




Medical  
Solutions™



**Connecting  
Gen Z: How to  
Prepare for the  
New Healthcare  
Workforce**



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# Message from the CEO

Through all the years, and all the changes, healthcare remains one of the most dynamic and demanding fields of work. But, at its heart, it is the most people-centric industry. Ultimately, quality care always boils down to people caring for other people.

In our mission to connect care and our drive to provide the best possible ecosystem of healthcare staffing solutions, Medical Solutions remains a people company with a commitment to human-first service. That's why we're sharing this whitepaper. The makeup of the people in the workforce is changing in an unprecedented way. The arrival of Gen Z creates a five-generation workforce and presents both challenges and opportunities.

To correctly connect this generation to their colleagues, there are questions that need to be answered. What does this new generation of clinicians want from their work? Why are they choosing to enter healthcare? What sorts of opportunities and settings are most attractive to them? How can they help change the healthcare landscape for the better? Where will they need help to grow and develop?

These are the inquiries that drove the creation of this paper. If you're anything like me, most of your thoughts probably turn to the near and not-too-distant future. By considering and better understanding this newest generation of clinicians and what they want, we can gain a better and clearer view of our industry's future. How Gen Z delivers patient care will shape our industry today, tomorrow, and for decades to come.

This future is full of promise. We see a world of driven, ambitious clinicians seeking truly meaningful work helping their patients. We see a workplace more adept at utilizing technology. We see a healthy shift toward a better work/life balance and a professional respect for experience through mentorship. It all starts with connection.

**By connecting Gen Z, we can better connect care.**



**Craig Meier**  
CEO, Medical Solutions

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# Abstract

The healthcare industry continually evolves. Sometimes an external event forces or accelerates change, as the COVID-19 pandemic did. Other times, the nature of the workforce is changing in a more organic and predictable way. Generation Z – those born between 2001 and 2020 – have started entering the workforce. These new clinicians will create change in healthcare.

Their arrival in the professional world creates a five-generation workforce. They join Traditionalists (born from 1925 to 1945), who may be in the twilight of their careers, as well as Baby Boomers (1946 to 1964), and Generation X (1965 to 1980). The much-discussed Millennial generation (1981 to 2000) now find themselves developing into management or leadership roles. The resulting picture is a mosaic of priorities and mindsets to balance. It reveals some critical learning opportunities.

