

2007 SURVEY OF CHIEF NURSING OFFICERS





**2007 SURVEY OF CHIEF NURSING OFFICERS
REGARDING THE USE OF TRAVEL NURSES
Based on 2006 Data**

INTRODUCTION

The use of travel nurses among hospitals and other health care organizations has increased in recent years. Twenty years ago, travel nurses were counted in the hundreds. Today, AMN Healthcare estimates that there are more than 22,000 registered nurses working as travel nurses at any given time, filling temporary assignments that can range in duration from several weeks to more than a year.

Why do hospitals use travel nurses? How many hospitals use them? Of those that use travel nurses, how many travel nurses do they typically use per month? How do hospitals rate the skill levels of travel nurses? How are travel nurse perceived by patients and physicians?

AMN Healthcare's Survey of Chief Nursing Officers was conducted to provide answers to these and other questions relating to the use of travel nurses. The survey asked hospital Chief Nursing Officers (CNOs) about their hospitals' experience with travel nurses – why they use them, when they use them, benefits travel nurses provide, value of travel nurses vs. cost, etc. Results of the survey may prove useful to hospital administrators, CNOs, human resource directors and other health care staffing decision makers who follow nurse staffing trends.

METHODOLOGY

The 2006 Survey of Chief Nursing Officers was mailed to 4,000 hospital chief nursing officers at hospitals located in all 50 U.S. states. Surveys were mailed in March, 2006 and 353 completed surveys were received by AMN Healthcare in June 2006. Survey results were released in February 2007.

ABOUT AMN HEALTHCARE

AMN Healthcare is the largest temporary healthcare staffing company in the United States. The company is the largest nationwide provider of travel nurse staffing services, locum tenens (temporary physician staffing) and physician permanent placement services and also a leading nationwide provider of allied healthcare professionals. AMN Healthcare recruits healthcare professionals both nationally and internationally and places them on variable lengths of assignments and in permanent positions at acute-care hospitals, physician practice groups and other healthcare facilities throughout the United States.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS & INTERPRETATIONS

The clinical workforce in the United States has become increasingly mobile. Given shortages of nurses, physicians and allied health professionals, hospitals and other health care organizations are seeking workers who can fill gaps on a temporary basis. Unlike most other professionals, nurses, physicians and allied health workers can choose to work either on a traditional, permanent basis, or they can work on a temporary basis as travelers, filling staffing assignments at hospitals, medical groups and other healthcare organizations nationwide. For nurses, these assignments can range from a few weeks to over a year.

Results of the Survey of Chief Nursing Officers (CNOs) underscore how important travel nurses have become as a staffing resource. The majority of responding to the survey indicated that their hospitals could not function without travel nurses, and that the most important benefit travel nurses provide to hospitals is the ability to maintain quality of care.

Who Uses Travel Nurses?

Two-thirds of CNOs surveyed (66.3%) indicated their hospitals had used travel nurses to supplement their existing staff sometime during the last 12 months. The majority (56.9%) said that their hospitals currently were using travel nurses to supplement their core staff.

The majority of those surveyed (62.3%) said that they typically use at least one to two travel nurses per month, while the balance (37.7%) indicated that in a typical month they do not use travel nurses. About 33% of CNOs said their hospitals typically use one to five travel nurses per month, while about 30% said they typically use six to 20 travel nurses per month. About 8% of CNOs indicated their hospitals are heavy users of travel nurses, typically using 21 or more travel nurses per month.

Forty-one percent of CNOs said that travel nurses are more difficult to find today than they were a year ago, while 41.6% said it is just as difficult to find travel nurses today as it was 12 months ago. A smaller percentage (17.5%) said travel nurses are less difficult to find today than they were 12 months ago.

When Are Travel Nurses Used?

Over two-thirds of CNOs surveyed (64.4%) said that their use of travel nurses is not seasonal and that they are no more likely to use travel nurses at one time of year than another. Of those who do use travel nurses on a seasonal basis, 48.8% said they are “very likely” to use travelers in the winter, compared to 38.8% who are “very likely” to use them in the fall, 30.2% who are “very likely” to use them in the spring, and 29.6% who are “very likely” to use them in the summer.

While the majority of respondents indicated that their use of travel nurses is not seasonal, winter is generally thought to be a period of peak nurse staffing needs because it coincides with flu season and with winter vacation related population surges in some areas.

Why Use Travel Nurses?

Results of the survey underscore the shortage of nurses in the United States today. Over 71% of CNOs indicated an inability to recruit enough permanent staff is “a most important reason” they use travel nurses. Typically, hospitals will use travel nurses to fill staffing shortfalls until permanent nurses can be recruited. In terms of what drives CNOs to use travel nurses, the inability to recruit enough permanent staff was cited more than any other factor.

