

# The Role of Gratitude in Mitigating Nurse Burnout

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**Background:** Burnout among clinical nurses is a prevalent issue that adversely affects both healthcare professionals and patient care. Recent studies suggest that workplace gratitude expressions may serve as effective interventions to alleviate burnout; however, the specific characteristics that enhance their effectiveness remain underexplored.

**Objectives:** This research aimed to (1) empirically validate whether receiving gratitude expressions at work can reduce burnout among clinical nurses, and (2) identify the most effective characteristics of gratitude expressions by examining the impact of different sources (patients, colleagues), expression formats, frequency, timing, and perceived sincerity.

**Methods:** The study comprised two cross-sectional online surveys targeting hospital nurses in Japan (Study 1:  $N = 287$ , May 2024; Study 2:  $N = 338$ , November 2024). In Study 1, participants completed questionnaires assessing burnout levels (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment), the frequency of receiving gratitude from patients and coworkers, and the perceived sincerity of these gratitude expressions. Study 2 additionally measured trait gratitude and evaluated the sincerity of various gratitude expression formats and scenarios. Both studies also gathered information about participants' working environments.

**Results:** Findings from both studies consistently indicated that the perceived sincerity toward expressed gratitude was the strongest predictor of reductions in all burnout dimensions, irrespective of demographic characteristics, trait gratitude levels, or gratitude sources. Additionally, the frequency of gratitude, particularly when expressed by colleagues, was associated with lower burnout levels. Gratitude from patients was found to be negatively correlated with depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment in Study 1, and additionally, with emotional exhaustion in Study 2. The research further revealed that simple yet thoughtful gratitude expressions, such as one-to-one verbal acknowledgments and handwritten messages, were perceived as most sincere and valuable by nurses.

**Conclusions:** Sincere expressions of gratitude play a crucial role in mitigating burnout among hospital nurses. Healthcare organizations should implement gratitude programs that emphasize genuine acknowledgment through simple and timely expressions, tailored to the recipients' working styles and personalities. Despite limitations related to cross-sectional design, limited generalizability, and reliance on self-reported data, this study contributes to the understanding of gratitude's role in reducing burnout and offers practical guidelines for effective gratitude interventions in healthcare settings. Future research should adopt longitudinal and pre-post intervention designs to prove causality and evaluate the real-world effectiveness of gratitude-based strategies. (安全行動学)