A Canadian Solution: Research Program to Better Understand and Stimulate Nursing Recruitment and Retention In Ontario

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There is currently a shortage of registered nurses in Ontario, Canada, and many other countries in the world, including Australia, the United States, and United Kingdom (Baron & West, 2005; Forsyth & McKenzie, 2006; Nogueras, 2006; RNAO, 2005). It is anticipated that by 2015 there will be a 20% shortage of nurses; this will increase to 29% by 2020 (Andrews & Dziegielewski, 2005). The existing nursing workforce is aging. In 2006, the average age of nurses in Ontario was 46 years; 54% of nurses were over 45 years; only 18% were under 35 years (RNAO, 2007). Many of the nurses currently over 45 years of age will be planning retirement in the next 10 years. Although the Ontario government has committed to provide funding for 4,000 new first year nursing student spaces, the number of students registering in nursing programs is slowly declining, with 3,267 spaces filled in 2004 (RNAO, 2007). Compounding this shortage is the fact that attrition rates for Canadian nursing schools have been estimated to be between 20-40% (Grainger & Bolan, 2002). Even when students graduate, there is no guarantee that they will practice in Canada. Twenty-one percent of nurses that graduated between 1990 and 2000 were not registered as nurses in Canada (CNA, 2002). During the 1990’s as many as 27,000 nurses moved to the United States to seek unemployment (Industry Canada, 1999). Moreover, more nurses than ever are leaving nursing within four years of graduating (Sochalski, 2002).

Many reasons have been cited for the declining nursing workforce including few full-time positions, poor working conditions, heavy workloads, increased burnout, and significant job dissatisfaction (Albaugh, 2003; Coomber & Barriball, 2007; RNAO, 2000). Lack of interest in a nursing as a career choice among young adults has been attributed to adolescents’ negative and unrealistic perception about nursing and limited understanding of the profession and available opportunities (Hemsley-Brown & Foskett, 199; Hoke, 2006). Although much research has been conducted on understanding issues related to nursing recruitment and retention, most of it has been conducted in the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia. There are few studies examining these issues from a Canadian perspective. Moreover, many of the studies employ survey methodologies, which inherently do allow for an in-depth understanding of the issues at hand.
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The research program outlined here is designed to increasing our understanding of recruitment and retention from an Ontario-specific perspective with the ultimate goal of identifying potential strategies for promoting and increasing recruitment and retention of nurses in Ontario. Focusing primarily on qualitative research methods, this research program consists of three projects:

Part I: What do you want to be when you grow up? A survey of Ontarian high school students’ and guidance counsellors’ perceptions of the nursing profession. This study is an exploration of high school students’ and guidance counselors’ perceptions (attitudes) of the nursing profession, understanding of the nursing scope of practice and opportunities available within the profession, and their experience with the nursing profession. The ultimate goal of this project is to identify potential strategies for promoting the nursing profession to students in Ontario.

Part II: Perceptions of the Nursing School Experience: What makes students stay? What makes students leave? This study is an exploration of nursing school students’ (i.e., students enrolled in Baccalaureate nursing programs) perceptions of their nursing school experiences and in particular the factors that support their continued studies and that may contribute to attrition. The ultimate goal of this study is to identify potential strategies for retaining students in nursing programs to reduce attrition.

Part III: They have come, but will they stay? A study of retention issues and job satisfaction among working nurses. A study that will follow fourth year graduating nursing students into their first year in the workforce and a longitudinal study to follow a purposeful sample of new nurses (first year post graduation) through to 3, 5, and 7 years after graduation to obtain a greater understanding of the issues impacting retention and job satisfaction and to identify factors that may contribute to turnover and nurses intentions to leave the profession. The ultimate goal of this study is to identify potential strategies for recruiting and retaining new nurses.
Introduction

Although children start to develop their attitudes about potential career choices in early adolescence (Toepfer, 1994), they start to think about careers as early as the third grade (Trossman, 2002). The rejection of, or ruling out of, potential careers starts in adolescence as students begin to select their high school courses to support their career choices (Cohen et al., 2004) and can even occur earlier. A qualitative study of 410 middle and high school students aged 11, 15, and 17 years of age, found that 6th grade students have already rejected potential careers, including nursing (Hemsley-Brown & Foskett, 1999). In Canada, decisions about entering the nursing profession are made in high school as entrance into Baccalaureate nursing programs can occur immediately after high school. Appropriate course selection in preparation for university admission requires students to start thinking about potential careers in grade 10.

