Astra Wellbeing

Texas Healthcare Trustees

The Return on Recognition

Positive Feedback as a Strategy to Retain and Engage Today's Healthcare Workforce

Executive Summary

The post-pandemic American healthcare system is in an alarming position when it comes to the workforce: 20% of healthcare workers leave annually, 33% feel disengaged, and the resulting turnover costs typical hospital systems up to $25 million per year.[1]

20%	33%	$25M
of healthcare workers leave annually	of healthcare workers feel disengaged	resulting turnover costs for hospitals

Yet much of this loss is avoidable.

The National Academy of Medicine's Plan for Health Workforce Wellbeing cites "creating and implementing processes for meaningful recognition for all members of the health workforce" as a critical action area to reduce burnout and turnover.[2] The American Association for Critical Care Nurses cites "meaningful recognition" as a key pillar in creating a healthy work environment.[3]

Why are healthcare's most respected voices stressing the value of recognition?

Research shows that when employees feel valued, recognized, and supported, they become more engaged, leading to higher productivity, stronger loyalty, better patient experiences, and improved overall organizational performance.[4]

The goal of this whitepaper is to serve as an educational resource to forward-thinking healthcare leaders, demonstrating that fostering a culture of positive feedback among the workforce is not just a "nice-to-have" but rather a strategic investment with measurable impact on organizational performance. We review the psychology behind recognition, examine why traditional recognition and reward programs are underutilized, and present a compelling business case for why hospital leaders should invest in real-time, human-centered engagement and recognition tools. We highlight Astra Wellbeing as an example of one such solution, featuring a case study where patients, families, and peers exchanged over 3k messages of recognition within 90 days at two hospitals.
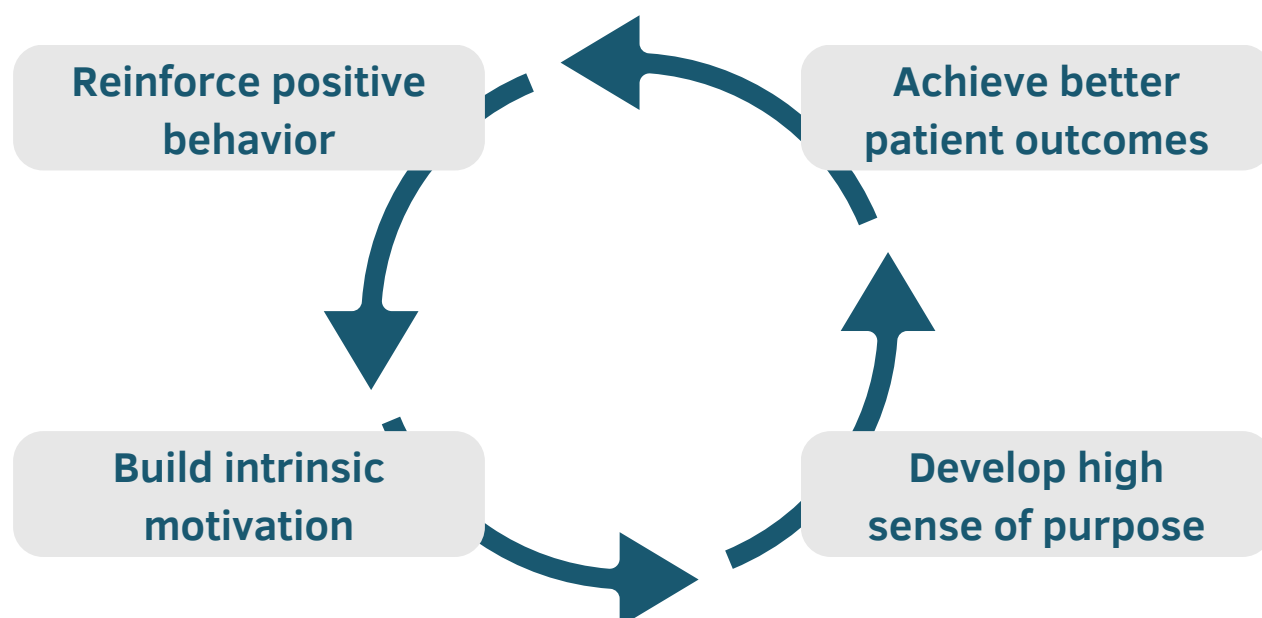
The Psychology of Positive Feedback in Healthcare

Psychological research indicates that, at a fundamental level, employees need to feel valued, engaged, and appreciated to perform at their best. While salary serves as an extrinsic motivator, its impact is often limited. In contrast, a sincere "thank you" or acknowledgment of effort activates the brain's reward centers, releasing dopamine and reinforcing positive behavior. When healthcare professionals see that their work has a meaningful impact on patients and peers, their sense of purpose deepens and intrinsic motivation grows.

