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## CASE STUDY

For health care providers worldwide

# How to Create a Supportive Work Environment for Float Nurses

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Bolstering float nurse recruitment and retention

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# Overview

## The challenge

Many leaders struggle to grow and sustain their nursing float pools. Nurses and managers often view float pools as unstable and unpredictable, with limited professional development opportunities. Float nurses may also feel unsupported on their designated units. As a result, recruiting and retaining float staff is a challenge.

## The organizations

- Princess Alexandra Hospital (PAH) is a 1,059-bed, Magnet® accredited hospital located in Woolloongabba, Queensland, Australia.
- Cleveland Clinic is a health system headquartered in Cleveland, Ohio, US.

## The approach

- In 2008, leaders at Princess Alexandra Hospital used government funding to upskill new graduate float nurses to prepare them for permanent positions on specialized units.
- In 2014, Cleveland Clinic developed support unit-level supports for float nurses through a shared governance project.

## The result

Since implementing their programs, PAH and Cleveland Clinic increased float nurse satisfaction and engagement. They also decreased labor cost by reducing reliance on agency labor.

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# Approach

## How two organizations created supportive work environments for float nurses

Float nurses at PAH and Cleveland Clinic felt disconnected from nursing leadership and professional development opportunities available for non-float nurses. As a result, leaders created support structures for their float staff to increase retention.

### The three components

There are three components critical to creating a supportive and welcoming environment for float nurses:

**01** Create professional development opportunities for float nurses

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**02** Integrate float nurses into nursing leadership structures

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**03** Embed unit supports for float nurses

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# 01 Create professional development opportunities for float nurses

Structures to support the development and growth of float pool nurses are essential to strengthening the appeal of float pool participation. Many new graduates were eager to join Princess Alexandra Hospital's first float pool. For new grads, a float pool provides the opportunity to be employed at a major health center, exposure to different clinical areas, and part-time hours to assimilating to the RN role and work environment.

Leaders at PAH developed a program within the float pool specifically for these new graduate nurses. They trained these nurses using a portion of government incentive funding earmarked for hiring newly graduated nurses. This helped new graduates feel more confident practicing across the hospital.

They used the other portion to train experienced nurses as graduate clinical facilitators. These facilitators provide 24/7 support for nurses in the float pool. In addition, the facilitator position also provides exposure to a wide array of specialist competencies.

# 02 Integrate float nurses into nursing leadership structures

Leaders at the Cleveland Clinic wanted the float staff to have all the training and certifications necessary to operate as full staff members and share the organization’s culture. They created two types of float pools with built-in supports to help float nurses feel a sense of belonging.

1. The Enterprise PRN Cleveland Clinic Staffing Resources (CCSR) is a highly specialized float pool composed of specialty RNs who fill vacancies as needed across all sites. Not considered full-time staff, these nurses are required to work only one shift every 60 days and can choose their own schedules.
2. The Main Campus Permanent Float Pool, comprised of RNs and PCNAs, are nurses who fill last-minute staffing needs for the main hospital only, and shifts are assigned by the staffing office. They are on staff as “expert generalists” and are required to work 48 hours every six weeks.

Dedicated managers oversee each float pool, while a “unit” of float nurses form a council to oversee their practice environment.



2. INTEGRATE FLOAT NURSES INTO NURSING LEADERSHIP STRUCTURES

### Float pool staffing options at Cleveland Clinic

	<b>CCSR</b>	<b>Main Campus Permanent Float Pool</b>
Specialties	<b>Specialty RNs</b> hired into med/surge, telemetry, ED, or critical care	<b>Expert generalists</b> hired into med/surge, telemetry, or critical care
Scope	Work across <b>eight different campuses</b>	Work across all units on <b>main campus</b>
Benefits	<b>Partial benefits</b> (access to pension); paid at a premium	<b>Full/part-time benefits;</b> paid same hourly rate as staff with hourly premium float differential
Scheduling	Self-scheduled, offset staffing needs based on anticipated leave and volume spikes; required to work at least one shift every 60 days	Assigned by staffing office, cover last minute staffing needs; PRN required to work at least 48 hours every six weeks
Size	119 RNs	31 RNs and 82 PCNAs

# 03 Embed unit supports for float nurses

Even with the robust float pool options outlined on the previous page, Cleveland Clinic float nurses still faced challenges.