Maintaining quality of services was second on the list of CNOs most important reasons for using travel nurses. About 55% of CNOs indicated that maintaining quality of services was “a most important reason” for using travel nurses. Quality of care has been linked to high nurse-to-patient ratios, and hospitals often use travel nurses to ensure that they have sufficient staff to maintain quality standards.

Permanent loss to the nurse staff due to retirement, relocation or termination was third on the list (51.7%) of CNOs most important reasons for why their hospitals use travel nurses. According to the American Nurses Association, close to 50% of nurses are 45 years old or older, making retirement a particular challenge for hospitals and other nurse employers. When a member of the permanent staff leaves due to retirement or other forms of attrition, hospitals may use travel nurses to fill staffing gaps.

Family Medical Leave was cited as “a most important reason” to use travel nurses by close to 40% of CNOs. Since 94% of the nurse work force is female, family medical leave frequently creates staffing gaps that can be effectively filled by travel nurses.

Close to 40% of CNOs also said that preventing revenue loss due to closed beds was “a most important reason” to use travel nurses. In cases where nurse-to-patient ratios decline to levels that are deemed unsafe, hospitals may be compelled to close beds or even entire wings. By using travel nurses to keep beds open, hospitals can maintain quality of care and ensure uninterrupted revenue streams to the hospital.

What Are the Benefits of Using Travel Nurses?

CNOs surveyed cited three principal benefits of using travel nurses. Over 72% indicated that maintaining quality of care was the “most important” benefit of using travel nurses. Forty-eight percent cited the “immediate availability” of travel nurses as a “most important” benefit, while 42.6% said that preventing burn-out of existing staff was the “most important benefit.”

Nurse attrition may often be unplanned, in which case the immediate availability of travel nurses can be a valued benefit. Moreover, travel nurses may help to reduce nurse attrition by relieving staff burnout during peak usage periods. In this fashion, travel nurses can serve as a nurse retention tool to help maintain core staff over the long-term.

What Concerns Are There About Travel Nurses?

About 80% of CNOs expressed that knowledge of hospital equipment and procedures was their “most important” concern regarding travel nurses, while “interaction with permanent staff” was considered a “most important” concern by 67.7% of those surveyed. Travel nurses often must come into unfamiliar environments and must be appropriately qualified and trained to acclimate quickly within the hospital’s core nursing staff.

How Are Travel Nurses Viewed by CNOs, Physicians and Patients?

When asked about the skill level of travel nurses, about 93% of CNOs indicated travel nurses have skills that are “adequate” or “equal or superior to” existing staff. A small group, just over 7%, rated travel nurse skills as “below average.” The survey suggests that the great majority of CNOs have a moderate to high degree of confidence in the skill levels of travel nurses.

However, the survey suggests that perceived skill levels among travel nurses can vary. About 72% of CNOs said that there are “noticeable differences” in skill levels among travel nurses based on the staffing provider with which they work. This response underscores the need for hospitals to select travel nurse staffing providers carefully and to closely examine quality management procedures and professional certification programs.

The great majority of CNOs (94.3%) indicated that travel nurses are either “accepted” or “tolerated” by permanent nurse staff, while just 5.7% said they are “not accepted.” Travel nurses have become common in many hospitals in recent years and the survey indicates that for the most part CNOs find that travel nurses and core staff co-exist in a productive environment.

Where Do Travel Nurses Fit in the Overall Staffing Continuum?

The survey asked CNOs to comment on the role travel nurses play at their hospitals. About 90% of CNOs said that the statement “We could not function without travel nurses” was either “somewhat true” or “very true.” Of this group, close to one-third (31.62%) said this statement was “very true.” Given nurse shortages today, the survey suggests that for many hospitals travel nurses are an indispensable source of supplemental staff.

Close to three quarters (74.1%) of CNOs said the statement “Travel nurses are a necessary supplement to existing staff” was at least “somewhat true,” with 49.8% calling the statement “very true.” The majority of CNOs (70%) also said the statement “Travel nurses are useful for periods of high volume” was at least “somewhat true,” while 51% called the statement “very true.”

The majority of CNOs surveyed (73.8%) said the statement “travel nurses are not particularly necessary” was “least true.” About one-quarter of CNOs said the statement was at least “somewhat true,” while the minority (13.5%) said this statement was “very true.”

Is the Value of Travel Nurses Worth the Cost?

Seventy-four percent of CNOs surveyed indicated that the value of travel nurses to their hospitals is either “worth the cost” or “break even,” while 26% indicated that the value of travel nurses to their facilities is “not worth the cost.”

