

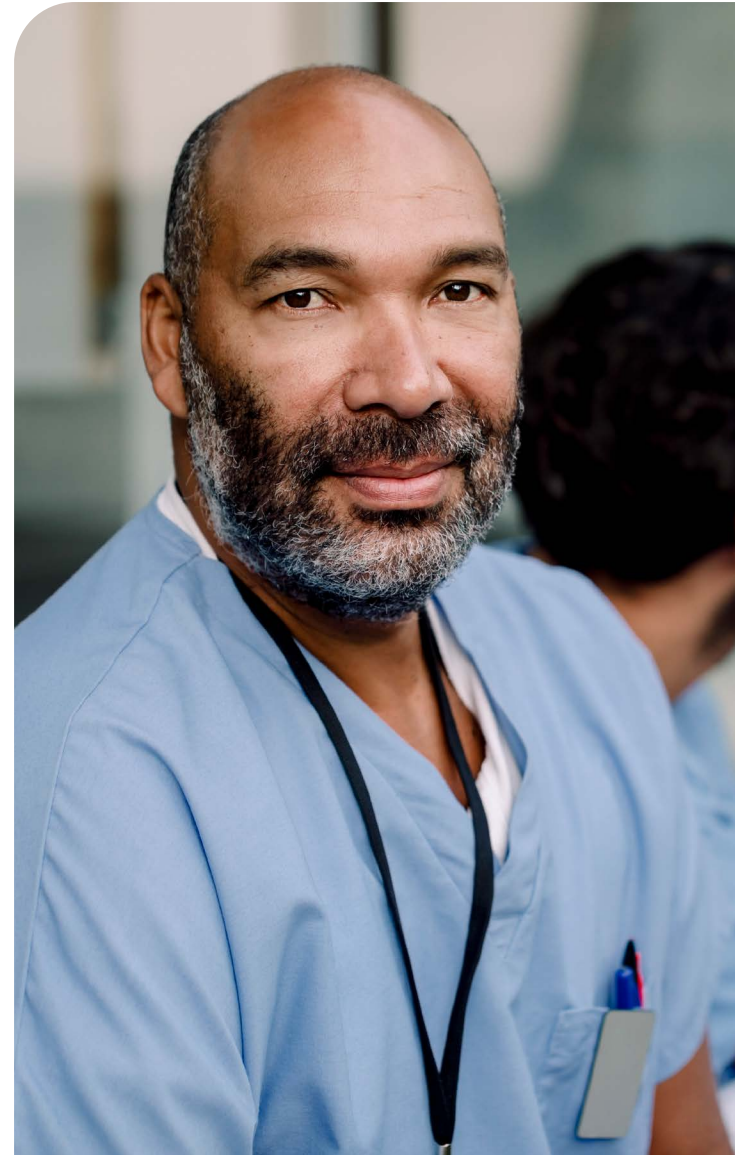


INDUSTRY INSIGHTS

2023: The state of workforce engagement

In a demanding, high-pressure industry, Press Ganey data shows what drives employee engagement—and what separates top-performing healthcare organizations from the rest of the pack.

a **PG Forsta** company



Executive summary

The healthcare industry is facing several challenges like rising labor costs and inflation, an aging population, competition from alternative care providers, and, on top of it all, a widespread staffing shortage. Healthcare employees are in high demand—which means they have options. And it can be difficult to retain top talent. This makes it increasingly important that organizations prioritize the employee experience and create an environment where people feel included, respected, and involved in decision-making.

We analyzed feedback from over 1.72M employees, nurses, and physicians, across 509 organizations and 4,500+ facilities, to see what's happening on the ground with the healthcare workforce. Here's what we found.

Engagement is at an all-time low.

Employees and physicians across all healthcare roles are struggling to disconnect and recharge. And, while leaders typically perform better across all measures, leader engagement has also fallen, as they continue to struggle with new challenges that were exacerbated through the pandemic.

Many organizations continue to be on a downward cycle of performance, while others have found the path to improvement.

Engagement, caregiver well-being, and patient experience are tightly intertwined. Success in one area feeds success in the others.

A continuous listening strategy fuels critical action to improve engagement and overall experience.

By listening authentically throughout the year, organizations can **gather, analyze, visualize, and, most importantly, act** on feedback to increase employee engagement, alleviate burnout to achieve professional fulfillment, and reduce turnover.