Both American and international studies of student career choices have revealed that a very small percentage (ranging from 5%-28%) of high school students consider nursing as a potential career choice (Al-Kandari et al., 2005; Al-Omar, 2004; Barkley & Kohler, 1992; Kohler & Edwards, 1990; Law & Arthur, 2003). There is evidence that inconsistencies exist between high school students’ perceptions of the ideal career and of nursing. Telephone interviews with 400 American teenagers revealed found that few teens perceived the nursing profession as having the potential to be provide them with the benefits consistent with their perceptions of an ideal career - few perceived nursing as providing happiness, a good salary, flexibility, or advancement opportunities (Erikson et al., 2005). Similarly, a study conducted with grade 10 high school students found that they wanted more appreciation, money, and power from a career than they could get from nursing (Tomey et al., 1996). Cohen and colleagues (2004) found that students aged 9 - 15 years of age perceived nursing as involving less decision making, being busier, more hands on, and paying less money than other career choices. The portrayal of nurses in the media tends to be negative and adversely impacts decisions to enter the profession (Mee, 2002). Erikson and colleagues (1999) found that 27% of adolescents who had expressed an interest in nursing, changed their minds as a result of something they had experience in the media.

Generally, adolescents’ have negative and unrealistic perceptions about nursing and have a limited understanding of profession and the opportunities available to them as nurses. Studies with American adolescents have found that they do not consider it a high status profession (Hemsley-Brown & Foskett, 1999; Hoke, 2006), do not consider it to be based on scientific knowledge or as involving problem-solving skills (Hoke, 2006), consider it to consist of mostly unappealing responsibilities, including menial, clean-up tasks
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(Erikson et al., 2005) and think that it is low paying (Stevens & Walker). A study examining the reasons that students were not interested in nursing found that students did not want to work with ill or dying individuals and they were too "squeamish" for the tasks required; boys did not choose nursing because they perceived it to be a female role (Hemsley-Brown & Foskett, 1999). Grainger and Bolan (2006) found that 28% of first year nursing school students and 41% of fourth year students were discouraged by others from entering nursing. It has been suggested that the declining interest in nursing is due to the ever expanding career opportunities for women (Staiger et al., 2001).

In general, there is evidence that high school students are largely unaware of what the nursing profession entails and the educational requirements for a nursing degree (Hemsley-Brown & Foskett, 1999). Hoke (2006) suggested that decisions to enter nursing are often based on stereotypes and idealized images rather a real understanding of the opportunities available in nursing. High school students’ interest in nursing is influenced by their parents, friends, guidance counsellors, and past experience with nurses (Grossman & Northrop, 1993; Law & Arthur, 2003). Students who know a nurse, or have experience with the nursing profession are most likely to choose it as career than those who lack this type of experience (Erikson et al., 2005; Al-Kandari et al., 2005; Al-Omar, 2004, Bumgarner et al., 2003, Rossiter et al., 1999). Although guidance counsellors are a potential source of accurate information and support for the nursing profession, there is some evidence that they too have limited understanding of the nursing scope of practice (Williams et al., 1991) as well as the attributes of potential candidates and of the academic requirements (Blasdell et al., 1999). A survey of 189 American guidance counsellors found that one-third reported that they were not well informed about nursing (Mignor, Cadenhead & McKee, 2002). Enhancing guidance counsellors knowledge of nursing as important, as a Canadian study found that 66% (of 50) guidance counsellors surveyed reported that they received between one and five requests for information about practical nursing per year (Bolan, 2000).

There is much support for targeting recruitment strategies to both elementary and high school students (Mee, 2002; Morrison & Morrison, 1992; Trossman, 2002). Efforts aimed at providing adolescents with accurate information and meaningful experiences with the nursing profession have been successful at stimulating interest in nursing as a career and increasing recruitment (Daumer & Britson, 2004; Redding et al., 2004). Many of the studies that have investigated student understanding of and perceptions of nursing have been conducted in the United States, Middle Eastern, and Asian countries (Erikson et al. 2005; Al-Kandari et al., 2005; Law & Arthur, 2003). Very little is known about what Canadian students think of nursing. Understanding the student perceptions of the nursing profession within the Ontario context will be critical to effectively promoting nursing as a career choice. It has been suggested that enrolment in nursing schools
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currently need to increase by 40% to meet projected needs for nurses (Buerhaus et al., 2002). Similarly, little is known about what guidance counsellors within the Ontario school system know and think about the nursing profession.

Research Objectives - Part A: Survey of Ontario High School Students

The purpose of this study is to explore high school students’ perceptions (attitudes) of the nursing profession, understanding of the nursing scope of practice and opportunities available within the profession, and their experience with the nursing profession. The ultimate goal of this project is to identify potential strategies for promoting the nursing profession to students in Ontario.