These survey results indicate that it is incumbent upon staffing providers to demonstrate additional ways in which travel nurses can be used strategically and cost effectively by hospitals and other healthcare organizations.

RESULTS SUMMARY

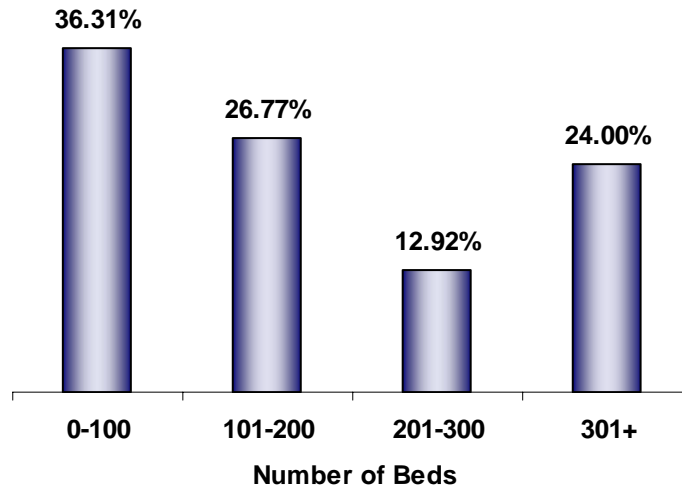
Total surveys mailed: 4,000

Completed Surveys: 353

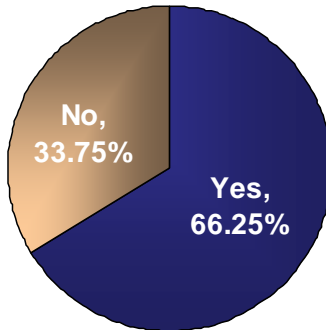
Response rate: 8.8%

Profile of Respondents

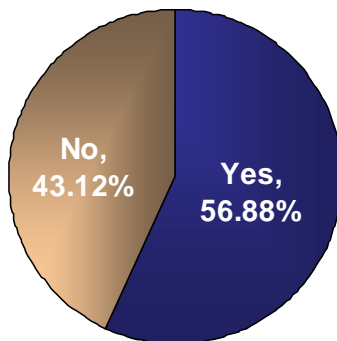
1. How many beds does your hospital have?



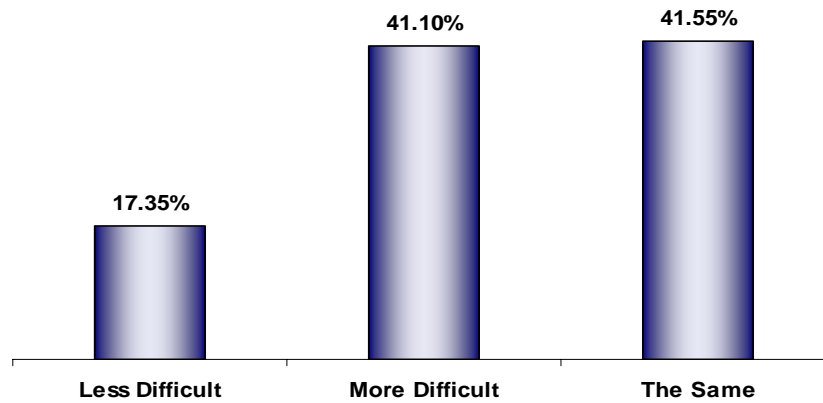
2. Have you used temporary ("travel") nurses to supplement your existing staff at any time during the last 12 months?



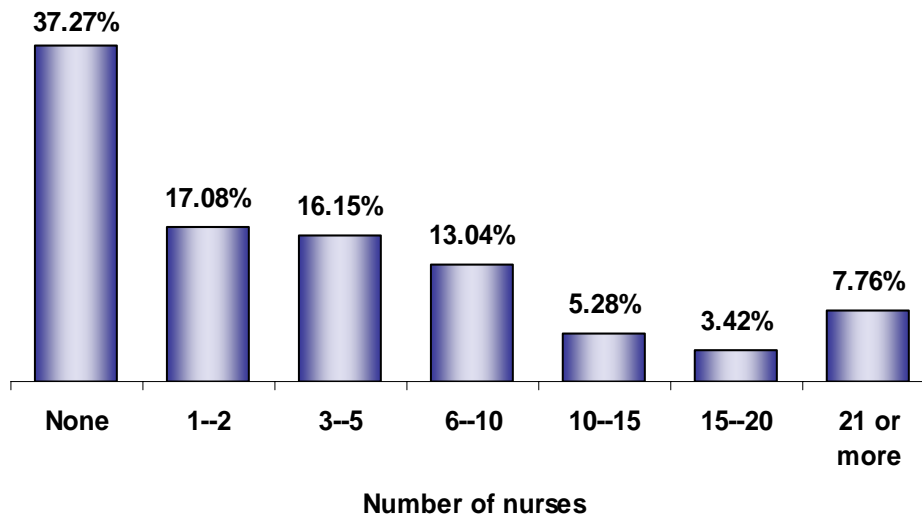
3. Are you currently using travel nurses to supplement your existing staff?