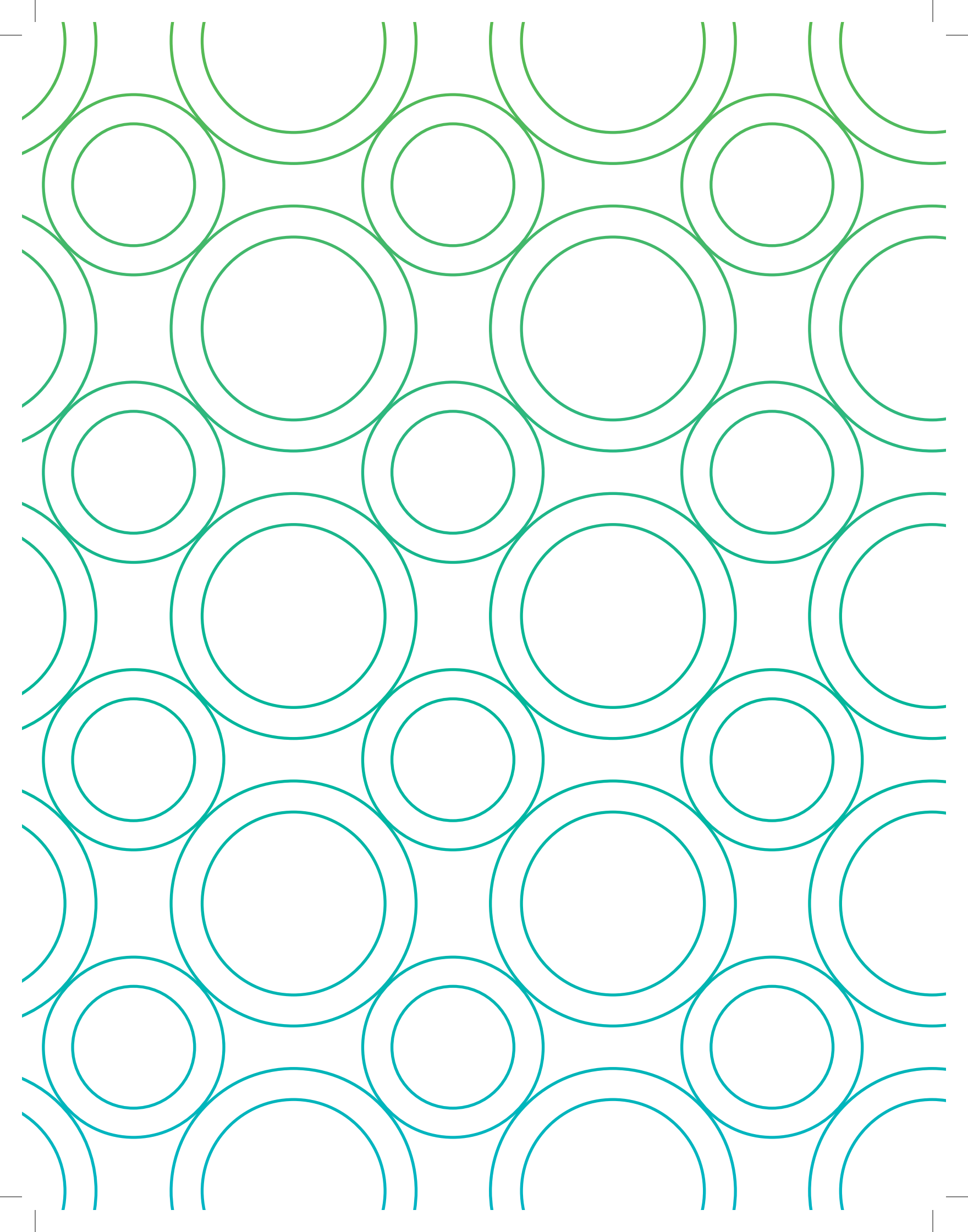
How do hospitals and health systems attract, recruit, retain, and develop this new generation of Gen Z clinicians? In a word: *connect*. Effectively connecting Gen Z clinicians to the healthcare workforce and with other generations will enable them to have the most positive impact on patient care now and over the course of their careers.

This paper explores ways to make and nurture that connection, based on what is known about Gen Z's values and the conditions that shaped them. Specifically, it examines their need for purpose and balance between their work and personal lives, their ability and willingness to use technology, and their drive for near-continuous education and professional development. There are steps hospitals and health systems can take to leverage each of these values to help Gen Z connect and thrive in the new healthcare landscape.





**How do hospitals and health systems attract, recruit, retain, and develop this new generation of Gen Z clinicians? In a word: *connect*.**





## Section 1

# Work/Life Balance Is Nonnegotiable



Healthcare can be a very demanding field of work, and nurses and other clinicians know patient care does not stop. In some hospitals and health systems, there exists a culture of compartmentalization or even a glorification of the work grind, which may compound the problem of balancing work and life.

**A recent survey of 200 adults from Gen Z gauged what they want from their employers.**

**53%**

**More than half of them said they want their work to have meaning.**

**50%**

**Said they would leave their job entirely if there was poor work/life balance.**

**Overtime is also a hot-button issue:**

**41%**

**Said they would quit if they had to work overtime regularly.<sup>1</sup>**

Previous generations of clinicians, particularly Baby Boomers and Gen Xers, accepted the struggle to balance the demands of work and their lives outside of work as “part of the job.” However, the COVID-19 pandemic made things exceptionally hard and kicked stress and long hours into overdrive. Regardless of previous age and experience, all clinicians were overwhelmed by the crisis’ demands. Unfortunately for new nurse graduates, the pandemic coincided with the oldest of the Gen Z cohort entering the healthcare workforce.

