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Survey of Nursing Educators in Washington State Executive Summary



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Washington State faces challenges to meet the increasingly complex health care needs of its residents. Nurses are the single-largest health care occupation. Having a diverse and vital pool of nurses is foundational to meet health care needs. This is especially true for nursing faculty, who prepare nursing students for general practice and provide ongoing education essential to meet changing care needs.

According to the American Association of Colleges of Nursing, “faculty shortages at nursing schools across the country are limiting student capacity at a time when the need for professional registered nurses continues to grow.”¹ This trend affects the nursing workforce both nationally and locally, including Washington State. In seeking to better understand the nursing faculty shortage in Washington, the Washington Center for Nursing worked with the Council on Nursing Education in Washington State (CNEWS) to survey the state’s nurse faculty population. The survey was adapted from the Oregon Center for Nursing’s Nurse Faculty survey¹. The majority of responses were in March 2017 and the remainder in the first two weeks of April. Highlights of the survey findings include:

- Nursing faculty fulfill many different roles in their institutions, including teaching in laboratory (including simulation), clinical, and classroom settings. Direct teaching of students comprises 39% of faculty’s time. Engaging in research, program administration, and additional duties such as program planning, committee work for both the program and the college, student advisement, grant management, coordination of practicum placements, and community service are other major components of this role.
- Nurse educators enjoy professional satisfaction. Most survey respondents are highly satisfied or satisfied with being a nurse educator, especially when it comes to relationships with students, colleagues, management, and professional autonomy.
- However, income and workload are the top dissatisfiers among nurse educators. While there is no universal definition of *workload*, it can be described as the number of hours spent by a nurse educator to carry out his or her role. Faculty work an average of 50 hours per week when school is in session and 20 hours per week when school is not in session. Nurse faculty employment contracts are limited to when school is in session. As competition increases for nursing services across health care sectors, if noncompetitive compensation and concerns about workload continue, this will create challenges in recruiting and retaining future nurse educators. When asked what was the main reason for considering leaving nursing education within the last year, the most frequent reason was higher pay, followed by lack of a manageable workload.

¹ American Association of Colleges of Nursing. (2017). Nursing Faculty Shortage Fact Sheet. Retrieved from <http://www.aacnnursing.org/News-Information/Fact-Sheets/Nursing-Faculty-Shortage>

- Retirement was the most-frequently cited plan for actually leaving a current nursing faculty position. The age range of those responding to this survey is from 30 to 70 years old, with a median age of 55. The average age of RNs in Washington is 47. ²
- Nursing faculty lack racial and ethnic diversity. According to the 2012 US Census, ethnic minority groups make up 30.2 % of Washington State’s population.ⁱⁱ This lack of diversity among nurse faculty is a concern, given a trend we see in the demographics of the nursing student population as well as the general community which nurses serve. This highlights the importance of continuing academic progression efforts. The Washington Center for Nursing received an Academic Progression in Nursing grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation in 2012-2014 and another in 2014-2016, a major component of which was to identify strategies to increase the diversity of the nursing workforce. In most cases, the diversity of nursing students pursuing a graduate degree in nursing (ARNP 20%, MSN 19%, DNP 25%, and PhD 36%)ⁱⁱⁱ lags behind students pursuing a bachelor’s degree in nursing (29%) and those pursuing an associate’s degree in nursing (31%). Providing systems and incentives to ensure more diverse nursing students earn a baccalaureate degree in nursing earlier in their career and aspire to advanced degrees to position them as nurse educators is a key policy consideration moving forward. Washington State regulations require a minimum of a master’s degree in nursing, or a bachelor’s degree in nursing and a master’s degree in a related field, to teach registered nursing.
- Only 56.7% of faculty work solely for the educational institution and 30.57% regard their faculty role as primary but also are employed elsewhere in nursing.

Highlights of differences between community & technical college (CTC) nursing faculty and four-year university nursing faculty:

- The majority of both groups have about 27 years of teaching experience. More university faculty began practicing nursing earlier than community and technical college faculty: 29.3% between the years of 1970-1979 compared to CTC faculty at 23.3%. Community and technical colleges have more nursing faculty who began their careers between 2000 and 2017: 84.5% vs. 64.1 among four-year college and university nursing faculty.
- Community and Technical College faculty are most heavily involved in clinical teaching (80.9%) and teaching lab skills (66.7%). Four-year college and university faculty are most heavily involved in teaching non-clinical courses (68.4%), followed by clinical teaching (62.3%), and research is a close third (39.6%).

Areas of additional study

² Washington State Data Snapshot—Registered Nurses. (2016). Retrieved from <http://www.wcnursing.org/uploads/file/data-reports/2016%20SNAPSHOTS/WA%20RN%20Snapshot%202016-05-23.pdf>

- Supply surveys to begin in 2018 will provide a better picture of the current nursing workforce, including nurse educators. Two key state surveys are the WCN Registered Nurse Workforce survey in 2018, and the Nursing Commission's requirement for nurses to complete a demographic survey beginning January 2018, with analysis available in 2019.
- The highest degree earned by most nurse educators is a master's degree. If nursing students increasingly pursue doctoral degrees such as the Doctor of Nursing Practice, the faculty of the future may also need to mirror the educational attainment of students increasingly earning DNPs.
- Anecdotally, there has been a growing shift towards adjunct faculty versus permanent faculty. Permanent faculty are those responsible for curriculum, program evaluation, maintaining accreditation status, and mentoring new and part time faculty. Decreasing numbers of permanent faculty can have an adverse impact in these areas for schools of nursing.

ⁱOregon's Nurse Faculty Workforce (2014). Retrieved from http://oregoncenterfornursing.org/wp-content/uploads/OCN_Publications/OCN_Nurse_Faculty_Workforce_20141.pdf

ⁱⁱ Balk, G. (2016, June 27th). Washington State Becoming Less White – But Not Seattle. *Seattle Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/data/from-ocean-to-idaho-border-state-becoming-less-white/>

ⁱⁱⁱ Nursing Care Quality Assurance Commission. (Revised May 2017). *Nursing Education Programs, 2015-2016 Annual School Report, Statistical Summary and Trends Analysis*. Olympia, Washington: State of Washington Department of Health. Retrieved at <https://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/6000/669269.pdf>