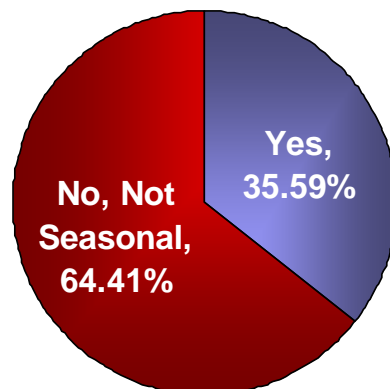
4. How difficult is it to find the travel nurse your facility needs today compared to 12 months ago?



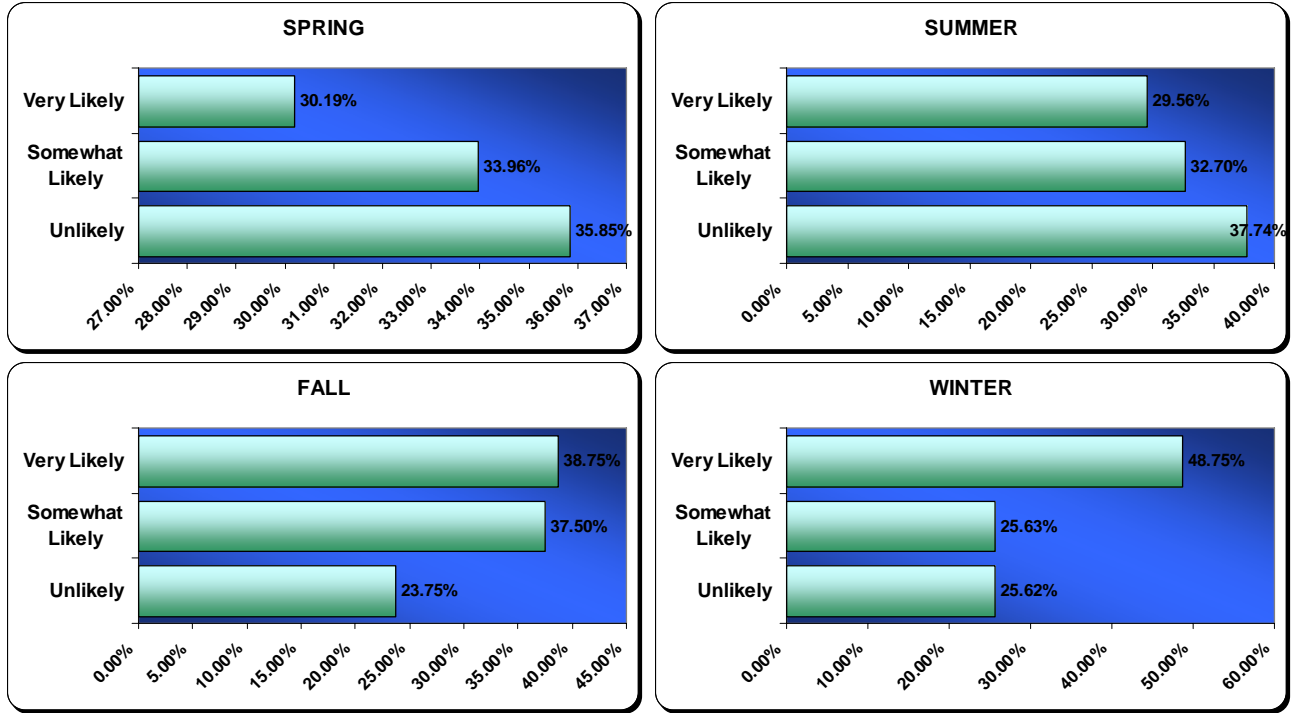
5. In a typical month, how many travel nurses does your facility use?