This untenable situation shaped their views on work and helped define their values when it came to work/life balance. Studies show this generation is starting to demand a change. A recent survey of 200 adults from Gen Z gauged what they want from their employers. More than half of them (53%) said they want their work to have meaning. Further, 50% said they would leave their job entirely if there was poor work/life balance. Overtime is also a hot-button issue, as 41% said they would quit if they had to work overtime regularly.<sup>1</sup>

Mental and emotional health and wellness is also a big part of the equation for Gen Z employment. Similar to their Millennial counterparts, members of Gen Z who were in the workforce in 2020 and 2021 endured significant stress, anxiety, and even trauma from the pandemic. Workforces more accepting and understanding of mental health challenges will be more attractive to the youngest generation of workers. Reducing the stigma is key. A 2021 study from Deloitte showed that 47% of Gen Z workers who have taken time off work for mental health reasons have given their employer a different reason for this absence.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <https://zety.com/blog/generation-z-vs-workplace>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www2.deloitte.com/global/en/pages/about-deloitte/articles/millennials-gen-z-and-mental-health.html>







# Steps for Creating a Healthy Balance

There are steps hospitals can take to make a more inviting and accommodating workplace for members of Gen Z. Their need for balance, the pandemic experience, and their prioritization of mental health and wellness provide a blueprint for how managers can effectively change a unit.



## Suggestions include:



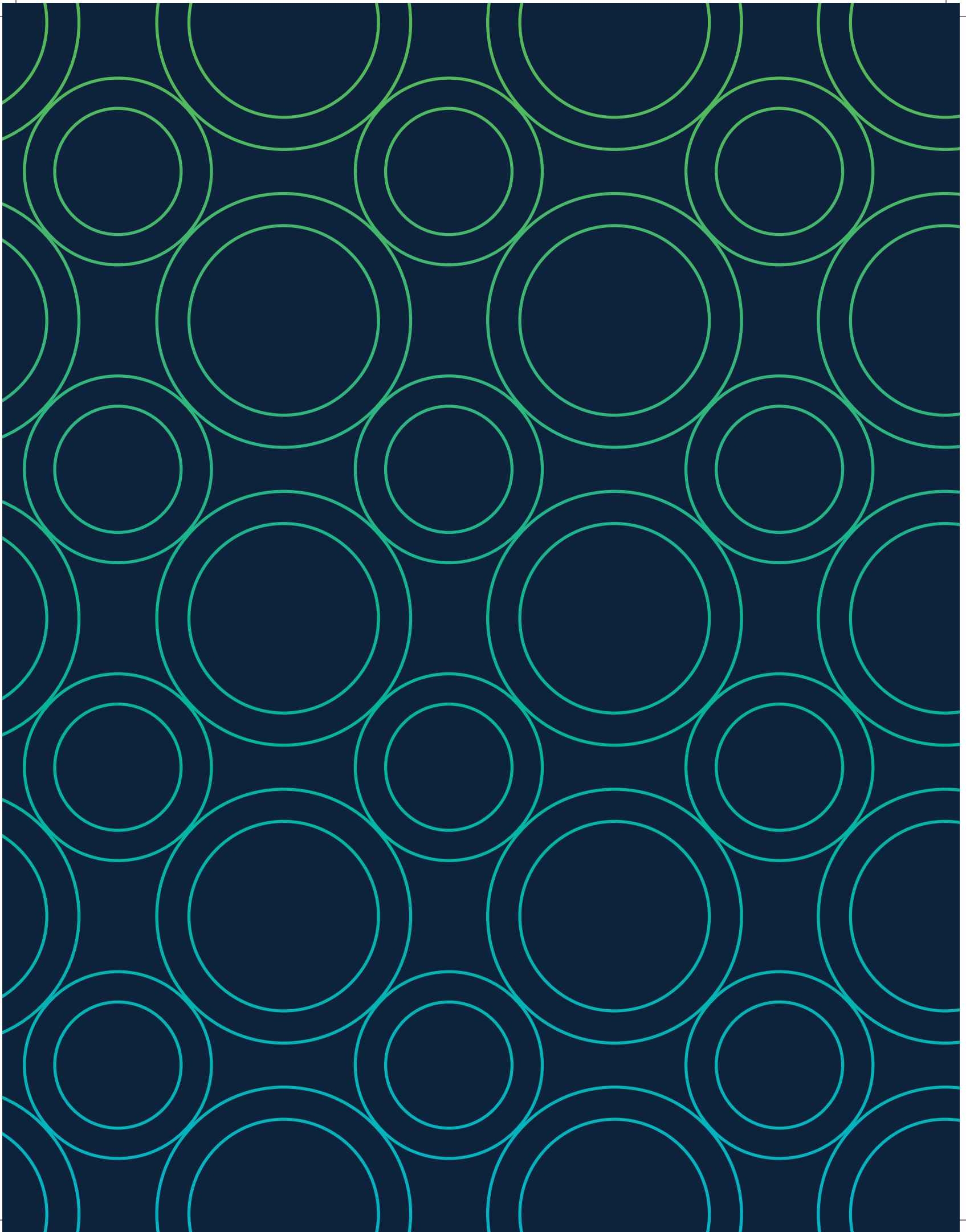
**Developing and continuing initiatives like mandatory debriefs and decompression rooms that address trauma and trauma responses.** This proved helpful during the pandemic and can continue to help address the persistent stress or demands of healthcare.



