

The Hidden Mental Health Cost of Nursing, and Why Many Nurses Don't Talk About It

ICU Nurse and Wellness Advocate Calls Attention to the Silent Burnout Crisis Impacting Healthcare Workers Across North America

SEATTLE, WA, UNITED STATES, May 27, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Behind every patient saved, every overnight shift, and every moment of crisis inside a hospital, there is often a nurse carrying emotional wounds no one sees.

Nicole Johnson, BSN, RN, CCRN, CEP, critical care nurse and mental health and wellness advocate, is speaking out about what she describes as the "silent emotional epidemic" happening within the nursing profession - a culture where burnout, anxiety, emotional exhaustion, and trauma have become so normalized that many nurses no longer recognize they are in crisis.

At a time when healthcare systems continue to face staffing shortages, increasing patient demands, and rising mental health concerns among frontline workers, she is urging media, healthcare leaders, and the public to confront an uncomfortable truth: Many nurses are surviving professionally while quietly suffering personally.

"The public sees nurses as strong, compassionate, and selfless," says Johnson. "What they don't see is the emotional weight many nurses carry home after every shift - the grief, the guilt, the stress, the trauma, and the pressure to keep going no matter what."

Drawing from years of experience working in intensive care, she says the profession has unintentionally created a culture where self-sacrifice is celebrated while emotional recovery is ignored.

"Nurses are often praised for pushing through exhaustion, skipping breaks, and constantly putting themselves last," Johnson explains. "Healthcare has normalized the idea that a 'good nurse' sacrifices everything, including their own wellbeing."

She believes that mentality has created dangerous consequences for frontline workers.

The "Invisible" Side of Nursing Few Talk About

While burnout among healthcare workers has become a growing public conversation, Johnson reveals that many nurses still feel unable to openly discuss their struggles due to fear of judgment, professional stigma, or appearing incapable.

Among the issues she says nurses quietly battle:

- Emotional trauma after difficult patient outcomes
- Chronic stress and nervous system exhaustion
- Anxiety, compassion fatigue, and emotional numbness
- Sleep disruption and hypervigilance after shifts
- Guilt associated with taking time off or setting boundaries
- Fear of being perceived as “weak” for seeking support

“Many nurses become experts at functioning while emotionally depleted,” Johnson says. “They keep showing up for everyone else while disconnecting from themselves.”

Redefining Recovery for Nurses

As an advocate for nurse wellness and burnout prevention, she is now helping nurses rethink what recovery and mental well-being actually look like - beyond simply taking a vacation or “getting more sleep.”

Her work focuses on helping nurses regulate stress, reconnect with themselves outside of their profession, and rebuild emotional resilience in sustainable ways.

Johnson also leads wellness retreats designed specifically for nurses, creating spaces where healthcare professionals can decompress, process emotional fatigue, and prioritize their own well-being without guilt.

“Nurses spend their careers caring for others,” she says. “Very few have ever been taught how to care for themselves in the process.”

A Growing Conversation the Healthcare Industry Can No Longer Ignore

With nurse burnout continuing to impact retention, staffing, patient care, and mental health outcomes across the healthcare system, Johnson believes the conversation needs to move beyond surface-level wellness messaging.

“This isn’t about self-care clichés,” she says. “This is about the psychological cost of constantly caring for people during the hardest moments of their lives.”

She hopes sharing her perspective will help nurses feel less isolated while encouraging

healthcare organizations to address the deeper cultural issues contributing to burnout.

"The strongest nurses are not the ones who never break," says Johnson. "They're the ones willing to acknowledge they're human."

About Nicole Johnson

Nicole Johnson, BSN, RN, CCRN, CEP, is a critical care nurse and advocate for mental health and wellness in nursing. With 17 plus years of clinical experience, Nicole works to transform how nurses understand and practice self-care in systems that historically reward endurance over rest. She is certified in 'Happiness at Work' through the Greater Good Science Center at UC Berkeley, received a certification on Psychological First Aid from John Hopkins University and is trained as a debriefing facilitator.

Nicole leads retreats, provides media commentary and keynote talks, and supports healthcare leaders in building sustainable cultures of care. For more information, visit:

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