



POLICY PERSPECTIVE

IT IS IMPORTANT FOR POLICY-MAKERS TO UNDERSTAND THE EFFECT THAT NEW NURSES HAVE ON HOSPITAL TURNOVER RATES SINCE HIGH TURNOVER HAS REPERCUSSIONS FOR HEALTH CARE QUALITY AND COST. THIS STUDY SUGGESTS THAT POLICY CHANGES THAT RESULT IN BETTER MANAGEMENT, BETTER ORIENTATIONS AND A DECREASE IN THE AMOUNT OF STRESSFUL WORK MAY IMPROVE THE RETENTION OF NEW RNS IN HOSPITALS. RESULTS FROM THIS STUDY OVER THE NEXT 10 YEARS WILL PROVIDE FURTHER GUIDANCE.

The Issue

Nine years after the start of the current nursing crisis, a shortfall of 340,000 registered nurses (RNs) is still projected by 2020.¹ Therefore, it remains critically important to recruit new nurses and retain older, experienced RNs, particularly in workplaces with high turnover rates, such as hospitals. Retention of newly licensed RNs (NLRNs) is of particular interest in reducing hospital turnover rates. NLRNs are more likely to work at hospitals than are practicing RNs in general, but little is known about how long they stay, why they leave and where they go once they leave.²

This Robert Wood Johnson Foundation-funded study headed by Christine T. Kovner, Ph.D., R.N., and Carol S. Brewer, Ph.D., R.N., provides a baseline for understanding NLRNs and their employment patterns.³ Researchers analyzed survey data from more than 3,000 NLRNs in 35 states about their individual characteristics, work setting, attitudes toward work and job opportunities in other organizations. This same group of nurses will be contacted periodically over the next 10 years to provide extensive information on their career trajectory.

Key Findings

Typical characteristics

- *Education.* A majority of participants held an associate's degree (58%) as their first professional degree, one-third obtained bachelor's degrees (38%) and 4 percent held a master's degree or higher.
- *Workload.* A majority of RNs (66%) worked 12-hour shifts. RNs working in hospital settings were more likely to work 12-hour shifts (72%).
- *Relationship with colleagues.* Some 75 percent of RNs reported that individuals in their workgroup were helpful "quite a bit" or "a great deal." A majority (53%), reported that supervisors encouraged them to express their opinions to a great or very great extent.
- *Autonomy and opportunity for advancement.* RNs reported a moderate amount of autonomy and 49 percent agreed or strongly agreed that there were opportunities for promotion.
- *Injuries.* Verbal abuse was the most frequently encountered injury at work (62%).

1 Auerbach DI, Buerhaus PI and Staiger DO. "Better late than never: workforce supply implications of later entry into nursing." *Health Affairs*, 26(1): 178-185, 2007. <http://content.healthaffairs.org/cgi/content/full/26/1/178>

2 Kenward K and Zhong E. "Report of Findings from the Practice and Professional Issues Survey, fall 2004." Chicago: National Council of State Boards of Nursing, 2006. <https://www.ncsbn.org/367.htm>

3 Kovner CT, Brewer CS, Fairchild S, Poornima S, Kim H and Djukic M. "Newly Licensed RNs' Characteristics, Work Attitudes, and Intentions to Work." *American Journal of Nursing*, 107(9): 58-70, 2007. <http://www.ajnonline.com/pt/re/ajnl/abstract.00000446-200709000-00033.htm;jsessionid=Hn1XqPk2bjMTwzMLbv553qVnmWxCkK9k106fjyTPm01GLXsGjP3!923867264!181195629!8091!-1>

Work setting and job stability

- A total of 87 percent worked in hospitals.
- Overall, 77 percent of respondents held one RN job since graduation; 12 percent reported holding two jobs at the same time.

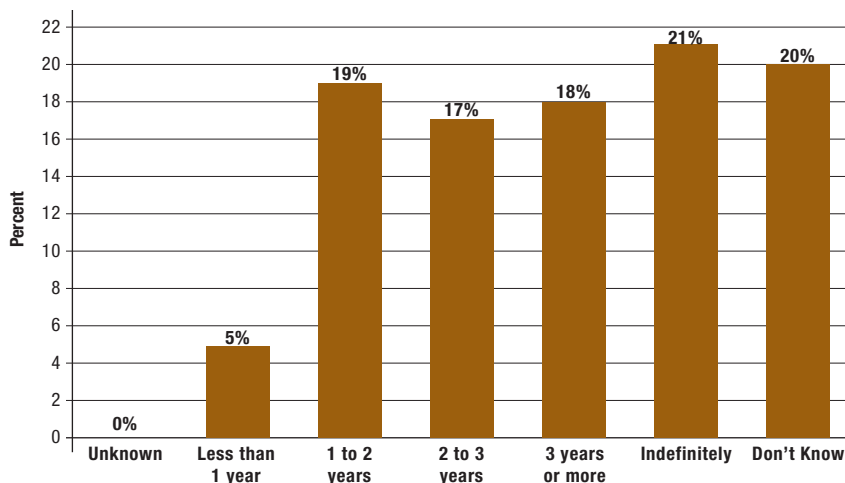
Attitude toward work

- Overall, more than 60 percent of RNs were satisfied or very satisfied with their jobs; 47 percent described their job as very much like the job they wanted.
- A consistent subset of RNs answered individual items less positively: 42 percent answered they would want another job if they were free to go to any type of job and 37 percent of RNs stated they planned to look for another job within the year.

Job opportunities

- Overall, RNs were neutral toward leaving their current employment. Among those who had already left their first job, the most common reasons for leaving included poor management, stressful work and wanting experience in a different clinical area.
- Associate's degree graduates were more intent on leaving than those whose first professional degree was a bachelor's degree.

How Long Do NLRNs Plan to Stay in Their First RN Job?



Source: *American Journal of Nursing*, 2007.

Additional unpublished findings

- Factors that influence the setting of NLRNs' first jobs were:
 - *The age of the NLRN*—The mean age of respondents working in hospital settings was 31.5 years and those working in nonhospital settings was 35.2 years. Within hospitals, NLRNs who worked in intensive care units were younger than those working on a general unit or on other units.
 - *Internship/Residency*—Formal internships and residencies were more common among nurses who worked in units where patients were heavily monitored. Some 22 percent of NLRNs received a formal residency or internship at their first job. More NLRNs working with heavily monitored patients received residency/internship training than those who worked in other units.

Resources

Lewis D. "Multiple Factors Affect Job Satisfaction of Hospital RNs." Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Research Highlight Number 22, February 2007.

Available at <http://www.rwjf.org/pr/product.jsp?id=15959>

Kovner C and Brewer C. National Study to Track Career Change Among Newly Licensed Registered Nurses. Princeton, NJ: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2007.

Available at <http://www.rwjf.org/files/publications/other/UBNurseSurvey.pdf>

—Melanie Napier

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