These aren't superficial needs, they are core drivers of human motivation.

From a behavioral science perspective, when an employee receives positive feedback, it satisfies two essential psychological needs: esteem (as outlined in Maslow's hierarchy of needs) and relatedness (a core component of Deci & Ryan's Self-Determination Theory). This dual impact is especially critical in emotionally demanding environments like healthcare. The American Psychological Association highlights that psychological wellbeing, driven by feeling valued and connected, is a top priority for employees in high-stress roles like healthcare.[5]

The result is a continuous, powerful feedback loop:

How Recognition Drives ROI in Healthcare Organizations

We have thus far established the psychological need for positive feedback, but what business impact does this have for healthcare organizations?

The 2025 NSI National Health Care Retention Report reported that across 450 hospitals from 37 states, **hospitals are aiming to lower turnover by 2.6%, associated with cost savings of $750k**.[6] Extensive research shows that organizations with a culture of consistent recognition experience higher retention, engagement, safety, satisfaction, and experience, ultimately helping hospitals achieve the 2.6% turnover reduction goal.

Employee Retention

Employees who receive consistent recognition are **45% less likely to quit their jobs in two years** than those who do not.[7] This is especially significant as the majority of employees who leave an organization do so within the first two years,[8] highlighting the need for intentional recognition strategies to improve early retention.

Sense of Belonging

When employees feel recognized and valued, they develop a stronger sense of belonging. This is crucial for organizations to achieve, as this sense of belonging leads to important outcomes, including a **43% increase in retention and an 84% increase in estimated intent to stay**, as reported by Forbes.[11]

Employee Engagement

Employees who receive adequate recognition are **9x as likely to be engaged**.[9] This increased engagement has a direct effect on retention: PressGaney's recent workforce report found that **disengaged employees are 2x as likely to turn over** as their highly engaged peers, underscoring the importance that recognition and engagement have on reducing turnover.[10]

Patient Experience

Improved employee experience leads to improved patient experience (HCAPHPS). An analysis by Perceptyx found that hospitals with **higher engagement scores reported HCAHPS scores of 4 or 5 stars**, compared with lower scores for hospitals with lower employee engagement - highlighting that recognition is essential for delivering high-quality care.[12]

Why Traditional Recognition Systems Fail in Healthcare

While many forward-thinking healthcare leaders understand the critical importance of employee recognition, many leaders utilize outdated recognition methods, leading to underutilization and missed opportunities to build a truly supported and valued workforce. Common pitfalls include infrequent or one-time awards or recognition, manual recognition processes, standalone "kudos" pages, and complicated applications not designed for the fast-paced, high-stress healthcare environment.

To be effective, hospitals need next-generation tools that make recognition frictionless, visible, and immediate. The following two pages include common shortcomings of recognition systems and how healthcare organizations can address them.

Administrative Burden

Traditional in-house recognition systems in hospitals often require manual paperwork or multi-step approvals (e.g., emailing HR to recognize a colleague, HR manually reviewing and approving the message, and then sending it to the recipient). **Such friction can delay recognition by weeks or months while taking valuable time away from managers**. Instead, hospitals can utilize modern technology to automate the entire recognition process. For example, modern AI technology can pre-screen recognition messages for appropriateness, approve or deny messages in real-time, and send the message out to the intended recipient within seconds.

Infrequency and Delay

PressGaney's 2024 Workforce Report shows that the younger healthcare workforce expects to be recognized daily or weekly.[13] Therefore, **traditional methods of celebrating staff at monthly or yearly intervals fail to reinforce the daily behaviors that drive performance.** Instead, organizations can promote continuous recognition by increasing the number of access points to provide appreciation to healthcare workers. For example, placing QR codes throughout a hospital, adding a quick link on patients' EHR portal, and sending reminders to staff can encourage patients, families, and coworkers to consistently share positive feedback consistently.

Industry Agnostic

Most third-party recognition and engagement solutions are designed for general corporate settings and **fail to address the unique needs of the healthcare environment**. For example, many solutions require employees to log in to a third-party portal on a work computer to give or receive recognition. While this may be suitable for industries where employees work primarily at a desk, healthcare employees rarely work in such scenarios. Instead, recognition systems that do not require burdensome logins and are compatible across multiple devices (both work and personal) and channels (SMS text or email) can greatly improve utilization rates in healthcare organizations.

Rewards & Credit Issues

Many organizations hesitate to publicly post recognition messages or reward recipients, fearing that **employees may feel burdened or pressured to earn recognition to appease managers.** This may lead to disingenuous behavior and hesitancy - key reasons why traditional recognition programs are often underutilized in healthcare. Instead, organizations can implement a system that collects anonymous recognition messages, thereby placing value on the message content rather than the identity of the recipient.

