

NURSING FACULTY COMPENSATION:



A WCN Workgroup Briefing Paper

In March 2008, the Washington Center for Nursing submitted the Master Plan for Nursing Education to the state Department of Health. In that plan, we proposed a comprehensive set of reforms to the nursing education system in this state, organized around the broad areas of competency, supply, diversity, and access. We are now developing plans for implementing those proposals, through stakeholder workgroups and research on best practices. This workgroup is focused on enhancing compensation fairness and equity in the nursing education system.

Background

One of the main factors preventing further expansion of nursing schools is a shortage of qualified faculty. One of the main causes for that, in turn, is widely reported to be the relatively low salaries earned by nursing faculty. In addition, many nursing faculty (like nurses in general) are nearing retirement age, and a large wave of replacement educators will be needed fairly soon. Accurate information about faculty compensation is crucial for education planning.

The nursing education system in Washington State is a complex blend of a number of sectors: public and private; community/technical colleges and university; pre-licensure, bachelor's completion (RN-BSN), and graduate programs. The minimum credential for teaching pre-licensure RN students is a master's degree. However, many schools in Washington have had great difficulty recruiting masters-prepared faculty to fill all their teaching positions. With permission from the Nursing Care Quality Assurance Commission (which regulates nursing education in this state), nurses with bachelor's degrees who are enrolled in a master's program (or who have three years current clinical experience in that area) can be hired to teaching RN students. Meanwhile, most universities require a doctorate for tenure-track positions.

Q. Why is it difficult to say what the “average” nursing faculty person earns?

Some full-time faculty are hired on 9-month schedules, while others have 11- or 12-month contracts. The community and technical colleges are covered by collective bargaining agreements – each school negotiating *its own separate* contract – while most of the universities in this state are not. A full professor at a university is in a very different salary structure than a part-time lecturer at the same institution. All of these factors make it difficult to summarize the state of nursing faculty salaries.

At present there is no central repository for information about nursing faculty salaries across the various sectors of the education system. Some information about public employees' salaries is available and has been collected. However, this information is incomplete, and difficult to summarize and compare across sectors, campuses, and faculty ranks. Information about salaries at the private universities is not currently available.

Q. Can we say how much nursing faculty should earn?

It is not clear which salary comparisons are most appropriate for evaluating the adequacy and competitiveness of nursing faculty compensation. Comparisons between a part-time clinical instructor and a staff nurse, for example, may not be the most meaningful point of contrast. In many cases, part-time instructors are paid at lower rates than full-time faculty, while staff nurse earnings may include overtime pay, shift differential, and the effects of seniority. In acute-care areas, nurses with masters' degrees may be more likely to have staff development, nurse educator, and clinical specialist roles, rather than to be working as staff nurses, suggesting that those positions may be more appropriate points of comparison. Some have argued that salaries of nursing educators should be compared to those of educators at similar institutions in other fields (i.e., non-nursing educators). The goal is to have a salary and benefits structure that reflects the education and experience of the workforce, is appropriate to the resources of the schools, and is sufficiently competitive to attract adequate numbers of highly-qualified and motivated teachers.

Q. Does this issue affect all nursing faculty equally?

No, probably not. Although the data are not complete, we believe that part-time clinical instructors may face the largest gap between various salary options. Faculty at community and technical colleges generally earn less than their counterparts at universities. A Compensation Study Task Force commissioned by the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges in 2008 recommended significant salary increases to bring faculty in these Washington schools closer to their peer averages in comparable other states, as well as increasing the pay rates for part-time faculty. Surprisingly, data from a survey conducted by the National League for Nursing suggested that faculty at private schools tend to earn less than their counterparts at public universities, but we do not know if that is the case in Washington State.

Q. Is salary the only issue in recruiting nursing faculty?

No, many other issues are important as well. Adequate compensation for nursing faculty – including salary and benefits – is only one factor; however, it seems to be both important in itself and connected to other issues (e.g. workload, stress, satisfaction, recognition and other rewards). No one goes into teaching in order to become wealthy, but teachers do consider salary and benefits, as does everyone.

Q. How can we talk about raising faculty salaries now, with the state in a budget squeeze and some people being laid off?

This is a difficult time for the state, for education, and for healthcare. Our short-term goal is to identify the key issues and collect information about the current status of nursing faculty compensation. In the longer run, we do need to develop proposals and strategies for enhancing nursing faculty compensation, so that when the economy improves, we will be ready with a plan. The faculty shortage may have been postponed somewhat, but it is not going away. Innovative and sustainable solutions must be developed to respond to these issues, in order to prepare a nursing workforce capable of providing healthcare for the people of Washington State.

Q. What's next?

In the spring and summer of 2009, key stakeholders in education and practice will work together to develop a plan for implementation of the Master Plan goals, specifically to identify strategies for enhancing compensation for nursing educators at all levels.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES and REFERENCES:

American Association of Colleges of Nursing (2008). *Fact Sheet: Nursing Faculty Shortage Fact Sheet*. Available at:

<http://www.aacn.nche.edu/Media/pdf/FacultyShortageFS.pdf>

Brady MS (2007). Educational innovations: Recruitment and retention of associate degree nursing faculty. *Journal of Nursing Education*, 46(4): 190-192.

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