This report explores what “employee engagement” means today, as well as current data insights and trends helping healthcare organizations pave the path forward.

INTRODUCTION

What does engagement truly mean?

As organizations everywhere sharpen their focus on workforce engagement, you might feel compelled to ask: What does “engagement” actually mean? And what difference does it make in healthcare?

In today’s hectic and demanding healthcare ecosystem, where organizations must become increasingly integrated and holistic to fulfill their missions, working as a team is more essential than ever. The sports analogy is apt. Engaged employees will proudly wear their organization’s “jersey.” Wearing the jersey means having pride in your organization, wanting to remain employed there, and feeling confident about referring friends and family there for care—as well as for work. It means having an overall positive experience on the job and feeling equipped and empowered to provide the same top-tier experience to patients.

The path to success is paved with data. But collecting data for data’s sake isn’t enough. It doesn’t tell you



the full-color story of what’s happening within your organization, and within your workforce. Benchmarking your data, and seeing how that data relates to other factors across your organization, gives you actionable insights about your healthcare workers’ experiences—for better or for worse. Press Ganey measures engagement and other critical metrics to help organizations understand the current state of the workforce, then learn from our top performers to guide and develop a comprehensive improvement strategy through cutting-edge technology, like digital surveys, healthcare-specific AI and natural language processing, and the largest database of feedback from the healthcare workforce. Our data shows that higher employee engagement has a positive impact on other industry priorities, like patient experience, safety, clinical outcomes, and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI).



Our research has identified the critical areas where top-performing healthcare organizations are doing notably better than their lower-performing counterparts. Many of these areas, where top performers excel, are also key drivers of workforce engagement. These areas include:

- **Committed and involved senior leadership.** Employees have confidence in senior leadership, and they demonstrate the organization's mission and values in their behaviors and actions.
- **Feeling respected and listened to.** Employees feel the organization is treating them respectfully and using their feedback to drive improvement.
- **Meeting basic needs.** Employees have the resources and tools needed to deliver safe, high-quality care. They're being recognized for their contributions and have a reasonable work/life balance.
- **Safety focus.** Organizations are committed to zero harm and high reliability principles, which accelerate improvements in employee and patient safety.

Each of these priorities plays an important role in the healthcare experience. In many ways, the current climate isn't encouraging. But the good news is that we know precisely where to get started to set a foundation for a more promising path forward.

Healthcare employee engagement has reached an all-time low

Over the past few years, healthcare has experienced some of its greatest challenges. As a result, engagement is at an all-time low, across nearly all roles. Physician alignment is also on the decline.

Leaders are feeling the pressure. Leader engagement has fallen to its lowest level yet. Many are struggling with decompression and resilience, in particular. Leaders, too, need time and space to recharge, so they can best empower, and be champions of, their teams.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many leaders left the industry. Some retired early, while others jumped at opportunities outside of healthcare. In the rush to fill open roles, a new generation was thrust into leadership positions—often without adequate training. They had to learn on the job, quickly trying to get up to speed under stressful conditions. But this left many feeling underqualified, unsupported, and ineffective—far from engaged and empowered to do their best work.

As for the managers and executives who weathered COVID-19, they're tired from shouldering added responsibilities and combating regular turnover—among several other challenges.

Glossary of terms

Engagement: An individual's emotional and personal connection in the organization, as influenced by the work environment.

Resilience: The ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change.

Activation: Having a connection to and finding meaning in the work.

Decompression: The ability to disconnect and recharge at the end of the day.

Physician alignment: The extent to which physicians feel a strong partnership and connection with leadership and have a shared vision of how to execute the organizational mission.

With lower engagement comes a higher risk for turnover. Press Ganey data shows that the groups with the biggest risk for leaving are physicians, advanced practice providers, registered nurses, and those in licensed technical roles—like respiratory and occupational therapists. Key strategies for driving retention include: focusing on diversity and equity, ensuring job fit, enabling workers to practice top of license, committing to safety, and showing respect. Job do-ability and practicing top of license are especially important to direct care roles that are at high risk for churn—yet those workers are consistently asked to do more and more, with less and less.