Memory & Attention

Many traditional recognition processes make the **incorrect assumption that patients, family members, or staff members will remember the name or contact information** of their provider in order to recognize them. This is often not the case, especially in the fast-paced healthcare environment where multiple providers may be involved in a patient's care. Instead, organizations can come up with innovative systems that preload employee profiles with names and photos, allowing individuals to recognize caregivers simply by remembering what they looked like.

By removing these burdens and replacing them with real-time, healthcare-specific, burdenless recognition processes, building a culture of appreciation that supports both staff wellbeing and operational excellence is achievable. In the next section, we explore a case study from Astra Wellbeing - a digital engagement platform developed in collaboration with the Massachusetts Health & Hospital Association that uses modern technology to streamline the recognition process exclusively in healthcare systems.
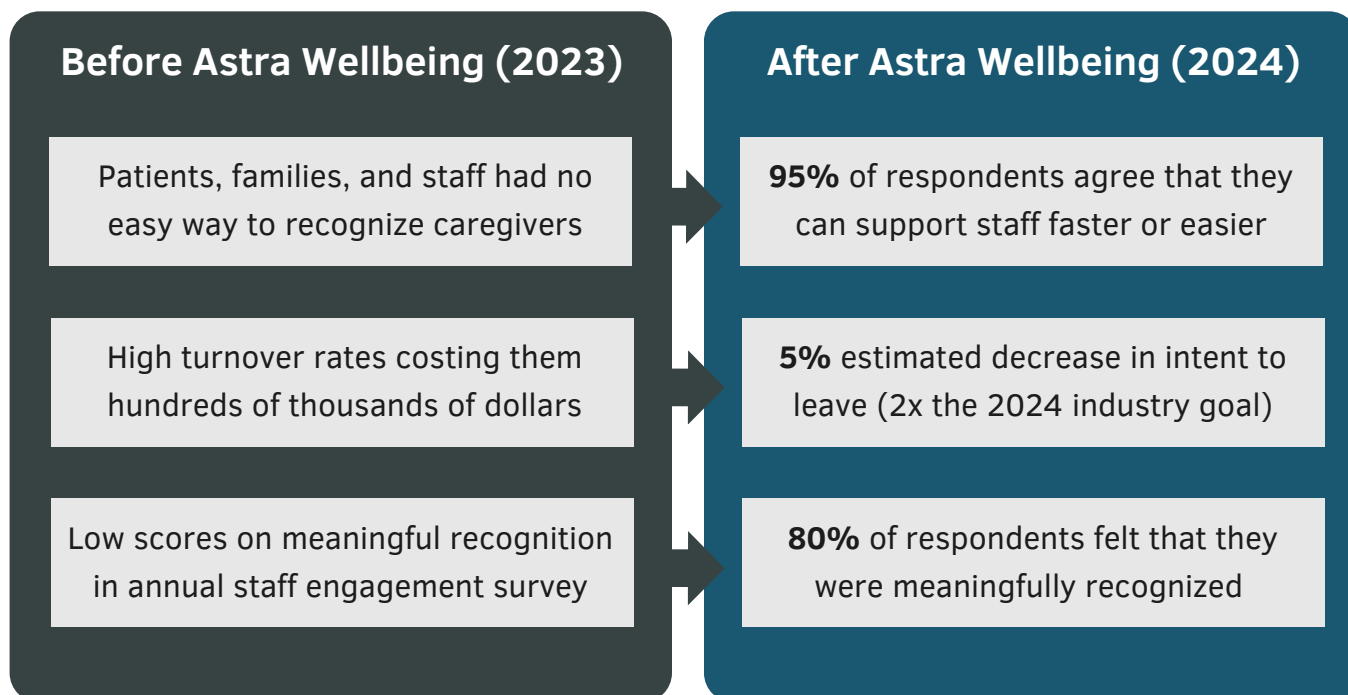
Case Study: Sparking 3,000+ Messages of Recognition

This two-page case study highlights how patients, families, and peers at a 500-bed academic medical center and a 150-bed behavioral hospital used Astra Wellbeing's AI-powered recognition platform to exchange **3k+ messages of recognition within 90 days.**

The two hospitals that participated in this pilot faced high rates of post-pandemic turnover, like many healthcare organizations and post-acute facilities today. High turnover rates were costing them **hundreds of thousands of dollars** and creating high-pressure burdens on the leadership team to find a solution that could be **quickly implemented.**

The hospitals had several wellness initiatives already in place, such as an internal employee recognition program, an Employee Assistance Program (EAP), and monthly wellness activities for staff. However, monthly events were **too infrequent** to make a lasting change and the EAP and internal programs were **"severely underutilized."**

That is when the hospital's leadership team decided to pilot **Astra Wellbeing's real-time positive-feedback system** that empowers patients, families, and peers to send positive messages to staff in order to help foster a culture of positive support among staff.