**Reconsidering the schedule.** Some systems are starting to move away from 12-hour shifts, as more clinicians recognize that at the end of 12 hours, they're tired and more error-prone. Today, shifts are moving from 12-hour to 10-hour and 8-hour so clinicians can have a more regular schedule. This could be more appealing to a generation of clinicians seeking better balance.



**To further combat burnout, some healthcare systems are leveraging self-scheduling and allowing nurses to have more control over their own schedules.** This includes the choice to work weekdays versus weekends and allows for more holiday time off. Systems are also extending that benefit to traveling clinicians, recognizing that travelers want to feel like part of the team and be treated similarly to permanent staff nurses, rather than just being used to fill staffing gaps.





## Section 2

# The Role of Technology



Like many industries and services, technology is a game changer for healthcare. But it faces uneven adoption rates often based on generational differences. This creates a unique opportunity for members of Gen Z, arguably the first generation of American workers to have been raised in a digital world.

Technology is ubiquitous in healthcare. As of 2021, 96% of hospitals in the U.S. were using certified electronic health record (EHR) technology.<sup>3</sup> Use of technology will only increase as new and emergent systems, devices, and treatments grow. Consider that 80% of hospitals and medical practices plan on adopting or already utilize some form of artificial intelligence (AI) application including telehealth, online scheduling, surgical robots, and more.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> <https://digitalhealth.folio3.com/blog/ehr-systems-for-hospitals/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://resources.10to8.com/blog/medical-technology-statistics/#:~:text=The%20global%20mobile%20health%20app,17.7%25%20from%202021%20to%202028>

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# The Tech Generation Gap

Not every generation accepts, adapts to, and uses technology in the same way. Adoption can vary significantly by age cohort. It's a matter of familiarity and experience. Some older clinicians may be more experienced in providing care without certain technologies and may not see their value as clearly. Professionally, they may be concerned that it is taking over portions of their roles. For Gen Z, it's quite the opposite. They not only accept and adopt technology in their work, but they seek and expect it. In a survey of more than 12,000 Gen Z students, 80% of them said they want to work with cutting-edge technology.<sup>5</sup>

In patient care, a Gen Z clinician is more likely to be willing to let the technology aid care for a patient. This is a generation of people for whom almost every aspect of their life has had a technological component. Why would work be any different? Hospitals offering access to the most cutting-edge technology will likely be attractive to younger nurses and other clinicians. These Gen Z care providers could also provide value to their colleagues and units in teaching and training others.

For example, there is an opportunity to institute training programs for Gen Z clinicians to help their more experienced colleagues utilize technology. Consider:

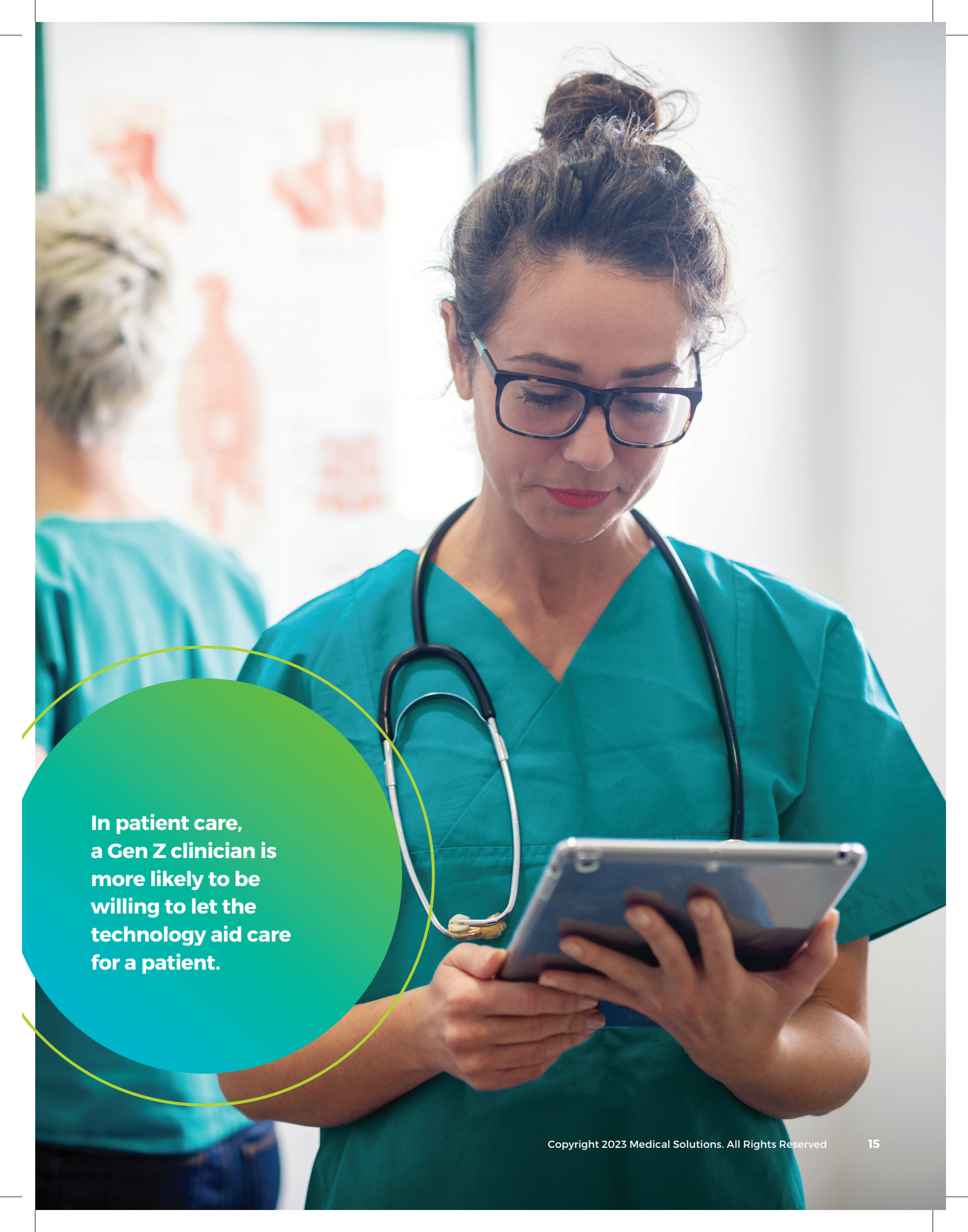
- Gen Z clinicians are comfortable with technology, implement

it fluidly, and could teach their more technology-averse coworkers.

