



MedStar Health
MedStar Washington Hospital Center

Transformative workforce strategies to improve recruitment and retention

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Purpose

The purpose of this project was to implement transformative recruitment processes, flexible work schedules, and meaningful recognition to improve recruitment and retention of permanent staff.

Significance

Nationwide nursing shortages, exacerbated by the pandemic, pose a persistent challenge for healthcare organizations, impacting care delivery, patient safety, satisfaction, and quality outcomes, as well as contributing to increased healthcare costs and nurse dissatisfaction. Literature supports the need to organize capacity pools and increase operational flexibility, improve the utilization, and efficiency of existing resources^{1,2}

Implementation

Addressing these issues, particularly in a 912-bed Level I Trauma Center, necessitated visionary leadership to drive organizational change through innovative staffing models and a renewed focus on workplace culture to boost recruitment and retention.

Staffing Strategies

Flexible Staffing Models

The CNO advocated for the expansion of float pools, which offered flexibility and competitive compensation, and played a crucial role in retaining nurses seeking better work-life balance or higher pay.

- **Central Float Pool:** Cross-trained nurses capable of working across various specialties to address fluctuating patient demands.
- **Unit-Based Float Pool:** Nurses maintain their primary unit assignments with a minimum of three shifts every two weeks.

Timely Recruitment

To shore up the primary workforce, the CNO tasked the hospital's recruitment team with expediting the hiring process.

- All applications reviewed within 24 hours of submission.
- Interviews scheduled at the candidate's convenience.
- Hiring decisions made within 24 hours of interview.

Boomerang Recruitment

Knowing that many nurses who left the organization during the pandemic were re-entering the market, the CNO implemented a "boomerang" strategy to rehire former employees. Through personal outreach from nurse leaders and an expedited hiring process, the organization successfully re-recruited 55 nurses.

Internal Mobility

Efforts were made to promote professional development and facilitate internal transfers, as evidenced by 26 travel nurses transitioning to permanent positions within six months. Part-time positions were created to offer further flexibility for permanent staff.

Recognition and Engagement

Communication and recognition were key components of the CNO's retention strategy. The CNO actively engaged with staff through monthly newsletters, frequent rounding, town hall meetings, and regular check-ins with new hires. A robust recognition program was launched, including the DAISY Award for monthly recognition and CNO Excellence Awards presented biannually. The Butterfly Award was created to honor exceptional new-to-practice nurses from the hospital's nurse residency program. During National Nurses' Week, the CNO kicked off the celebration with a welcome breakfast for the hospital's 2,000+ nurses.

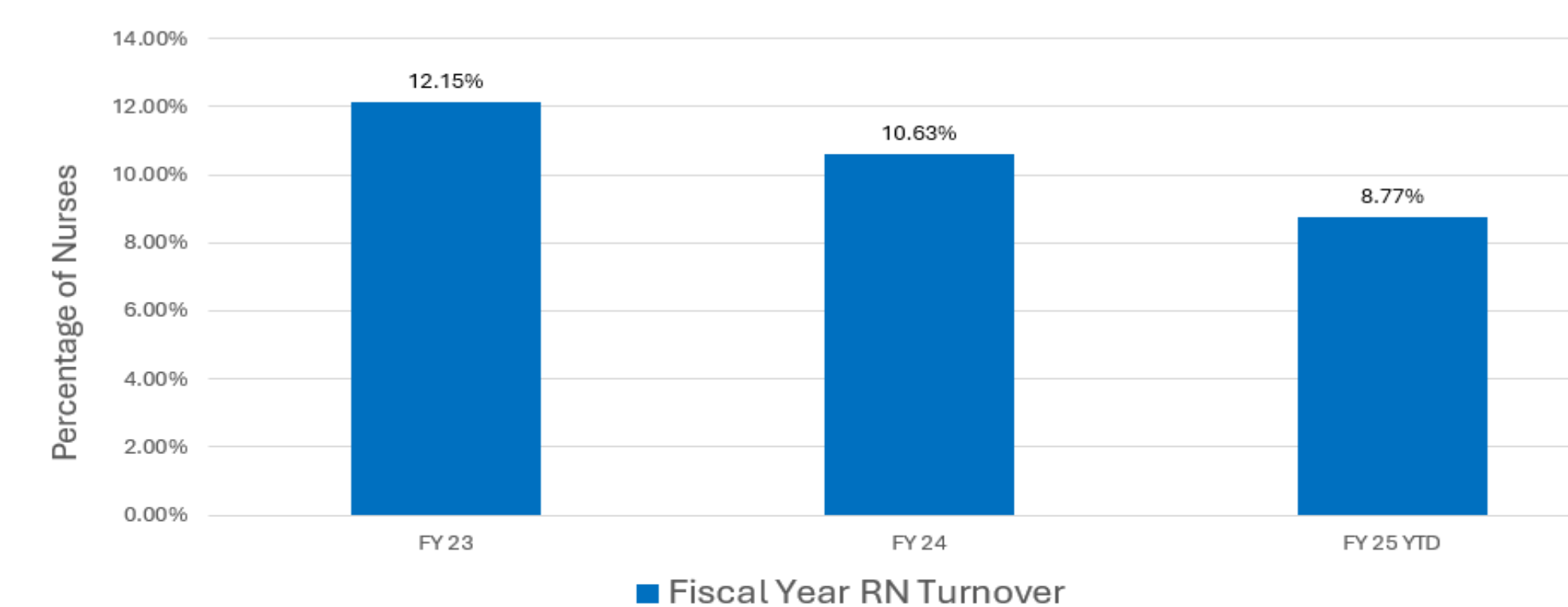
A food truck festival, financial benefits fair, puppy party, and annual Nurses' Choice Awards celebration rounded out the recognition week and contributed to an enhanced culture of gratitude.