Before Astra Wellbeing (2023)	After Astra Wellbeing (2024)
Patients, families, and staff had no easy way to recognize caregivers	**95%** of respondents agree that they can support staff faster or easier
High turnover rates costing them hundreds of thousands of dollars	**5%** estimated decrease in intent to leave (2x the 2024 industry goal)
Low scores on meaningful recognition in annual staff engagement survey	**80%** of respondents felt that they were meaningfully recognized

Before piloting Astra Wellbeing, a patient or employee had to send a manual email to HR to recognize a staff member, which then had to go through a burdensome approval process. **This process was "time-consuming" for HR managers, "disappointing" for patients and peers who simply wanted to send a thank you, and "insufficient" for staff who wanted to see the impact of their work immediately.** However, by using Astra Wellbeing's real-time recognition system, anyone at the hospital can easily scan a QR code, search for a staff member, and submit a positive message. The message is then reviewed by AI and sent out in real-time, eliminating delays and **making recognition effortless and immediate.**

3,116+
**3k+ total messages sent during pilot**

★★★★☆
80% messages were AI-approved

95%
95% ease of recognition rate

The high volume of messages and strong AI approval rate saved HR managers **dozens of hours weekly**. A 95% ease-of-recognition score from post-pilot respondents shows that when given the chance, patients, families, and peers are **eager to recognize their caregivers.**

Utilization was consistent and ramped up after the first week showing that once users were acclimated, **usage increased organically**. A 3% opt-out rate and >50% weekly utilization further reinforces this trend.

>50% avg weekly utilization

3.3% opt-out rate
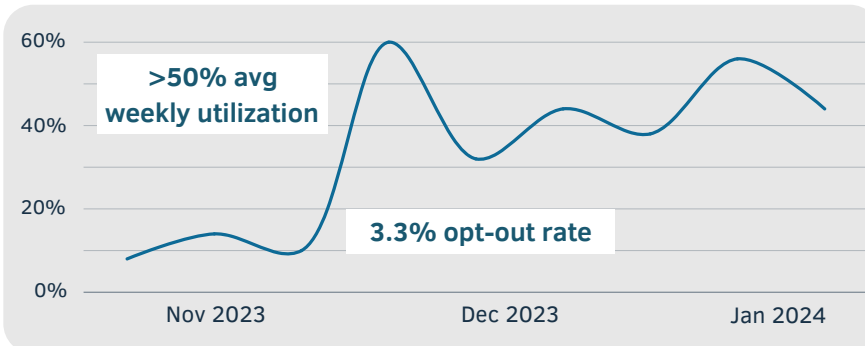
When given an easy and accessible vehicle for sharing positive support, patients, families, and peers **readily engage**. Below are some messages and testimonials from the pilot.

- "I can't stress enough how much you have impacted me"
- "I'm grateful you exist. It just takes one person to make a change. I won't forget you"
- "Your endless support helped me to not give up on myself. I am blessed to have you"
- "You're the best employee ever! ♥ "

"Using this platform reminded me of why I became a nurse in the first place"
Nurse Practitioner

"When it gets hard, knowing that my team values me serves as a constant reminder of why I signed up for this job"
Certified Nursing Assistant

"When first being hired, I was very impressed something like this existed"
Physician Assistant

Conclusion: A Call to Action for Modern Healthcare Executives

Employee retention and engagement will remain persistent challenges for healthcare organizations that fail to ensure that their team members feel valued and recognized. The good news is that healthcare leaders have a unique opportunity to set the tone for their entire organization by **implementing small changes that will make a big difference**.

By capturing real-time recognition from patients, families, and peers, hospitals can reinforce a culture of support, improving retention, safety, quality, and patient experience. Prioritizing the workforce isn't just good for morale - it's essential for long-term business success. **The time to act is now**. Below are some key takeaways from this paper.

Recognition is a Strategic Priority, Not a Perk: The data shows that recognition drives critical business KPIs (turnover, productivity, care). Modern healthcare leaders should explicitly include promoting positive feedback in their organizational strategy.

Traditional Programs Need Modernization: Traditional, outdated recognition programs are largely ineffective in today's healthcare environment. These programs need to be replaced with continuous, real-time, healthcare-specific feedback channels, such as Astra Wellbeing.

Assess your Current Recognition Solution: Take a look at the recognition systems (or lack thereof) you are currently using. Track key metrics (turnover, engagement, HCAHPS scores) and ask yourself: Are we building the culture we want our staff to thrive in? **Using modern systems can accelerate this transition with a positive ROI (see offer below).**

As an exclusive offer for THT readers, Astra Wellbeing is offering a 3-month pilot of our employee recognition system. To learn more about this opportunity, fill out our form here:

Interest Form ▶

https://www.astrawellbeing.com/interest-form

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