Amid a nationwide healthcare staffing shortage, it's simply not possible to “hire your way out of the problem.” Most organizations are wrestling with similar issues. Instead of hiring from the outside, organizations can adopt comprehensive solutions that put employee engagement and experience front and center. If you can engage the people you have, you will attract and retain more talent—and reduce costs over the long term.



30%

of employees who indicate they intend to leave will actually leave within the year

60%

of items that drive caregiver retention also drive engagement

90%

of items that drive physician retention also drive engagement



Creating social connections after a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic

The challenges COVID-19 introduced to the healthcare workforce are incomparable to those facing any other industry. Aside from the stressors around avoiding infection personally, the sheer volume of death seen on a daily basis put an unbearable mental load on healthcare professionals. Coworkers couldn't connect like they once did—opportunities for team building and bonding disappeared in exchange for keeping people safe and healthy, as much as possible. Add the migration to remote work among some healthcare employees, and social isolation became a real and critical problem.

On the flip side, creating social connections and feeling included can have a huge impact on workforce engagement and set a foundation for psychological safety within teams. For leaders, this might look like creating channels of peer support that serve emotional needs and/or an opportunity to work through team challenges. For front-line team members, this might look like team building activities or time to celebrate/have fun at work to develop authentic connections with team members.

“I would stay with this organization if offered a similar position elsewhere” by position



Flight risk analytics can help organizations understand why people are leaving and identify profiles of people at risk of leaving.

Key takeaways

- In the last year, the greatest declines are seen in advanced practice providers and physicians.
- Management, licensed technical, and security declined more than we have seen in prior years.
- Senior management is the least impacted group.
- RNs continue to be one of the groups at the greatest risk of turnover.

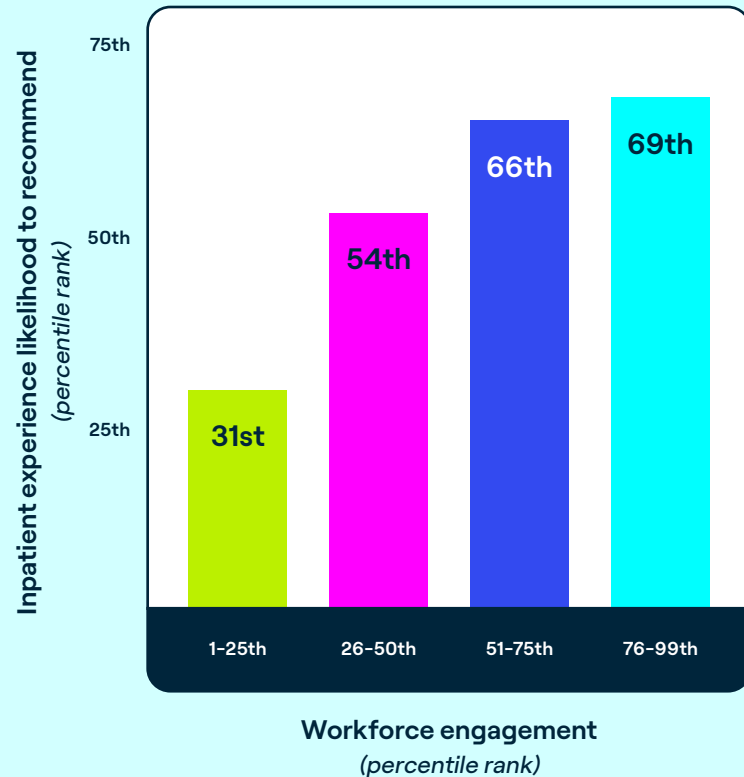
Organizations must move from a ‘vicious cycle’ to a ‘virtuous cycle’

Workforce engagement, caregiver well-being, and patient experience are tightly intertwined. When healthcare performance is high, that’s a good thing, as success in one area feeds success in the others. Facilities with stronger workforce engagement tend to provide a better patient experience, according to our data. All the different areas fuel the “virtuous cycle.”

But many healthcare employees—and, by extension, the organizations they work for—are stuck in a “vicious downward cycle” of performance. Healthcare performance is suffering in most areas. Most likely, that means caregiver well-being and patient experience are suffering too.

Why engagement matters

Patient experience performance is higher at facilities with stronger workforce engagement.



Source: Press Ganey 2021 National Dataset N=211 Facilities with mapped Inpatient Experience and Employee Experience data

3 steps to stop the vicious cycle

1

Build trust.