Key research questions:
- What do high school students in Ontario think about the nursing profession?
- What has influenced their perceptions about nursing?
- What is their understanding of the types of job opportunities available in nursing?
- Are their perceptions of nursing consistent with reality?
- What is their ideal career and how does this compare with nursing?
- What experience have they had with the nursing profession?
- What factors promote or discourage nursing as a career choice?
- What suggestions do high school students have for promoting the nursing profession in Ontario high schools.

Methods

Both qualitative and quantitative methods will be employed in this study.

Focus Group Interviews with High School Students

Focus group interviews will be conducted with 5 groups of students (6-8 students in each group) with equal gender, rural, and urban geographic representation. These interviews will explore students’ perceptions (attitudes) of the nursing profession, understanding of the nursing scope of practice, and opportunities available within the profession, and their experience with the nursing profession. These interviews will be conducted with students enrolled in high schools in Southwestern Ontario.

Survey of a Larger Sample of High School Students

The results of the interviews described above will be used to inform the development of a survey that will be distributed to a larger sample of grade 10 and grade 12 students in Ontario (attempts will be made to obtain a representative sample across the province). As
many high school students now have internet and e-mail access this survey will
distributed on-line via Survey Monkey (www.surveymonkey.com). In this survey
students will be asked to indicate the extent to which they are interested in nursing as a
career choice. Questions will be included to discern the factors that influence interest or
lack of interest in a nursing career. Grade 12 students will be asked to indicate whether
they have applied to enter nursing school and the likelihood of accepting offered
admission.

*Follow-up Individual Interviews with Those Entering Nursing School*

Students who have applied to nursing school will be invited to participate in follow-up
individual telephone interviews to gather more in-depth information about the factors that
have influenced their choice of nursing as a career and to identify potential strategies for
stimulating interest in nursing at the high school level and promoting nursing as a career
choice.

*Research Objectives - Part B: Survey of Ontario Guidance Counsellors*

The purpose of this study is to explore high school guidance counsellors’ perceptions
(attitudes) of the nursing profession, understanding of the nursing scope of practice and
opportunities available within the profession, and their experience with the nursing
profession. The ultimate goal of this project is to identify potential strategies for
promoting the nursing profession in Ontario high schools.

**Key research questions:**
- What do guidance counsellors in Ontario think about the nursing profession?
- What has influenced their perceptions about nursing?
- What is their understanding of the types of job opportunities available in nursing?
- What is their level of knowledge regarding the academic requirements for nursing
  studies?
- What personality attributes do they think are important students interested in a
career in nursing? How does this compare with other professions?
- What experience have they had with the nursing profession?
- What ways do they promote or discourage nursing as a career choice?
- What suggestions do guidance counsellors have for promoting the nursing
  profession in Ontario high schools?

**Methods**

*Focus Group Interviews with Guidance Counsellors*
A purposeful sample of high school guidance counsellors (2 groups; 6-8 participants in each) from London, Ontario and area will be surveyed about their perceptions of and knowledge of the nursing profession. The results of these interviews will be used to inform the development of a survey that will be distributed to a broader sample of guidance counsellors.

**Survey of Ontario Guidance Counsellors**

Guidance counsellors in Ontario will be invited to complete an on-line survey about their perceptions and knowledge of the nursing profession. Both closed-ended (forced choice) and open-ended questions will be asked. Information gathered in this survey will be used to inform the survey of high school students (previously described). Attempts will be made to access counsellors through the Ontario School Counsellors Association (OSCA), a professional association for guidance counsellors in Ontario. Alternatively, they will be accessed through Ontario school boards.

**Introduction**

Hope for reducing the growing shortage of nurses lies with undergraduate nursing students. However, there is global evidence of a growing attrition rate in many undergraduate programs and that not all graduating nursing students actually enter the field. In the United Kingdom attrition rates from pre-registration to graduation are about 28% and 14.3% of graduating students do not work as nurses (Gaynor et al., 2006). Similarly, in Australia, the number of graduating nursing students declined from 10,999 in 1994 to 7,794 in 2000 (Gaynor et al., 2006). In 2006, in Taiwan, 65% of final year nursing students reported that they were not planning to seek nursing employment after graduation (Lai, Peng, & Chang, 2006).

