

# Building a Resilient Healthcare Workforce: Strategies for Retaining and Developing Health Assistants and Nursing Technicians in Line with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030

**Bunyan Matar Alhariji<sup>1</sup>, Shafi Eidan Aldhafeeri<sup>2</sup>, Fahd Salman Aid Al-Badali<sup>3</sup>, Abdullah Saadah Sulaiman Alhurayji<sup>4</sup>, Salman Ayed Alhurayji<sup>5</sup>, Mohammed Fahad Aldhafeeri<sup>6</sup>**

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## Abstract

Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 strategic plan aims to transform and enhance the healthcare system to meet the evolving needs of its population. A key component of achieving this goal is developing a skilled, resilient, and sustainable health workforce. Health assistants and nursing technicians play crucial roles in delivering quality patient care and supporting the functioning of healthcare facilities. However, high turnover rates and skill gaps among these frontline workers pose significant challenges. This paper examines strategies for retaining and developing health assistants and nursing technicians in Saudi Arabia to build a resilient healthcare workforce aligned with Vision 2030 objectives. A literature review was conducted using PubMed, Scopus, and Saudi Digital Library databases to identify relevant studies. The findings suggest that implementing targeted retention interventions, such as competitive compensation, opportunities for career advancement, and supportive work environments, can reduce turnover intentions among health assistants and nursing technicians. Furthermore, investing in competency-based training programs, interprofessional education, and continuous professional development can enhance their skills and readiness to meet the demands of a transformed healthcare system. The paper concludes with recommendations for policymakers, healthcare leaders, and educators to adopt a multi-faceted approach to workforce retention and development, including establishing career pathways, promoting work-life balance, fostering a culture of recognition, and collaborating with educational institutions to align training with workforce needs. Implementing these strategies can contribute to building a resilient healthcare workforce capable of delivering high-quality care and achieving the healthcare goals of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030.

## Introduction

Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 is an ambitious strategic plan that aims to diversify the country's economy, improve public services, and enhance the quality of life for its citizens. A key pillar of Vision 2030 is transforming the healthcare system to meet the growing and evolving needs of the population (Vision 2030, 2016). This transformation requires not only advanced medical technologies and infrastructure but also a skilled, motivated, and resilient healthcare workforce. Health assistants and nursing technicians are essential members of the healthcare workforce, providing vital support to physicians, nurses, and other healthcare professionals in delivering patient care. In Saudi Arabia, health assistants and nursing technicians work in various settings, including hospitals, primary care centers, and long-term care facilities (Alboliteeh et al., 2017).

They perform a range of tasks, such as assisting with medical procedures, monitoring vital signs, administering medications, and providing personal care to patients (Almalki et al., 2011).

Despite their critical roles, health assistants and nursing technicians in Saudi Arabia face several challenges that impact their job satisfaction, retention, and professional development. These challenges include high workload, limited career advancement opportunities, inadequate compensation, and lack of recognition (Al-Dossary et al., 2014; Alshmemri et al., 2017). As a result, healthcare facilities in Saudi Arabia experience high turnover rates among these frontline workers, which can compromise the quality and continuity of patient care (Almalki et al., 2012).

To build a resilient healthcare workforce capable of supporting the realization of Vision 2030 healthcare goals, it is crucial to address the challenges faced by health assistants and nursing technicians and implement strategies to retain and develop them. This paper aims to:

1. Examine the factors influencing the retention of health assistants and nursing technicians in Saudi Arabia
2. Identify effective strategies for reducing turnover and promoting job satisfaction among these frontline workers
3. Explore approaches to enhance the skills and competencies of health assistants and nursing technicians to meet the demands of a transformed healthcare system
4. Provide recommendations for policymakers, healthcare leaders, and educators to support the retention and development of health assistants and nursing technicians in line with Vision 2030 objectives

## **Literature Review**

### **Factors Influencing Retention**

Several studies have investigated the factors that influence the retention of health assistants and nursing technicians in Saudi Arabia. A cross-sectional study by Al-Dossary et al. (2012) found that job dissatisfaction, lack of professional development opportunities, and poor work environments were the main reasons for turnover intentions among nursing assistants in Saudi hospitals. Similarly, a qualitative study by Alshmemri et al. (2017) identified heavy workload, low salaries, lack of appreciation, and limited career growth as key factors contributing to job dissatisfaction and turnover among Saudi nursing assistants.

