results based on the total sample of healthcare professionals, the margin of sampling error is +/- 10 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level. In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of public opinion polls. Despite these challenges, the investigators felt the survey was a large enough volunteer sample size to draw generalized conclusions about industry trends.

Survey Results

Overall survey results indicate that while participants understood the benefits of technological developments in the industry, there are significant barriers preventing their organizations from implementing these innovative solutions, such as budget constraints and lack of prioritization for innovation. Participants also understood, even in small- and medium-sized business market segments, that technology solutions are imperative to removing roadblocks in the long term and will address the most pressing challenges in today's healthcare ecosystem.

Participants also recognized that, as the industry continues to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and adapt to the rapidly growing elderly population, healthcare workers must have access to intuitive, affordable technology that allows them to automate their processes and reduce the burden on staff while continuing to offer excellent care.

The following are the results that were collected from questions surrounding participants' demographics, common challenges and pain points, perspectives regarding their use of current technology, and solutions at their organizations.

Demographics

The majority of the respondents (51 percent) were between the ages of 30 and 44, followed by 33 percent in the 18 to 29 age group. Respondents were fairly evenly spread out across the United States, with the largest groups being from the East North Central (16 percent), Pacific (16 percent), and West South Central (14 percent) regions. A significant majority (82 percent) were female, while 18 percent were male. The household income followed a normal distribution, with a majority (52 percent) falling between \$50,000 and \$99,999. Respondents included registered nurses, licensed practitioner nurses, certified nurse assistants, administrators, operations executives, and nurse managers.

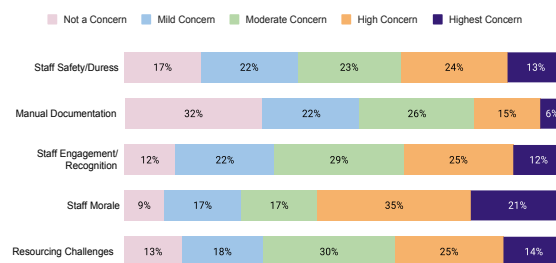
Organizations

The majority of the respondents (56 percent) represented skilled nursing facilities; the next largest group (30 percent) represented hospitals. The remaining respondents came from other healthcare facilities, including rehabilitation, assisted living, outpatient clinics, and memory care. Organization size was measured in terms of the number of beds. Of the facilities, 14 percent have up to 50 beds, 48 percent have 51–200 beds, 15 percent have 201–500 beds, 5 percent have 501–1,000 beds, and 18 percent have more than 1,000 beds.

In sum, the investigators felt that the industry breakdown was represented fairly well in the survey responses, with 95 percent of participants self-identifying as an administrator (20 percent), director of nursing (12.5 percent), or other management or clinical job function.

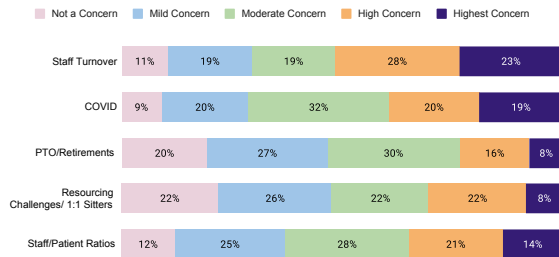
Perspectives on Technology and Solutions

After providing information about themselves and their organizations, respondents were asked to rank their level of concern regarding staff safety/duress, manual documentation, staff engagement/recognition, staff morale, and resourcing challenges on a modified Likert scale as “not a priority,” “low priority,” “moderate priority,” “high priority,” or “highest priority”:



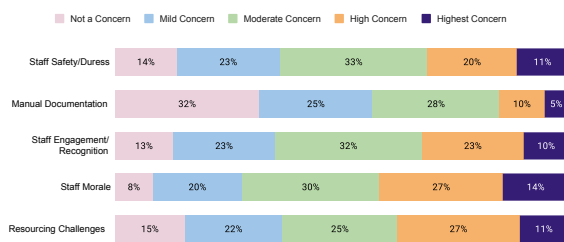
Staff morale is ranked as the highest concern, with 21 percent of respondents saying it was “highest priority,” with resourcing challenges as the next highest (14 percent). Staff morale and resourcing challenges can go hand in hand since, when turnover rates are high and resources are low, the job becomes more demanding physically, mentally, and emotionally. Staff safety (14 percent) and resourcing challenges (13 percent) followed closely behind in terms of being perceived as highest priority. Manual documentation was not seen as a challenge on the same level, with only 6 percent of respondents saying it was “highest priority” and 32 percent saying it was “not a priority.”

Next, respondents ranked their level of concern regarding each challenge specifically related to resourcing:



Staff turnover (23 percent) and COVID (19 percent) were the highest concerns with regard to resourcing. COVID has had a tremendous impact on employee turnover in the healthcare industry: As people fear for their safety, many who are high risk for infection or have high-risk family members have chosen to stop working or retire early, leaving the number of healthcare workers dwindling.

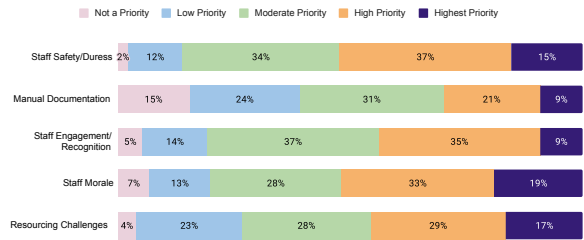
Respondents were then asked to rank their level of concern regarding their organization’s ability to address the challenges with their current solutions and processes:



The results indicate that employees are most concerned about their organization’s ability to deal with the ebb and flow of staff morale (14 percent ranked as highest concern), along with staff safety and resourcing challenges (11 percent ranked as highest concern).

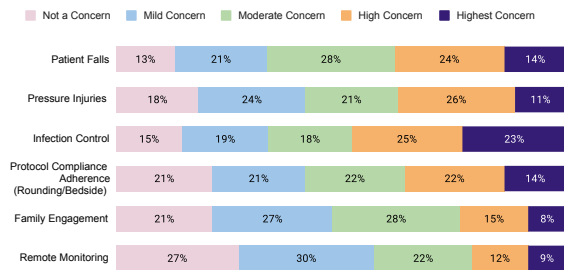
After respondents shared their concern about the organization’s ability to address common challenges, they ranked how well

their organization prioritizes evaluating their current processes and solutions for addressing each of the challenges:



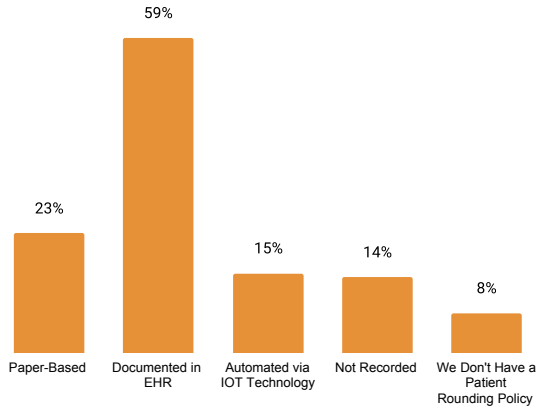
Staff morale was viewed as a top concern for organizations, with 52 percent of respondents saying their organization viewed it as highest or high priority. Staff safety was also viewed as a top concern, with 52 percent of respondents saying their organization viewed it as highest or high priority. Resourcing challenges (46 percent), staff engagement (44 percent), and manual documentation (30 percent) were viewed as secondary concerns.