Trust is the foundation for both workforce engagement and patient experience. The “trust triangle” has three vertices: authenticity, logic, and empathy.¹ People are likely to trust you when you’re authentic (i.e., being the real you), logical (demonstrating sound judgment and competence), and empathetic (caring about them). When they trust you, they feel freer to be their authentic selves. They’re also more likely to be empathetic toward you and/or the organization. And it’s impossible to build trust without listening and being transparent.

2

Listen.


Organizations need to listen to everybody, then use what they hear to drive decision-making. They must consider job and role, race and ethnicity, age, gender, and other demographics when listening to employees. That may entail segmenting the population to ensure that everyone’s voice is included. Of course, that doesn’t mean every suggestion will be implemented. But employees feel included when they see their feedback put into action, and it needs to be clear that everyone’s voice has been considered. Newer technology—like crowdsourcing, pulse surveys, and other tools—can help organizations better listen to their employees.

3

Be transparent.

Transparency starts at the top. The board and C-suite must prioritize this important work. Organizations must measure employee engagement and experience, then share the findings—good or bad. Workforce trust is eroded when they feel leadership is withholding information. Transparency happens when leaders close the loop by communicating what they are able to fix, what they need help fixing, and what can’t be fixed right now.

¹Frei, F. X., & Morriss, A. (2020). Begin with Trust. *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/2020/05/begin-with-trust>



Together, building trust, listening, and communicating transparently create an environment of respect and psychological safety—an environment where employees at all levels feel comfortable speaking up and speaking out, without fear of retribution. And it is from that place that the organization can begin to nurture the virtuous cycle.

3 ways to nurture the virtuous cycle

1

First, take care of yourself.

You can't give what you don't have. Unless leaders take care of their own physical and mental well-being, they will be unable to effectively lead and empower their teams. Similarly, if employees don't take care of their own needs, they will be less effective at taking care of their patients or serving their communities.

2

Build the teams and train the leaders.

Team members must feel welcome, included, and respected. They should be able to trust their leaders and teammates and feel empowered to bring their talents, opinions, and best efforts to the table. To that end, leaders must foster an environment of gratitude, recognition, respect, and psychological safety. And healthcare organizations must adequately coach leaders, equipping them with the technical and human skills to be successful in their roles.

3

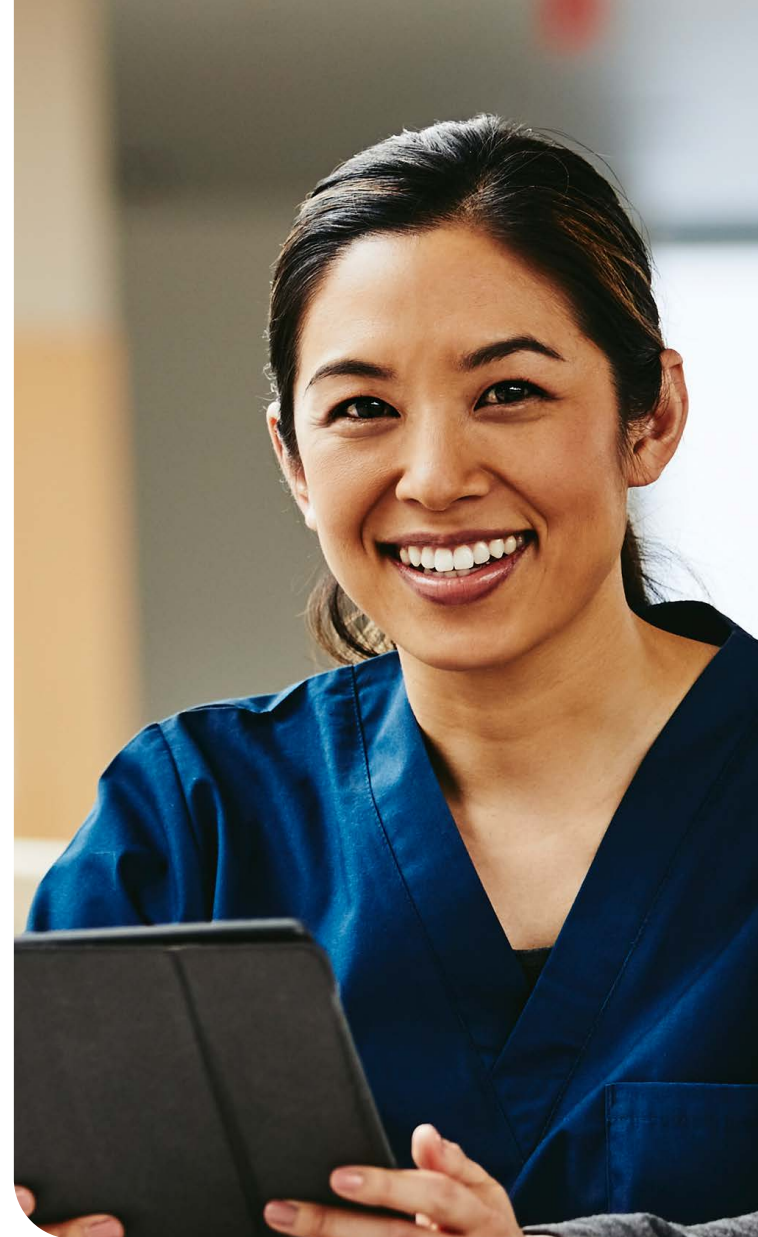
Fix the systems.