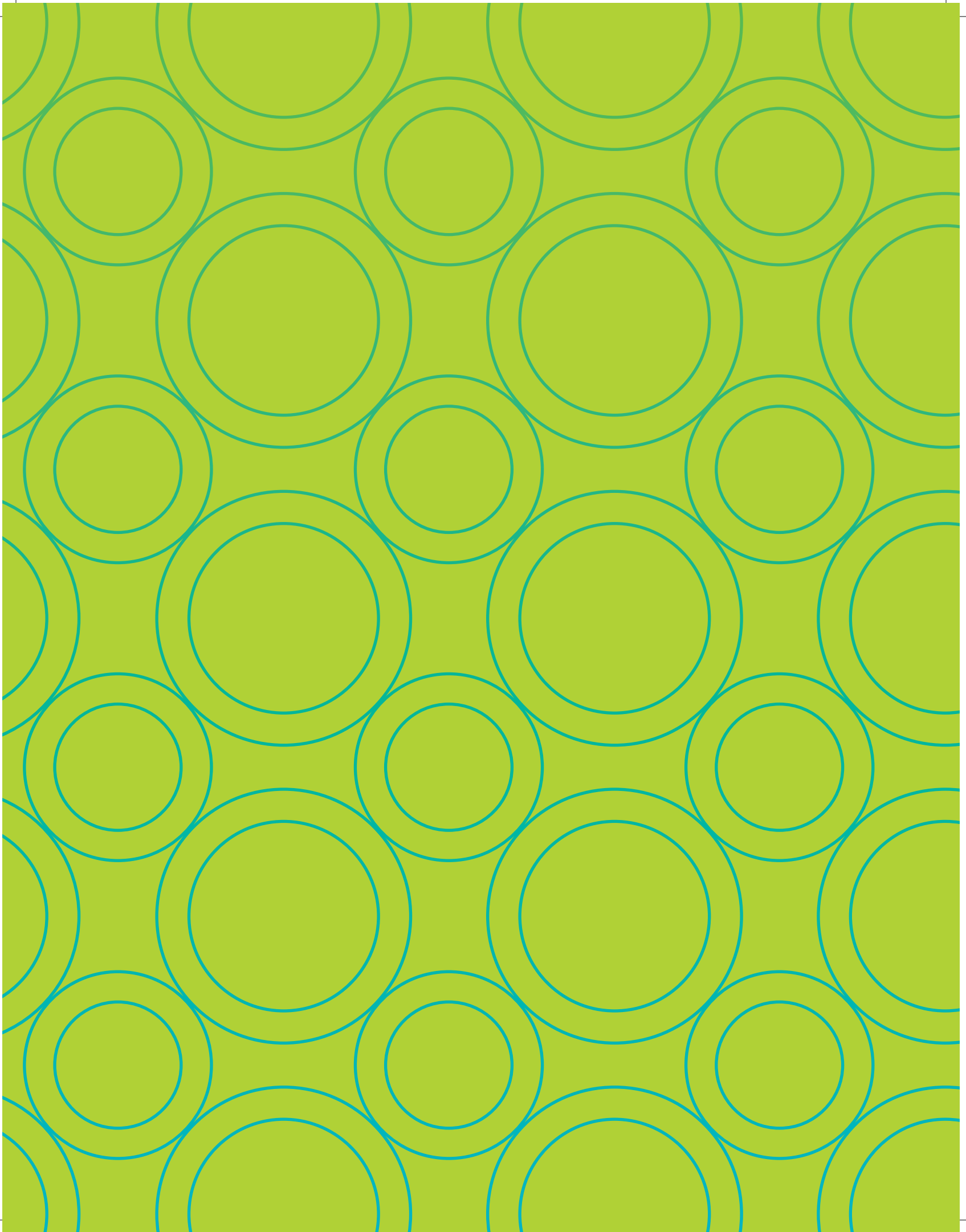
- This helps get everyone up to speed with technology and lets Gen Z clinicians make an additional contribution to the team.
- The mentorship pairing also provides a framework for experienced nurses to guide and develop their younger Gen Z colleagues – a familiarity that will pay off in other ways too.
- Hospitals can leverage one of the benefits of a workforce that spans five generations – the opportunity for deep learning and engagement across different areas of expertise.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ecmcgroup.org/news/group/generation-z-career-plans-and-expectations>

A female healthcare professional with dark hair in a bun, wearing teal scrubs and black-rimmed glasses, is looking down at a tablet computer she is holding with both hands. A stethoscope is draped around her neck. In the background, another person in teal scrubs is partially visible, and there are anatomical charts on the wall. A large teal circle with a yellow outline is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing white text.

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### Section 3

# Education and Professional Development



Compared to other generations of clinicians, Gen Z craves continued education and professional development. This impacts how they approach both their formal education as well as their progression and growth as caregivers. Their career trajectories may not be the same as some clinicians who came before them. That is not necessarily a bad thing, and health systems can develop and implement meaningful opportunities and mentorship programs.