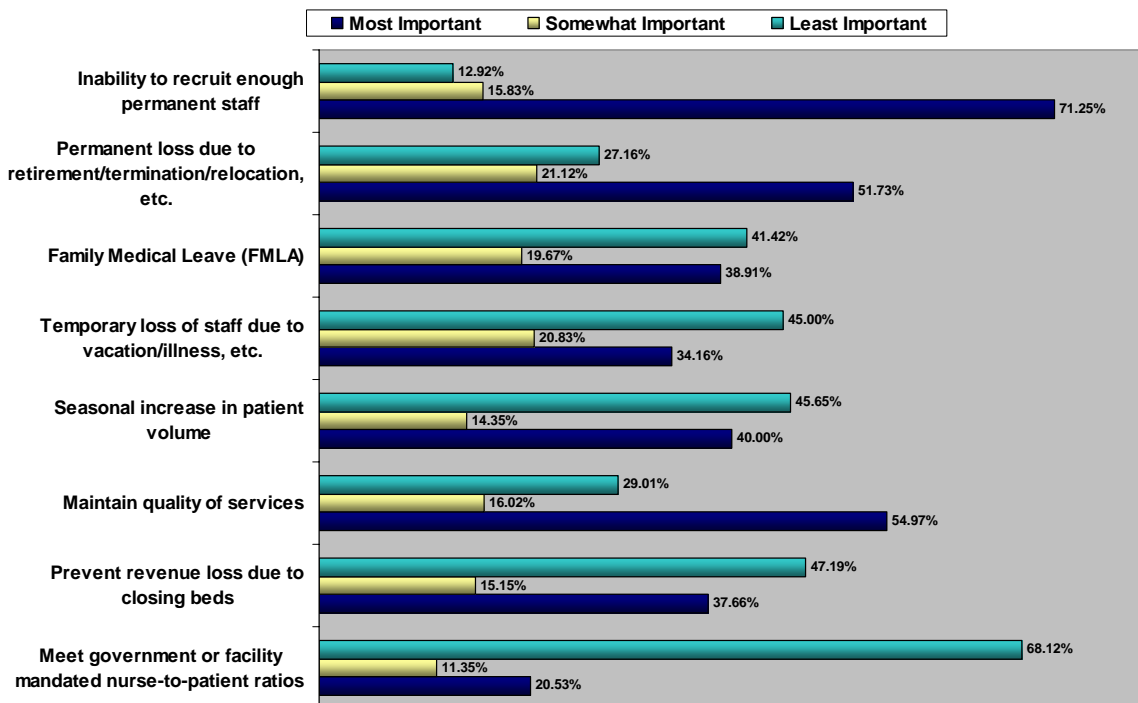
6. Are there times of the year when you are more likely to use travel nurses?



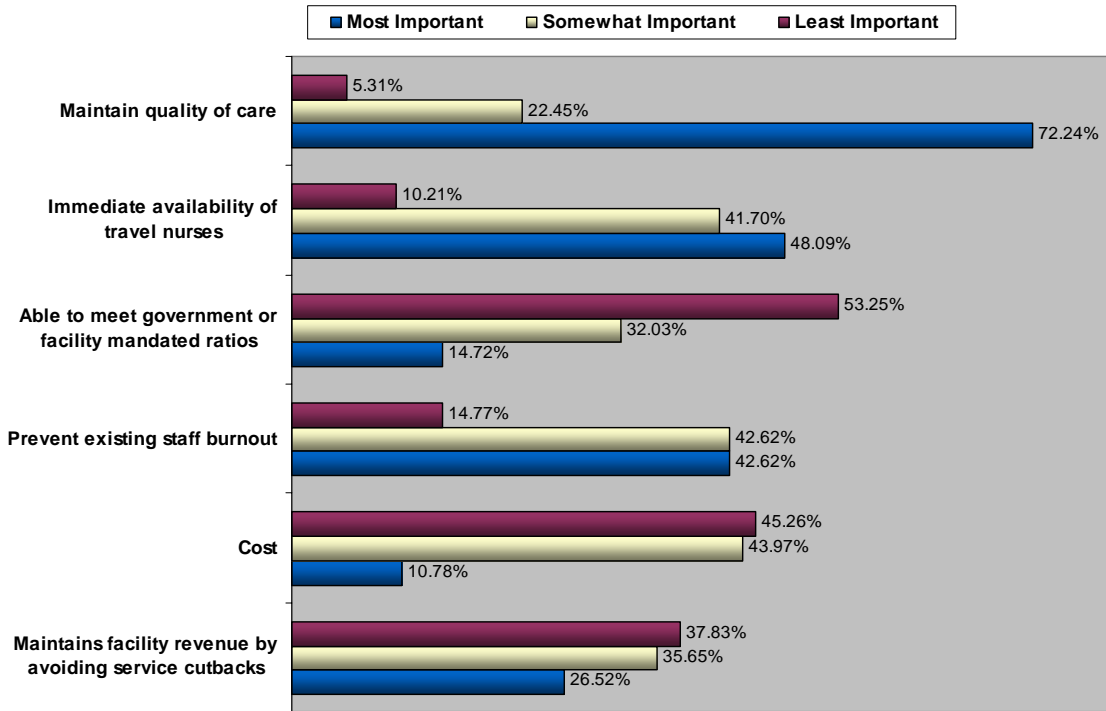
7. If yes, please indicate how likely you are to use travel nurses during the following seasons:



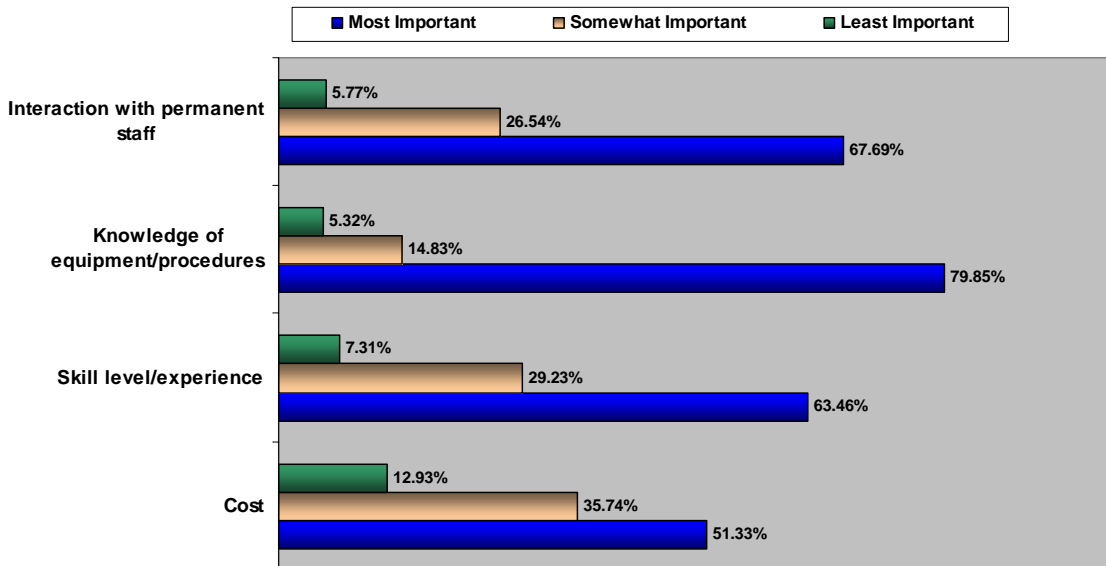
8. Why do you use travel nurses? Please rate the following factors from 1 to 5, with 1 being the most important:



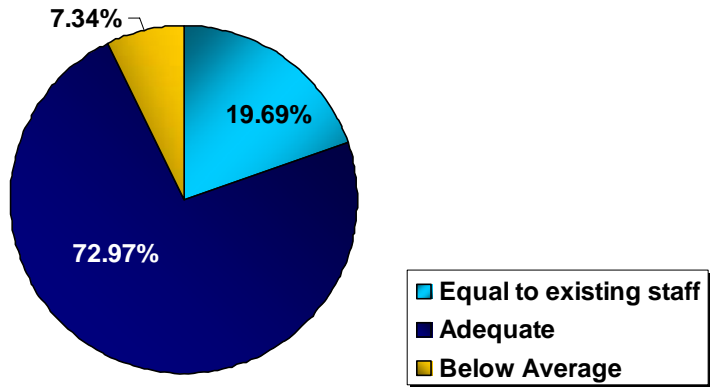
9. What are the benefits of using travel nurses? Please rate benefits from most important to least important



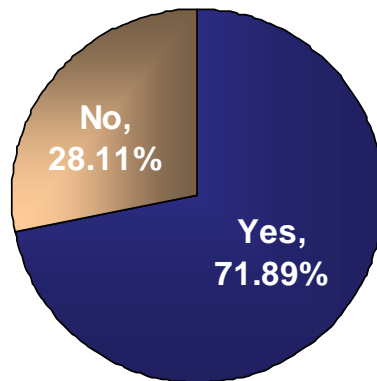
10. What are your concerns about travel nurses?



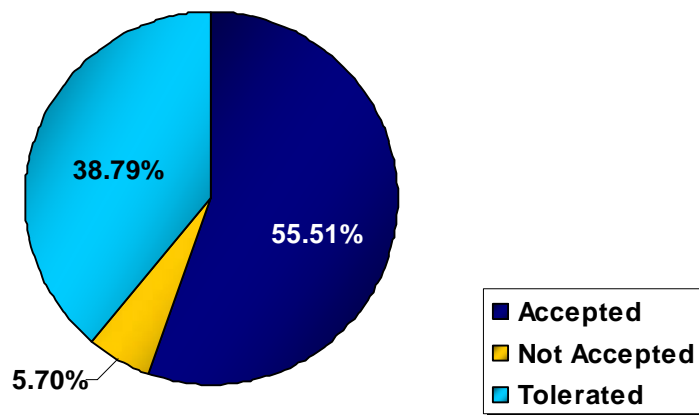
11. What is your perception of the skill level of travel nurses?