Float nurses frequently felt disengaged and struggled to adapt to their assigned units. As part of the float pool's shared governance work, Cleveland Clinic's nursing leaders developed a strategy to integrate float nurses immediately upon arrival to their assigned units. Leaders piloted this support program on a unit with high utilization of float nurses.


Making support resources simple and easily accessible is critical to ensuring that permanent staff and float nurses actually use them. There are three key elements that make up Cleveland Clinic's float nurse support model:

1. Each unit has a "float ally" on a shift—a nurse designated by the unit's manager. The ally serves as the point person for float nurses. The float ally greets each float nurse upon arrival, provides a tour of the unit, and stays connected throughout the shift.
2. At the beginning of the shift, the ally gives the float nurse a packet with all the information needed to function on the unit, including the name and phone number of the float ally and a unit-specific point-of-care checklist. (See the float ally job description on page 11.)
3. At the end of the shift, the float nurse receives a note of appreciation from the unit manager or float ally. The float pool manager also receives notice of the recognition. (See an example of these notes on page 10.)



# Results

Both PAH and Cleveland Clinic have reduced agency spending and increased retention and satisfaction of their float nurses.

- Agency costs at PAH decreased by almost 110,000 hours, resulting in nearly AU\$4 million in savings. Engagement and retention of new grads increased, stabilizing the float pool workforce.
- Leaders at Cleveland Clinic have grown and stabilized their float pools. As a result of embedding unit support for float staff, average staff satisfaction among float pool nurses increased 50%. The float pools have covered thousands of temporary relief hours in year. Those hours would have otherwise been covered by agency staff or overtime. 



Our units are specialized, and our floats become expert generalists. When a specialty unit has an identified need they say, ‘where’s the float?’ because of the float’s familiarity and vast experience with a wide variety of patient care settings and needs.

**Angie Walden, Assistant Nurse Manager, Nursing Floats**  
Cleveland Clinic

# Supporting artifacts

## Float nurse recognition letter template

When a float nurse completes a shift at Cleveland Clinic, the unit manager or float ally sends an email or handwritten note to thank the nurse for their work on the unit during a time of need, personalizing the message when possible.

Dear [float nurse],

Thank you very much for stepping up today and helping us on our unit. We were short-staffed, and you really lent a helping hand. The way you showed your patient, [Mr. Smith], how to follow his new medication instructions was particularly wonderful.

We appreciate the hard work you put in today. We know floating is not easy, but you did a phenomenal job supporting our patients and staff.

We hope to have you back on our unit soon. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me or your float ally.

Thanks again!

Unit manager

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SUPPORTING ARTIFACTS

# Float Ally Job Description

<i>Insert Organization Logo Here</i>	<b>[INSERT ORGANIZATION NAME] Float Ally Job Description</b>
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*Are you a recognized leader on your unit? Are you looking to gain more leadership experience? Do you want to help a colleague in need?*

*If so, consider becoming a float ally!*

Being a float nurse can often be very difficult. Yet, we need these nurses to respond to our staff absences and ensure that we have enough staff to care for our patients on our unit. To better support the float team, we have decided to introduce a “float ally” on every shift to serve as the main point of contact for our float nurse colleagues.

## Role definition

The float ally will be a designated main point of contact and source of support for nurses floating onto the unit on a particular shift. Each shift will have an assigned float ally who will welcome and orient the float nurse to the unit and serve as their go-to person.

## Major responsibilities

- Greet all float nurses at the start of the shift or when they arrive on the unit.
- Orient float nurses to the unit, showing them where supplies and relevant materials are located, explaining their patient assignments, and introducing them to colleagues on the unit as needed.
- Provide “float support packet” to float nurses, explaining the resources available to them.
- Serve as the main point of contact for float nurses throughout the shift.

### To Apply for the Float Ally Position


CONTACT US AT:


*[Insert email address and/or telephone number for person responsible for hiring float ally]*


Source: Cleveland Clinic, Cleveland, Ohio, US; Advisory Board interviews and analysis.

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