Often broken systems and processes underlie an organization's problems. Fixing these faulty systems requires the input and insights of the front-line employees who are most impacted. Leaders should show they care by seeking input from the front lines, listening intently to the employees' suggestions, and making direct changes—then communicating those changes. When front-line employees feel heard and understood, they're more likely to share valuable input in the future, continuing the virtuous cycle.

Improve employee engagement and experience with strategic continuous listening

Engaging employees is an ongoing process, not a one-and-done endeavor. By listening authentically using different types of feedback channels, organizations can gather, analyze, visualize, and act on feedback to increase employee engagement, improve their experiences, and reduce turnover.

[Continuous listening](#) represents a transformative shift from the traditional method of gathering employee feedback, which was to survey employees once every year or two. The new approach focuses heavily on action. Using several, varied healthcare-specific listening techniques through formal survey channels (census, pulse, and lifecycle surveys), predictive analytics and alerts (flight risk, rounding), interactive brainstorming (crowdsourcing, focus groups), and individual focused feedback (360° and 180° assessments) organizations gain targeted insights that enable them to take targeted actions, fast. It involves shifting the paradigm from what it means to *survey* to what it means to *really listen*. A strong listening strategy is set on the foundation of action and seeing results from the feedback given—at both the organizational and local levels.





Press Ganey's best-in-breed tech suite helps top-performing healthcare organizations listen deeply, and turn what they learn into meaningful action.