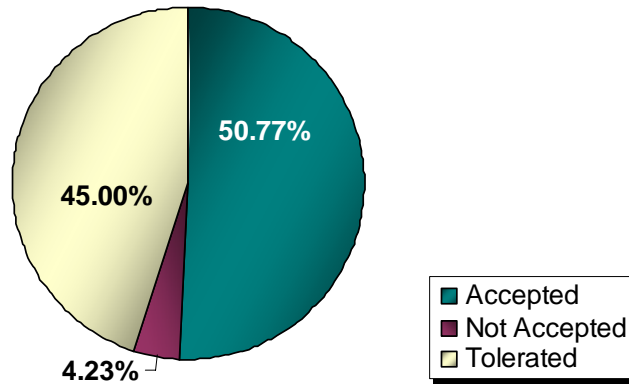
12. Is there a noticeable difference in the skill level of travel nurse based on the travel agencies they work with?



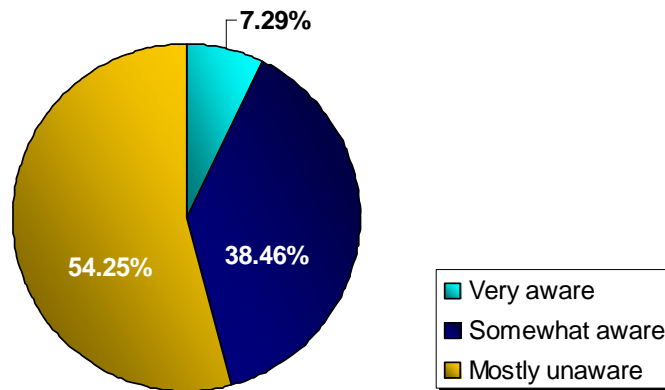
13. How are travel nurses viewed by the permanent staff nurses at your facility?



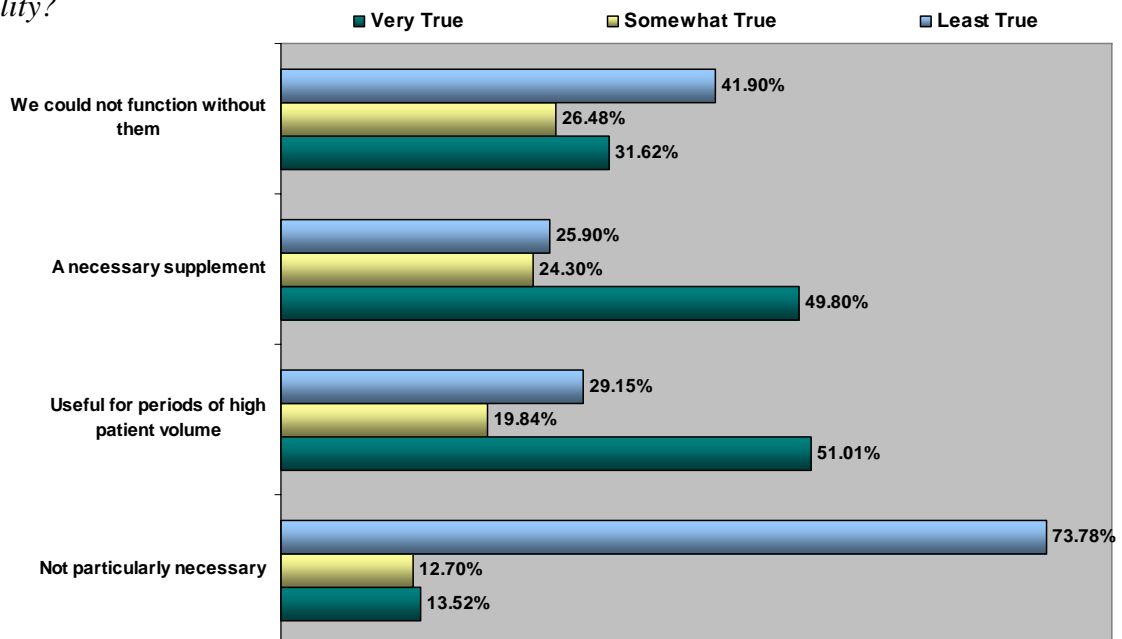
14. How are travel nurses viewed by the physicians at your facility or practice?