Respondents also expressed their concern about their organization’s ability to address the following challenges:



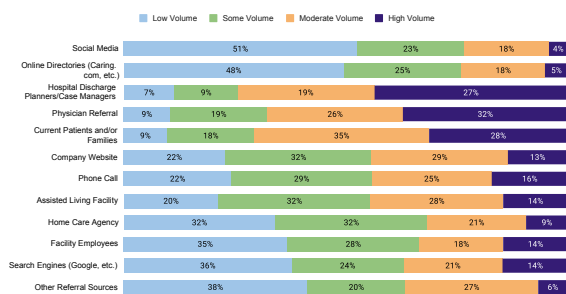
Not surprisingly, infection control topped the list of respondents’ concerns, with 48 percent of respondents identifying it as a “high” or “highest concern.” Protocol compliance adherence (36 percent), pressure injuries (37 percent), and patient falls (38 percent) were also cited as issues respondents were concerned about.

After measuring the respondent’s perspectives on these common challenges, respondents answered how their organizations currently measure patient rounding, resulting in the following data:



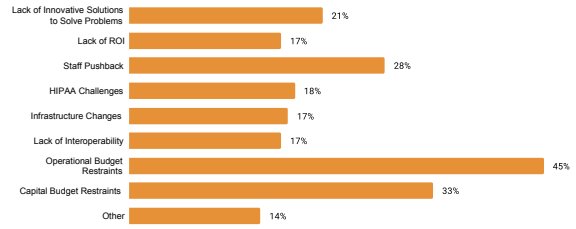
When it comes to patient rounding, nearly 52 percent of organizations are using an EHR to document activity, while 23 percent are manually documenting activity on paper, 15 percent are automating via IOT technology, 14 percent are not recording patient rounding, and 8 percent do not have a patient rounding policy.

Next, respondents ranked the volume of new-patient leads:



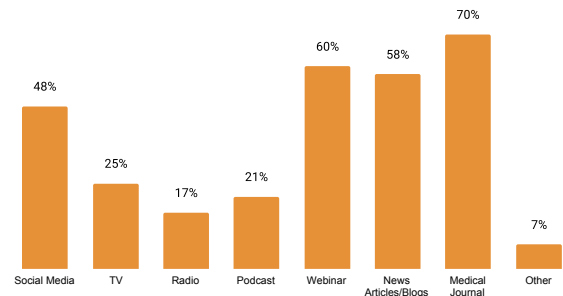
According to respondents, hospital discharge planners, case managers, and physicians are still responsible for the bulk of leads, with current patients and families following close behind. Company websites are providing a significant amount of leads, while only a few respondents cited digital directories and social media as high-volume sources.

Respondents then selected the factors that prevent their organizations from embracing new technologies and solutions:



Operational and capital budget restraints are cited as the most common reasons organizations have held off implementing innovative solutions. Staff pushback was listed next, then lack of innovative solutions to solve problems. Lack of ROI, HIPAA challenges, and lack of interoperability were also cited as barriers to implementing technology solutions.

Finally, respondents selected the resources they use to acquire healthcare industry information:



The majority of professionals are receiving information from a variety of sources. Medical journals are used most, then webinars, news articles, social media, and other sources. Interestingly, while most respondents overall do not view digital channels as an important source of leads, they do view digital channels as an important source of news and information.

Key Takeaways

The results of this survey were illuminating. The research shows that the greatest concerns of healthcare professionals are staff morale, employee turnover, and infection control. With 56 percent of respondents reporting staff morale as at least a high—if not the highest—concern and only 9 percent of them citing it as no concern at all, it's reasonable to assume that COVID-19 and the additional strain placed on healthcare professionals have left many concerned about the well-being of their staff. Intense stress and low staff morale can impact every aspect of care at a long-term care facility.

Low morale not only impacts healthcare professionals' ability to provide the best care possible, but it can also lead to high turnover rates. In fact, [Skilled Nursing News](#) reports that nursing homes have a 94 percent staff turnover rate. In facilities with particularly low star ratings, this percentage increases, as facilities with a one-star rating from CMS have a median turnover of 135 percent. While COVID-19 has certainly played a role in staff morale and regular turnover, high turnover rates have affected the long-term care industry long before the pandemic.