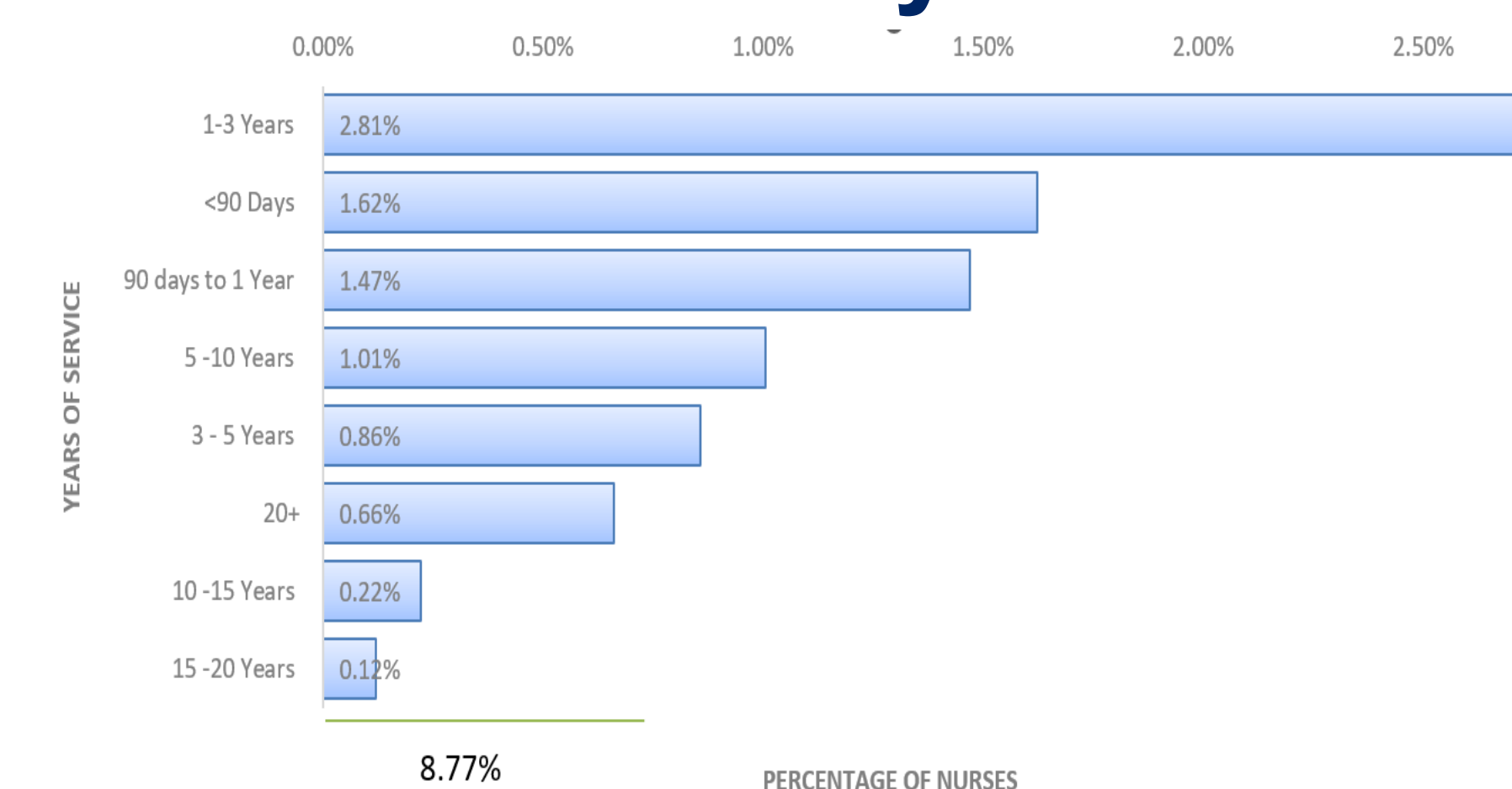
Figure 1: CNO Ariam Yitbarek (left) presented 38 awards at the hospital's annual Nurses' Choice Awards celebration in 2024.