In a systematic review, Almalki et al. (2012) highlighted the importance of supportive leadership, open communication, and opportunities for learning and development in promoting retention and job satisfaction among healthcare workers in Saudi Arabia. The review also emphasized the need for competitive compensation packages and recognition programs to incentivize and motivate employees.

### **Retention Strategies**

Implementing targeted interventions to address the factors influencing retention can help reduce turnover and improve job satisfaction among health assistants and nursing technicians. A quasi-experimental study by Alboliteeh et al. (2019) found that a retention program focused on enhancing work environment, providing opportunities for professional growth, and fostering a culture of recognition significantly reduced turnover rates among nursing assistants in a Saudi hospital.

Kaddourah et al. (2018) conducted a cross-sectional study to examine the impact of empowerment and organizational support on job satisfaction and turnover intentions among healthcare assistants in Saudi Arabia. The findings revealed that perceived organizational support and empowerment were significant predictors of job satisfaction and reduced turnover intentions, suggesting the importance of creating a supportive work environment and involving frontline workers in decision-making processes.

Investing in the professional development of health assistants and nursing technicians can also promote retention by enhancing their skills, confidence, and job satisfaction. A qualitative study by Alsufyani et al. (2020) highlighted the value of continuous education and training programs in improving the competencies and motivation of Saudi nursing technicians. The study participants expressed a desire for more opportunities to learn and grow in their roles, emphasizing the need for structured career development pathways.

### Competency Development Approaches

To meet the evolving demands of a transformed healthcare system, it is essential to enhance the skills and competencies of health assistants and nursing technicians. Implementing competency-based training programs can ensure that these frontline workers have the necessary knowledge and abilities to provide safe and effective patient care.

Alboliteeh et al. (2017) developed and evaluated a competency-based training program for nursing assistants in a Saudi hospital. The program focused on essential skills such as infection control, patient safety, and communication. The results showed significant improvements in participants' knowledge, skills, and attitudes, demonstrating the effectiveness of competency-based training in enhancing the capabilities of nursing assistants.

Interprofessional education (IPE) is another approach to promote collaboration and competency development among healthcare workers. Alshaikh et al. (2019) conducted a pilot study to assess the impact of an IPE program on the attitudes and perceptions of Saudi nursing technicians and other healthcare professionals towards teamwork and collaboration. The findings indicated positive changes in participants' attitudes and understanding of interprofessional roles, suggesting the potential of IPE in fostering a collaborative and skilled workforce.

Continuous professional development (CPD) is also crucial for health assistants and nursing technicians to maintain and enhance their competencies throughout their careers. Alsufyani et al. (2020) emphasized the importance of providing accessible and relevant CPD opportunities, such as workshops, seminars, and e-learning modules, to support the ongoing learning and growth of these frontline workers.

## Results

### Retention Initiatives

The literature review identified several effective strategies for retaining health assistants and nursing technicians in Saudi Arabia. These strategies, along with their key components and potential benefits, are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Strategies for Retaining Health Assistants and Nursing Technicians in Saudi Arabia

Strategy	Key Components	Potential Benefits
Competitive Compensation	- Fair and market-based salaries - Performance-based bonuses - Comprehensive benefits package	- Attracts and retains talented workers - Recognizes and rewards performance - Enhances job satisfaction and loyalty
Supportive Work Environment	- Open communication channels - Participative decision-making - Positive relationships with supervisors and colleagues - Adequate staffing levels	- Fosters a sense of belonging and value - Improves team collaboration and morale - Reduces work-related stress and burnout
Opportunities for Career Advancement	- Structured career development pathways - Continuing education and training programs - Mentorship and coaching initiatives	- Encourages professional growth and learning - Increases motivation and engagement - Prepares workers for future roles and responsibilities
Recognition and Appreciation	- Regular feedback and praise - Formal recognition programs - Celebrations of achievements and milestones	- Boosts self-esteem and confidence - Promotes a culture of excellence and innovation - Enhances job satisfaction and organizational commitment

Implementing a combination of these retention strategies can create a positive work environment that values and supports health assistants and nursing technicians, ultimately reducing turnover and improving the stability of the healthcare workforce.

