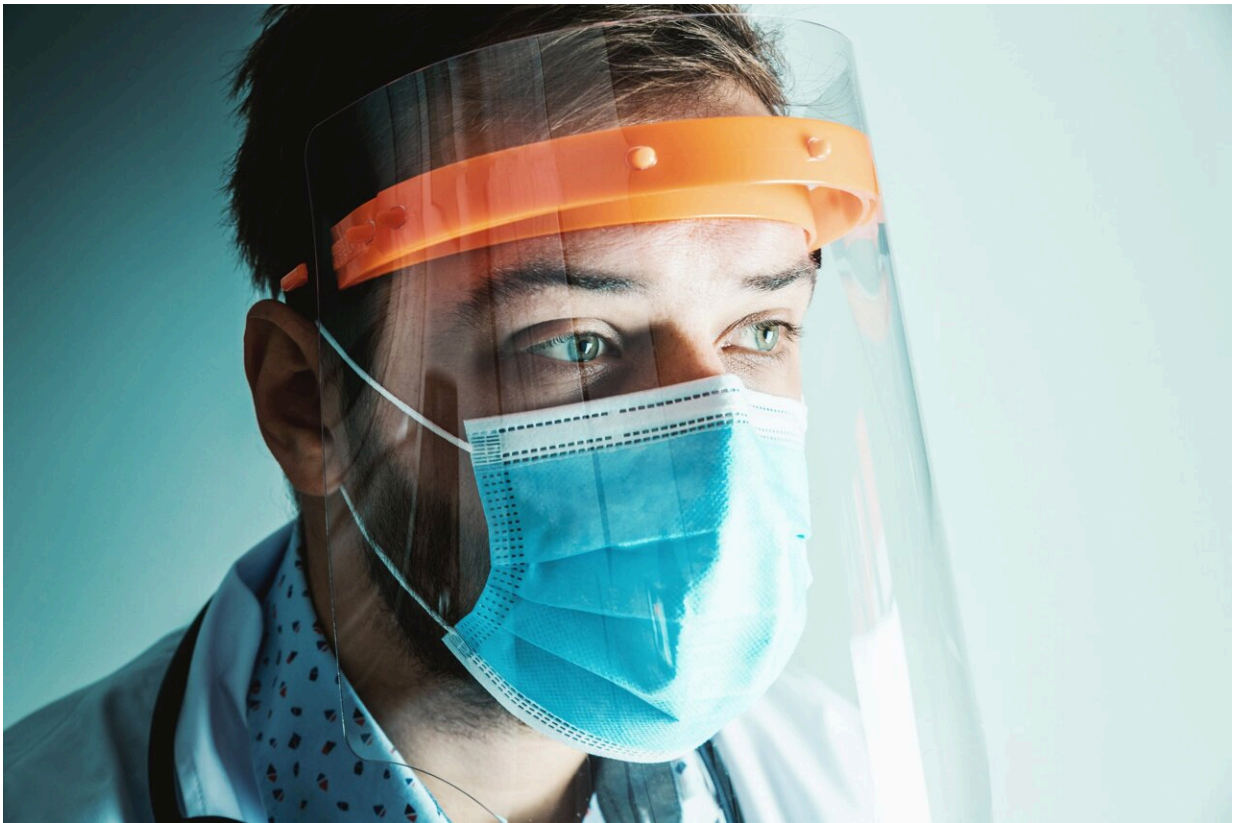


# Nurses: Attracting more men to the profession could help with talent shortage

December 22 2022, by Adi Gaskell and Zografia Bika

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Seldom has the state of the NHS workforce been more in the public consciousness. A global survey of nurses undertaken by the consultancy firm [McKinsey](#) in the summer of 2022 highlighted the perilous state of

the sector. The survey, which was conducted in France, Singapore, Japan, the US, Australia, Brazil and the UK, found that around one in four nurses was considering leaving the profession. Central to this desire was the burnout that was caused by being overworked and understaffed.

It's a situation that has been widely discussed in the UK as a result of the [first-ever strike](#) by members of the Royal College of Nursing in England. Data from [NHS Digital](#) reveals that there are over 133,000 unfilled vacancies across NHS England, with about one in three of these vacancies for registered nurses. The extent of the crisis is underlined by the fact that this figure has grown by 19% on the same period last year.

The huge number of unfilled vacancies has led to an understandable call for a renewed focus on recruiting new nurses into the NHS. It's an effort that would be greatly helped if the sector was as attractive to men as it is to women. Indeed, official [data](#) from the Nursing and Midwifery Council shows that just 11% of registered nurses in the UK today identify as men.

## Gender stereotypes

This matters in a number of ways. First, men can often suffer from discrimination when applying to or working in stereotypically female roles. Indeed, [research](#) has shown that men receive about 40% fewer requests for interviews when applying for jobs in female-dominated sectors.

These gender-based stereotypes [emerge](#) as early as five years of age, with children associating certain professions with men and others with women—and they are incredibly hard to shift. To do so will require a rethink about how nurses are portrayed both in the media and in communication between the industry and the wider public.

We have seen in [attempts](#) to increase the number of women studying science, technology, engineering and mathematics (Stem) subjects, and participating in those industries, that having a strong supply of role models significantly increases participation by women. Just as those efforts have had to confound the stereotype that science and engineering were male disciplines, so too do we need a concerted effort to show that men can thrive as nurses as well.

[Research](#) shows that going against gender norms carries a social and emotional cost, but whereas there has grown to be less stigma associated with women when they perform "men's" jobs, the same is not the case when men perform "women's" jobs. This is confounded by the [stereotyping](#) often associated with male nurses as either effeminate or homosexual (or failed doctors).

Not only is the health care sector facing a chronic skills shortage today, but it is also [estimated](#) that the number of jobs in the sector will grow by 13% by 2031. While there has been a justifiable focus on Stem subjects as underpinning the jobs of tomorrow, jobs in health care promise to be more important than ever due to the aging society and general trend towards greater spending on health care. If the industry is to meet those needs, it cannot afford to overlook half of the population.

The successful efforts to increase female participation in Stem point to several approaches that could be adopted to do likewise for male participation in health-related roles.

For instance, health care organizations and universities should actively target men for vacancies and training opportunities. This should be done in conjunction with providing more positive male role models. The potential of this was highlighted by a recent NHS campaign, called [We are the NHS](#), which resulted in a record number of male school leavers applying to be nurses. The campaign was backed by actor Charles Venn,

who plays a [nurse](#) in the BBC series Casualty.

It's an outcome that needs to be built upon, with investment to back up such campaigns. For instance, in the US, [The American Association for Men in Nursing](#) offers scholarships for men who have embarked on a career in nursing, but while this is encouraging, it is not at the same level as the financial support offered to Stem-related projects.

Getting more men into nursing has clear benefits for both the NHS and for society as a whole, but achieving it will require a truly national effort. We've shown what's possible with the drive to get more women into Stem. Now we need to replicate that to ensure men feel that nursing is a career for them.

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