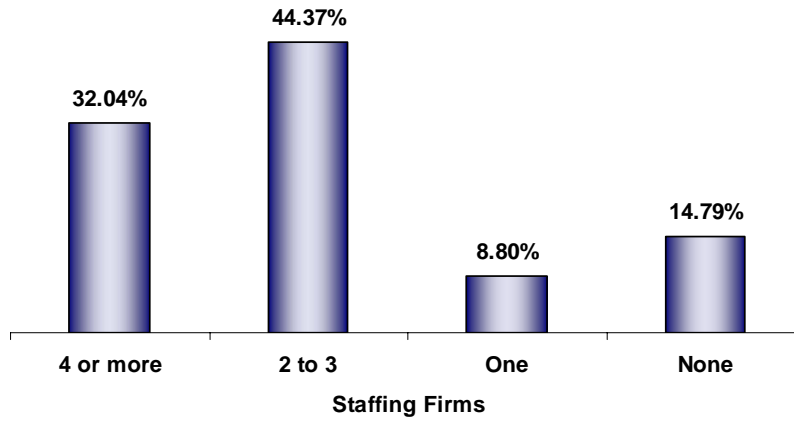
15. How aware are patients at your facility that they are being cared for by travel nurses?



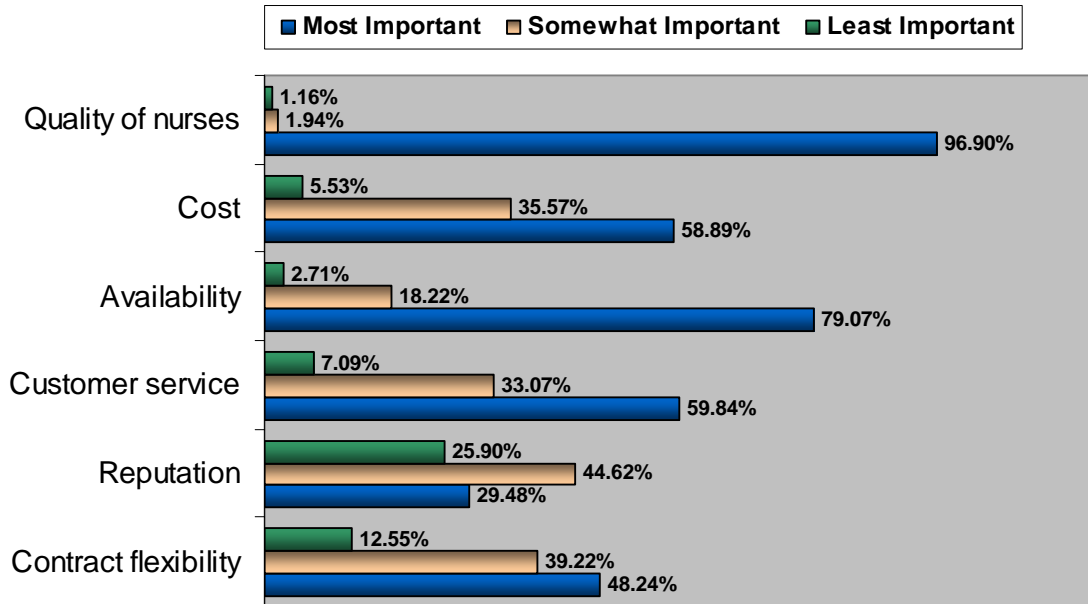
16. How true are the following statements about travel nurses you use at your facility?



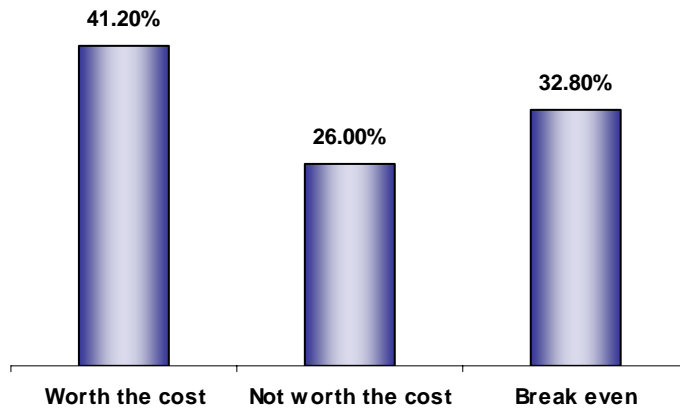
17. When seeking travel nurses, how many nurse staffing firms do you generally work with?



18. Please rate the factors you use in selecting a firm:



19. Is the value of travel nurses to your facility:



**For more information about the survey or about AMN Healthcare, please contact
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