**Gen Z is extremely motivated to advance their careers, often as quickly as possible.**

**3.3%**

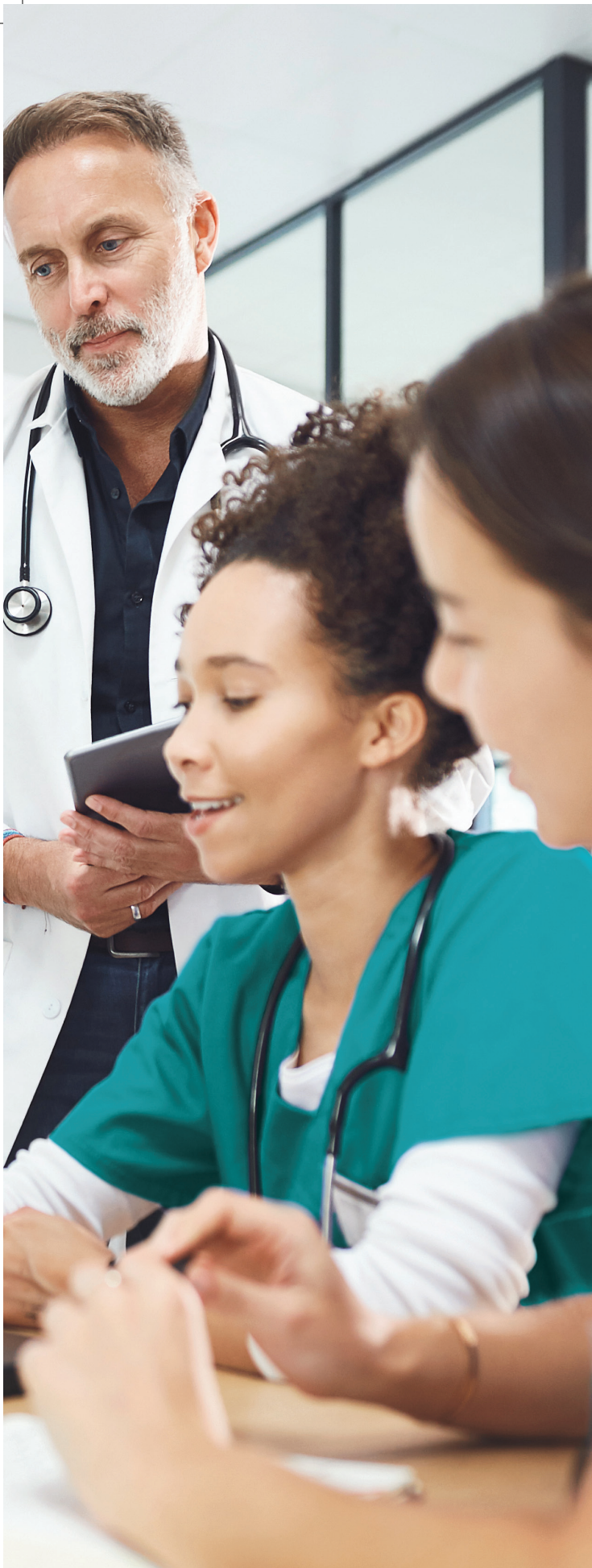
Student enrollment in entry-level baccalaureate nursing programs increased by 3.3% in 2021, despite concerns that the pandemic might discourage career seekers from entering the profession.<sup>6</sup>

**4%**

Doctor of Nursing Practice programs increased by 4% in 2021, which prepares nurses for practice at the highest level.<sup>6</sup>

**6%**

Registered nurses continue to steadily grow among health professionals, with a projected job growth of 6% from 2021 to 2031,<sup>7</sup> due in part to many in the profession changing careers or retiring.



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Gen Z's need for a purpose-driven career could also be a reason for an uptick in nursing school enrollment. Student enrollment in entry-level baccalaureate nursing programs increased by 3.3% in 2021, despite concerns that the pandemic might discourage career seekers from entering the profession. Doctor of Nursing Practice programs increased by 4% in 2021.<sup>6</sup> Further, registered nurses (RNs) continue to steadily grow among health professionals, with a projected job growth of 6% from 2021 to 2031,<sup>7</sup> due in part to many in the profession changing careers or retiring.

Now consider what you might think of as a traditional start to a nursing career. Nurses often started in a general medical-surgical role or at bedside and then moved on to working with higher-acuity patients. This slower progression ensured clinicians had a solid foundation of experience and gave them time to translate what they learned in an academic setting into real-life practice.