Outcomes

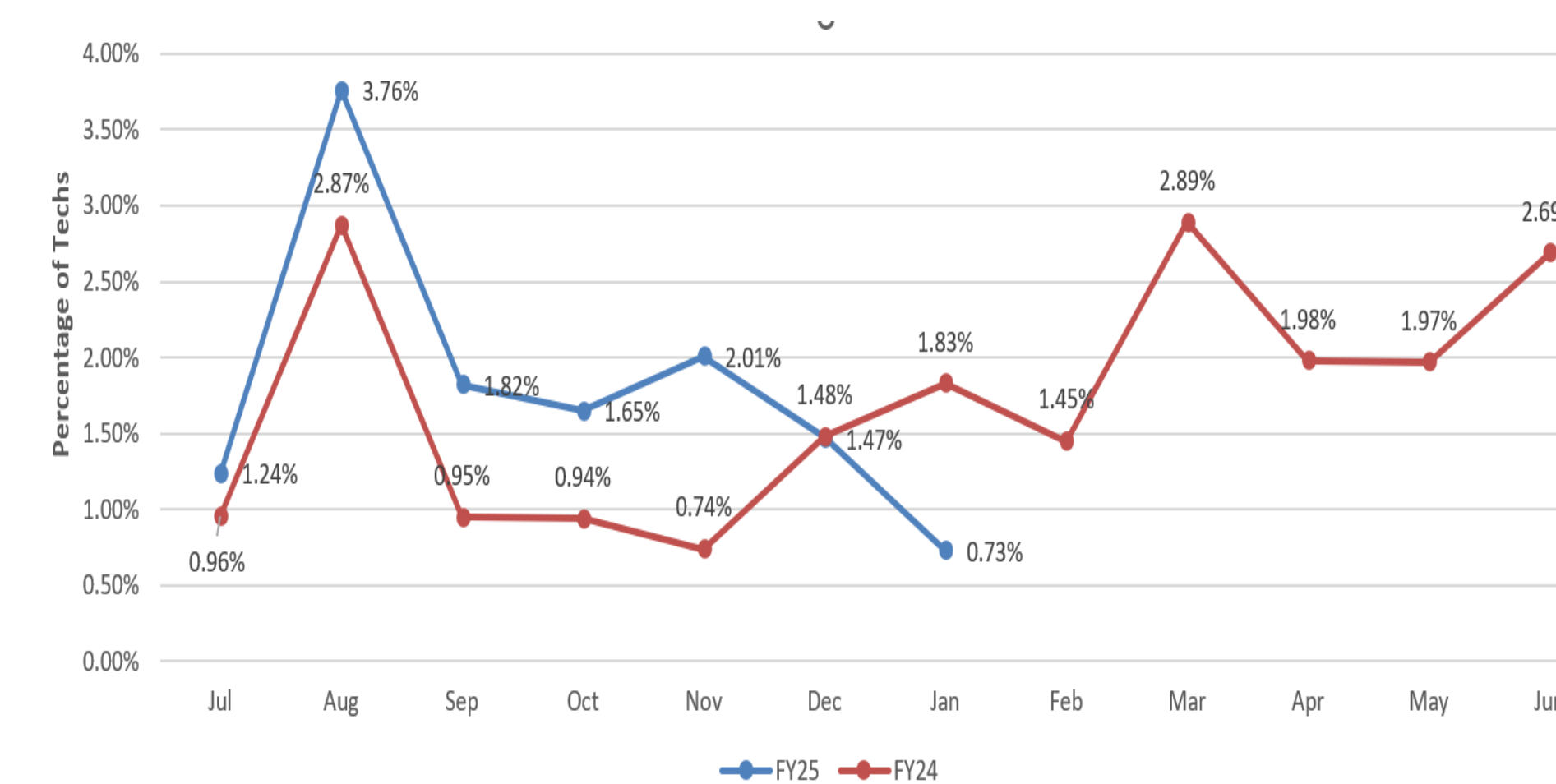
1. RN Turnover



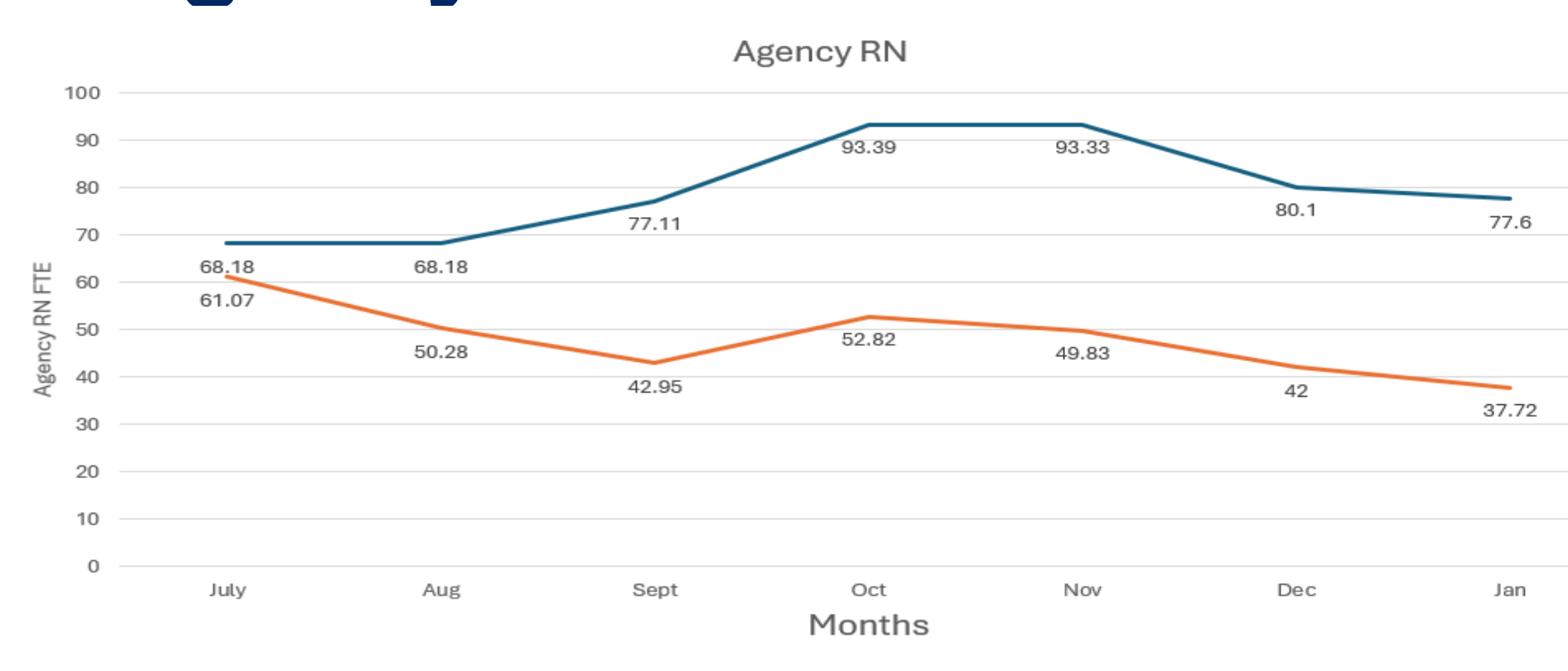
2. RN% Turnover by Years of Service



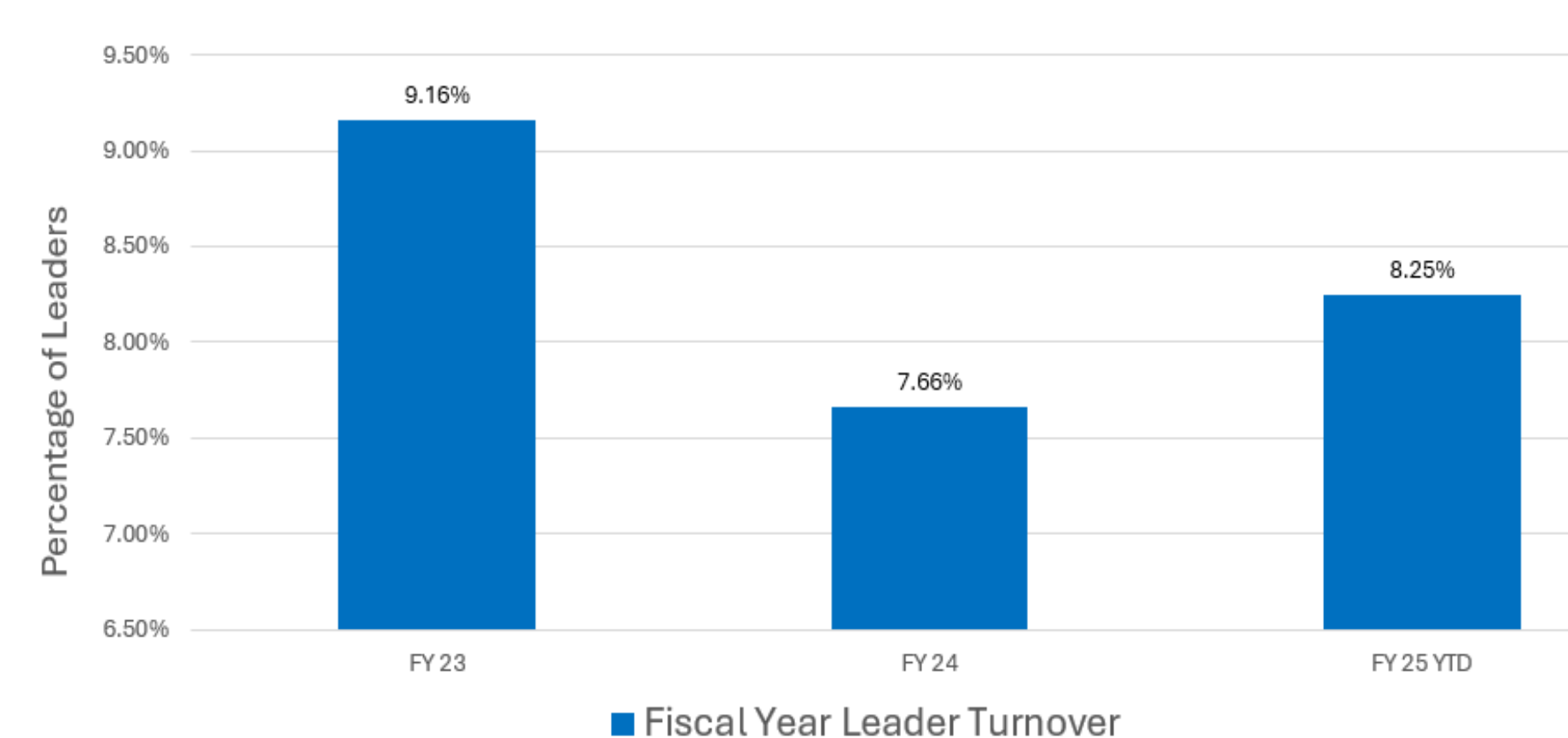
3. Tech Turnover



4. Agency RN Utilization



5. Leader Turnover



Results

These recruitment and retention strategies led to substantial improvements: Nurse turnover rates decreased from 12.15% in FY22 to 10.63% in FY24, while nurse leader turnover dropped from 9.2% in FY23 to 7.7% in FY24, currently trending at 8% (FY25 YTD). Patient care technician turnover also decreased from 2.87% in August 2023 to 0.73% in Jan 2025. The flexible float pool expanded from 457 FTEs in FY22 to 512 FTEs in FY24, and reliance on agency nurses was significantly reduced, from 146 FTEs in July 2023 to 42 FTEs in Dec 2024, a saving of over \$1 million.

Conclusion

The CNO's holistic approach made significant strides in optimizing staffing and improving retention. Stabilized staffing levels allowed the organization to eliminate shift bonuses that were of significant cost during the pandemic. The responsive recruitment process improved turnover rates but also decreased dependence on agency staff, demonstrating a successful, flexible strategy that could serve as a model for other healthcare organizations.

References:

1. Fagefors, C., Lantz, B., & Rosén, P. (2020). Creating short-term volume flexibility in healthcare capacity management. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17(22), 8514. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17228514>
2. Griffiths, P., Saville, C., Ball, J. E., Jones, J., & Monks, T. (2021). Beyond ratios - flexible and resilient nurse staffing options to deliver cost-effective hospital care and address staff shortages: A simulation and economic modelling study. *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 117, 103901. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijnurstu.2021.103901>