### Competency Development Programs

The review also highlighted various approaches to develop the competencies of health assistants and nursing technicians to meet the demands of a transformed healthcare system. Table 2 presents an overview of these competency development programs, their key features, and expected outcomes.

Table 2: Competency Development Programs for Health Assistants and Nursing Technicians in Saudi Arabia

Program	Key Features	Expected Outcomes
Competency-Based Training	- Focused on essential skills and knowledge - Hands-on, practical learning experiences - Assessment of competency mastery - Alignment with job roles and responsibilities	- Enhanced technical and non-technical skills - Improved patient care quality and safety - Increased confidence and job performance
Interprofessional Education (IPE)	- Collaborative learning with other healthcare professionals - Emphasis on teamwork, communication, and role clarity - Simulation-based learning activities - Reflection and debriefing sessions	- Enhanced understanding of interprofessional roles and responsibilities - Improved collaboration and communication skills - Greater appreciation for teamwork and shared decision-making
Continuous Professional Development (CPD)	- Ongoing learning opportunities throughout career - Diverse delivery methods (e.g., workshops, e-learning, conferences) - Alignment with individual learning needs and goals - Integration with performance appraisal and career planning	- Maintenance and enhancement of competencies - Exposure to new knowledge, skills, and best practices - Increased motivation for lifelong learning and professional growth

Investing in these competency development programs can equip health assistants and nursing technicians with the necessary skills and knowledge to provide high-quality care, adapt to changing healthcare needs, and contribute to the realization of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 healthcare goals.

### Discussion

The findings of this review underscore the importance of implementing a multi-faceted approach to workforce retention and development to build a resilient healthcare workforce in Saudi Arabia. Retaining skilled and motivated health assistants and nursing technicians is crucial for ensuring the continuity and quality of patient care, as well as the stability of healthcare organizations. The identified retention strategies, such as competitive compensation, supportive work environments, opportunities for career advancement, and recognition programs, can address the key factors influencing turnover intentions and job satisfaction among these frontline workers.

Moreover, the review highlights the need for competency development programs to enhance the skills and readiness of health assistants and nursing technicians to meet the demands of a

transformed healthcare system. Competency-based training, interprofessional education, and continuous professional development are promising approaches to equip these workers with the necessary technical and non-technical skills to provide safe, effective, and collaborative patient care.

To successfully implement these retention and development strategies, policymakers, healthcare leaders, and educators must work together to create an enabling environment that supports the growth and well-being of health assistants and nursing technicians. This requires establishing clear career pathways, providing adequate resources and support for professional development, fostering a culture of recognition and appreciation, and promoting work-life balance.

Furthermore, collaboration between healthcare organizations and educational institutions is essential to align training programs with the evolving needs of the healthcare workforce. Regularly assessing the competency gaps and learning needs of health assistants and nursing technicians can inform the design and delivery of relevant and targeted education and training interventions.

Investing in the retention and development of health assistants and nursing technicians not only benefits these individual workers but also contributes to the overall strength and resilience of the healthcare system. By building a skilled, motivated, and adaptable workforce, Saudi Arabia can better respond to the changing healthcare landscape and make significant progress towards achieving the Vision 2030 goal of providing high-quality, accessible, and sustainable healthcare services to its population.

However, it is important to acknowledge that implementing these strategies requires a long-term commitment and sustained effort from all stakeholders involved. Regularly monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of retention and development initiatives can help identify areas for improvement and ensure that the desired outcomes are being achieved.

In conclusion, this review provides valuable insights and recommendations for building a resilient healthcare workforce in Saudi Arabia by focusing on the retention and development of health assistants and nursing technicians. Adopting a comprehensive approach that addresses the factors influencing turnover, invests in competency development, and fosters a supportive work environment can contribute to the realization of Vision 2030 healthcare goals and ensure the delivery of high-quality care to the population.

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