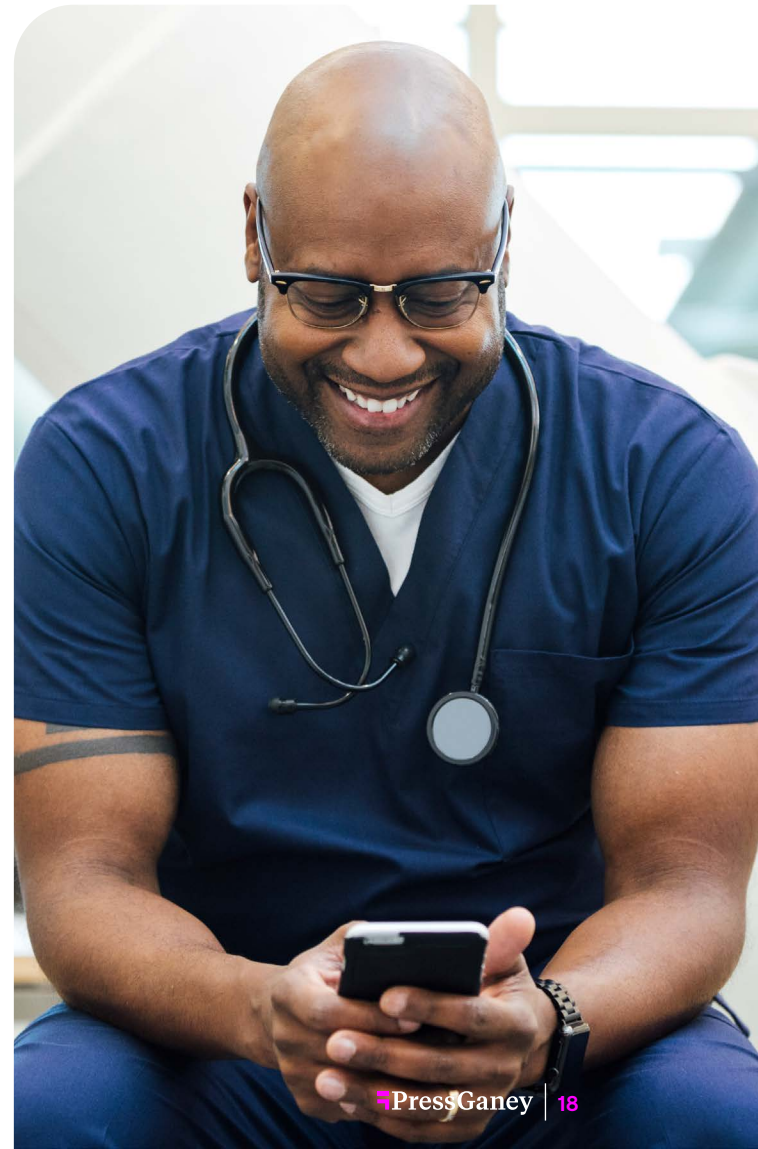
- **Census surveys:** These are multi-question surveys that most organizations deploy once per year to their entire population. You can choose to integrate a “one-ask” survey, which can measure not only engagement but also safety culture, DEI, and resilience. The benefit of a more comprehensive yearly census survey is that it can allow you to examine multiple key performance indicators to identify hospitals, teams, or other demographic segments that might be having a less than ideal experience. Census surveys can also empower you with predictive analytics to holistically focus on what is driving experience and retention. They also help to shape a roadmap on what feedback you need to collect from other listening channels or track progress on.
- **Pulse surveys:** When a census survey reveals something concerning, especially from a specific department or other cohort of people, an organization can drill down deeper with a pulse survey. [Pulse surveys](#) are also valuable for surveying on targeted topics that may not fit into your census survey.





- **Lifecycle surveys:** An employee's experience begins when they start the interview process. Their experience during onboarding is also critical, as we know many organizations are struggling with turnover in the first three months. Onboarding is a time when an individual starts forming their perceptions about the organization, their team, and overall experience. Lifecycle surveys help leaders connect with, and stay close to, employees from the onset, capturing feedback from them at pivotal points of their journey—such as at 30 days, 60 days, 90 days, one year of employment, and again if they choose to leave the organization.
- **Crowdsourcing:** [Crowdsourcing](#) technology helps organizations tap into valuable insights directly from their workforce to solve problems and drive lasting change. As the ideas come in, people can also vote on their peers' suggestions, so everyone feels involved in decision-making and connected to new changes. Crowdsourcing is a great brainstorming tool for healthcare organizations where people aren't sitting in front of a computer all day and are working different shifts.

- **Virtual focus groups:** Plan, schedule, and facilitate interactive focus groups to gain feedback and generate ideas to drive improvement.
- **360° and 180° assessments:** Assessments are invaluable to leader coaching and development. A 180° assessment gathers feedback from colleagues and a supervisor, while a 360° assessment casts a wider net, collecting input from others who have relationships with the employee at all levels, including peers and colleagues, supervisors, and those whom the employee supervises. These can help design individual or group training and development.
- **Digital rounding:** Use [digital rounding](#) technology to catch trends before they escalate. Understand how staff are feeling, see what obstacles they're facing, and conduct stay interviews. All of these touch points can help you identify key places to enhance the employee experience and reduce turnover.
- **Flight risk analytics:** Behaviors are another form of communication, and it is important to understand drivers and attributes that put someone at higher risk of leaving your organization. Flight risk analytics helps organizations understand why people are leaving and provides profiles of people at risk for leaving to identify solutions to prevent turnover.





Drive employee engagement. Improve the experience for all.

To learn more about nurturing an engaged, thriving workforce, reach out to our team at:

pressganey.com/request-a-demo

Unleash the power of an engaged workforce

The benefits of a fully engaged workforce are undeniable. When your workforce is engaged, they're happier, healthier, and connected. And the patient experience improves as a result, too.



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