



WHY RECRUITING AND KEEPING GREAT DOCTORS AND NURSES IS HARDER THAN IT LOOKS

By Jason Shenefield, President and CEO, Phelps Health

If you've visited a hospital or clinic in recent years, you've probably noticed a familiar theme: healthcare staffing is tight. Appointments can take longer to schedule, and sometimes it feels like there aren't enough doctors, nurses or specialists to go around.

At Phelps Health, we hear these concerns, and we share them. Our team works incredibly hard to deliver the care our patients deserve, but like hospitals across the country, we face ongoing challenges in recruiting and retaining talented physicians and clinical staff—especially in a rural community like ours.

This article is meant to explain why this problem exists, what it means for our community and what we're doing to address it.

A NATIONAL SHORTAGE WITH LOCAL IMPACT

The healthcare workforce shortage isn't just a Phelps Health issue—it's a national one. Across the United States, hospitals are competing for a limited number of trained professionals.

According to the Association of American Medical Colleges, the U.S. could face a shortage of up to 86,000 physicians by 2036. The American Nurses Association has reported that nursing shortages are the worst they've been in decades.

There are several reasons for this:

- Retirement and burnout: Many experienced clinicians are retiring earlier, especially after the intense strain of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Fewer new graduates: Medical and nursing schools can only train so many students each year, and not all choose hospital settings after graduation.
- Increased demand for care: As our population ages, more people need medical care than ever before.

For communities like Rolla and the surrounding region, the challenge is even greater. Rural hospitals often compete with larger urban systems that can offer more resources and amenities as well as proximity to larger cities. Recruiting a physician or nurse isn't just about salary—it's about helping them and their families find a home, build relationships and see a future here.

WHY IT MATTERS

When staffing is tight, it affects every part of the healthcare experience. It can mean longer waits for appointments, fewer specialists available locally and more stress on the dedicated professionals who choose to stay.

But behind every open position is a story—and often, it's a story of someone trying their best to serve others under difficult circumstances. Our nurses, technicians and doctors go above and beyond every day. They stay late, cover shifts and find ways to make sure patients get the care they need.



WHAT WE'RE DOING ABOUT IT

At Phelps Health, we are approaching recruitment and retention as a long-term, strategic priority. We know that finding great people isn't enough—we have to help them stay and thrive.

Here are a few of the ways we're doing that:

- We've created our own residency program, and we're working with regional medical, nursing and allied health programs to create training opportunities that introduce students to our community early. When people learn here, they're more likely to stay here.
- Investing in our workplace culture. We want Phelps Health to be a place where people feel valued, supported and connected. That means creating environments where teamwork, respect and growth are priorities.
- Supporting professional development. From continuing education to leadership training, we encourage our staff to grow their skills and advance their careers within our organization.
- Listening to our teams. We regularly ask for feedback from our staff and use it to improve scheduling, workload balance and overall employee experience.

We know that to attract and retain great people, we must make Phelps Health not only a great place to receive care—but a great place to give care.

A HUMAN STORY BEHIND EVERY ROLE

To bring this to life, let me share a simple example. Recently, a young physician who trained in another state told us that what drew her to Phelps Health wasn't just the job—it was the people. She said she felt that our staff “treated patients like neighbors,” and that this sense of community was something she wanted to be part of.

That's what makes rural healthcare special. When our doctors and nurses care for patients, they're caring for friends, teachers, local business owners—people they know by name.

LOOKING AHEAD

Recruiting and retaining great healthcare professionals is not a problem that can be solved overnight. It requires patience, creativity and collaboration. But at Phelps Health, we are committed to doing the hard work because our patients—and our community—deserve nothing less.

You have our word that we'll continue to seek out exceptional people who believe in our mission, and to take care of the people who already make Phelps Health such a special place to work.

Our community deserves access to high-quality care close to home, and we will keep building the team that makes that possible.

About This Series

At Phelps Health, we know that while healthcare touches everyone in our region, the system behind it can feel complicated and confusing.

“**Understanding the Realities of Healthcare**” is a series of articles and podcasts that goes behind the scenes at Phelps Health to explain the pressures, decisions and changes shaping care today.

Created by Jason Shenefield, president and CEO of Phelps Health, this series explores topics like staffing, costs, regulations and innovation—and how they impact the patients and communities we serve.

We invite you to follow along, learn with us and help us build a future that delivers the care and compassion you've come to expect from Phelps Health.

Learn more at phelpshealth.org/realities-of-healthcare.