Considering facilities' concern over budgetary restrictions, the need to continuously replace staff members puts additional strain on spending. According to [Gallup](#), the cost of replacing an employee can be up to two times the employee's annual salary. This means that prioritizing staff satisfaction could not only improve care but also help facilities save and invest money in addressing their most significant challenges, like driving digital transformation and improving their processes.

Not only were staff morale and resourcing the highest-ranking concerns in this survey, but many respondents also reported that they do not feel their organizations are

able to adequately address these challenges with their current technology and solutions. Many respondents reported their organizations were most unprepared to deal with staff morale (14 percent). Resourcing concerns and staff safety/duress follow closely behind—each at 11 percent. This shows that not only are these concerns at the top of long-term healthcare professionals' minds, but they also feel ill-equipped to address them.

Infection control also ranked as one of the industry's highest concerns, most likely due to the COVID-19 pandemic: 23 percent of respondents selected it as their greatest concern amongst other choices such as patient falls, pressure injuries, protocol adherence, family engagement, and remote monitoring. As facilities continue to move past the pandemic and adapt to a stricter regulatory environment, this concern is expected to subside.

While many technology organizations and investors are betting on solutions to digitally transform the industry and solve common challenges, respondents indicate that there are barriers between these solutions and organizations' ability to adopt them.

As the complexity of issues faced by the long-term care industry grows, facilities' processes remain unchanged, making concerns like staff morale and resourcing even more difficult to address. For example, 82 percent of organizations manually document all activity, making it difficult to keep up with accurate and recent information, let alone identify necessary areas for growth. In one study focused on post-acute care facilities, [83 percent](#) of respondents encountered problems related to inadequate data from the hospital, particularly during discharge. Inadequate information flow can make providing excellent care that much harder, especially when nursing staff does not have the guidance they need.

Outdated processes are also reflected in the methods used to secure new patient leads. According to these results, long-term care facilities rely on in-person referrals from physicians and current patients to reach new clients. However, implementing digital outreach through search engine results, websites, and social media could help them stand out from the competition. While 32 percent of respondents ranked physician referrals as the most common source of new patient leads, only 4 percent chose social media. There is an opportunity for forward-thinking companies to become market differentiators in this area, as [71 percent of patients](#) use search engines to find healthcare reviews as the first step while finding a new healthcare provider. Similarly, a [BrightLocal](#) survey found that 76 percent of consumers trust online reviews as much as personal recommendations. As consumers continue to rely on digital solutions, long-term care facilities that harness digital tools may be able to adapt and stand out in the market.

Along with the pressure to adapt to the challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic, long-term care professionals have been faced with an intensifying regulatory environment, increased competition, and more complex organizational processes—all issues that may be improved by technology. However, barriers to change—such as tight budget restraints—leave many professionals juggling these challenges alone.

In sum, this survey was designed as an exploratory study to understand the perceptions of skilled nursing professionals about technology's role in patient acquisition and

care. This study has confirmed the authors' hypothesis that (1) most healthcare professionals understand the benefits of technology but (2) see significant barriers in the ability to utilize them effectively. The study also suggests that there is a significant opportunity to improve patient acquisition with digital tools, as some respondents have indicated that they are receiving a high volume of leads from these channels.

Further research is needed to identify the technology tools and processes that market leaders are using to digitally transform and stand out among competitors, as well as the relative importance that market leaders place on technology.

Further qualitative research is also needed to understand how technology solutions improve operational efficiency, reduce financial risk, and optimize patient care in more specific ways.

It is the authors' opinion that, as healthcare professionals continue to experience more complex processes and additional regulatory requirements, technology solutions will become more important in the basic functions of a skilled nursing facility. Market leaders will be those who harness the value of technology and place the necessary time and resources to become the first adopters of these solutions.