However, Gen Z is extremely motivated to advance their careers, often as quickly as possible. Today, new graduates have a hunger for knowledge and skill. Those who enter the workforce after nursing school as new RNs are seeking the higher-acuity opportunities and entering directly into those demanding higher-acuity specialties. A newer trend has emerged as well where they continue through to be a nurse practitioner instead of stopping and working after they earn their RN.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.aacnnursing.org/News-Information/Press-Releases/View/ArticleId/25183/Nursing-Schools-See-Enrollment-Increases-in-Entry-Level-Programs>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/registered-nurses.htm>

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### Advancement Matters

# 43%

of Gen Z would leave a job due to a lack of professional development opportunities and/or an inability to advance within the company.

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### When looking for a job,

# 59%

of Gen Z candidates say plentiful career development and progression opportunities create the most appeal for them.<sup>8</sup>

Advancement also matters to this group. Specifically, 43% of Gen Z would leave a job due to a lack of professional development opportunities and/or an inability to advance within the company. When looking for a job, 59% of Gen Z candidates say plentiful career development and progression opportunities create the most appeal for them.<sup>8</sup>

Couple the need to achieve with the desire for meaningful work and it's not uncommon to see Gen Z clinicians are requesting roles in departments that deal with higher-acuity patients or wanting to handle more complex cases and patients earlier in their career. While this drive and desire to help is admirable, some younger clinicians may be lacking essential experience and practical know-how.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.yahoo.com/video/future-workforce-gen-z-really-140016911.html?>





# The Call for Mentorship

Gen Z's desire for continued education and growth is another reason to implement a mentorship program. Like the previously discussed opportunity for the tech-savvy clinicians to mentor others, the program can also empower experienced nurses to transfer their knowledge within the five-generation workplace.



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Why does formal mentorship make sense for Gen Z? It can be included as part of a path for advancement. That's attractive to this cohort. Mentorship programs can also be an opportunity to retain clinicians that might otherwise retire. The transfer of historical knowledge is especially important because the retirement rate of clinicians exceeds the graduation rate of new nurses, setting up a situation where there is a high risk of knowledge loss.

Virtual mentorship roles have also grown in popularity for people who are not assigned a patient load and would rather serve as a subject matter expert to help clinicians build their practical knowledge. Gen Z's drive and willingness to take on challenges is also reflected in their desire for autonomy. A majority (76%) of Gen Z are looking for new opportunities to learn or practice new skills.<sup>9</sup>

Opportunities for Gen Z to pursue leadership positions in their nursing units (even non-traditional ones) empowers them to help determine their job requirements. This can be a big draw. Some healthcare facilities have already created nursing residencies or new nurse cohorts to create this framework for development and increase employee engagement. And many are bringing back team nursing to assist with the growing patient to nurse ratios.

At Medical Solutions, for example, we're utilizing and adding staff to our Clinical Team of experienced nurse managers to support our traveling nurses and clinicians, especially newer ones entering the field, with additional education, certifications, mental health resources, and mentorship opportunities. We're also increasing our touch points through surveys and texts to ensure our travelers know the Clinical Team is available to mentor and talk them through difficult situations, utilizing their own personal experiences.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.linkedin.com/news/story/gen-z-wants-it-all-at-work-4672449/>

# Key Takeaways



More so than some previous generations, Gen Z has expressed and shown a desire for **meaning and importance** in their work. More than anything, they want to make a difference.



Shaped in part by the pandemic in their early working years, they value both their **mental health** and wellness and a sustainable **work/life balance**. To them, it's nonnegotiable.





For Gen Z, technology isn't just something that's emerging or easily considered – it's expected. They will seek opportunities to discover and utilize the most **cutting-edge technology** in patient care.



In a five-generation workforce, every generation has something to learn from each other. Encouraging formal and informal **mentoring opportunities** can help clinicians all along the age and experience spectrum. Mentoring is the key to connection and knowledge sharing.





# Let's Connect



We understand how more efficient human-powered healthcare improves quality and creates value. We're here to help answer your questions.

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The logo for Medical Solutions features the words "Medical" and "Solutions" stacked vertically in a dark blue, sans-serif font. Small green dots are placed above the 'i' in "Medical" and above the 'o' in "Solutions". A trademark symbol (TM) is located at the end of "Solutions". The logo is positioned inside a white circular shape that overlaps a green-to-teal gradient background with yellow concentric arcs.

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