While the number of students graduating from nursing programs in Canada steadily declined in the 1990’s (from approximately 8,000 in 1994 to 4,833 in 1999), the early 2000’s saw an increase in graduates; in 2004 there were 7,983 graduates, representing an 65% increase in the number of graduates since 1999 (Canadian Nurses Association, 2004). In Ontario, the number of graduates from Baccalaureate programs has increased from 501 in 2000 to 891 in 2004 (Canadian Nurses Association and Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing, 2006). However, despite guaranteed funding for 4000 nursing school spaces in Ontario, enrolment is down: 3330 in 2003 and 3267 in 2004 (Registered Nursing Association of Ontario, 2005). It is been estimated that in 2007 3000 nursing students will graduate in Ontario; 3200 are estimated to graduate in 2008 (Canadian Nurses Association, 2002). Attrition rates for Canadian nursing schools have
been estimated to be between 20-40% (Grainger & Bolan, 2006). In 2002 it was estimated that 60% of new nursing students enrolled in nursing programs in 2001 would complete their programs (Canadian Nursing Association, 2002). In general, attrition rates in Canada are not well documented, primarily due to variability in how these rates are calculated across different institutions (Canadian Nursing Association, 2002).

Attrition in nursing school is not well understood (Gaynor, Gallasch, Yorkston, Stewart, & Turner, 2006). Some of the factors associated with attrition have been suggested including: inconsistencies between student expectations for the nursing program and career and reality (Harvey & McMurray, 1997; Brodie et al., 2004; Last & Fulbrook, 2003); change in career choice (Harvey & McMurray, 1997); stress and feeling unvalued (Last & Fulbrook, 20023); academic demands (Ehrenfeld & Tabak, 2000); lack of faculty support (Shelton, 2003); lower high school grades (Brennan, Best, & Small, 1996); English as a second language (Jalili-Grenier & Chase, 1997) and inappropriate personality characteristics for a nursing career (Adib-Hajbaghery & Dianati; 2005). In examining, the personality characteristics associated with attrition, Deary and colleagues (2003) found that students with lower conscientiousness and agreeableness scores were most likely to drop out of nursing school. Harvey and McMurray (1994), in a study in which they followed 306 nursing students for 3 years, found that students who did not complete the program had lower academic scores, lower self-efficacy related to their ability to learn the academic requirements, and were less committed to nursing than students that did complete the program. Grainger and Bolan (2006) explored student’s nursing self-concept in an attempt to understand attrition rates. In this Canadian study they found that first year students had a more idyllic view of the nursing profession than fourth year students who were less enamoured with nursing and perceived the nursing profession as less valued than first year students. Understanding nursing students’ perceptions of the profession may provide insight into attrition as inconsistencies between student orientation to nursing and their education program may be a source of dissatisfaction with nursing school (Vanhanen & Janhonen, 2000).

In general, there is much support for further research examining why students fail to complete their nursing degrees (Gaynor et al., 2006; Grainger & Bolan, 2006). In particular, there is a need for more Canadian studies, and qualitative studies examining student perceptions of their nursing school experiences and their reasons for choosing not to pursue a nursing career.

**Research Objectives: Survey of Nursing School Students**

The purpose of this study is to explore nursing school students (i.e., students enrolled in Baccalaureate nursing programs) perceptions of their nursing school experiences and in
particular to identify the factors that support their continued studies and to explore the factors that may contribute to attrition. The ultimate goal of this study is to identify potential strategies for retaining students in nursing programs to reduce attrition.

**Key research questions:**
- What are the challenges experienced by nursing students at various points in their training?
- What strategies exist to assist them to overcome their challenges?
- What supports or resources do students need to ensure their successful completion of their studies?
- What expectations do students have for their nursing careers?

**Methods**

Both qualitative and quantitative methods will be used in this study.

**Individual and Focus Group Interviews**

Individual interviews will be conducted with the high school students identified in Part I as entering nursing school and focus group interviews (5 groups, 6-8 students each) will be conducted with first year students enrolled in the School of Nursing, University of Western Ontario. These interviews will explore students’ perceptions (attitudes) of the nursing profession, understanding of the nursing scope of practice, their practice interests, and their reasons for choosing a career in nursing. For those students who participated in Part I, comparisons will be made to the responses they provided when in high school to identify changes over time in their perceptions of the nursing profession. The interviews will also explore challenges experienced, perceptions of the supports available and needed to be successful (e.g., encouragement, faculty support, mentorship availability), and factors that could potentially contribute to attrition. Potential questions for these interviews could include:
- Why did you choose nursing?
- Do you feel encouraged and supported in your studies and clinical placements?
- What expectations did you have for your clinical placements? Did your placements meet these expectations?
- Did you feel prepared for your clinical placements?
- What supports/ resources do you need to be successful?
- What factors do think contribute to student drop out in nursing programs?
- Do you feel you have a good understanding of the potential scope of the nursing practice?
- What are your practice interests?
Longitudinal Survey Study of a Larger Sample of Nursing Students

The results of interviews described above will inform the development of a survey that will be distributed to a larger sample of first year nursing students enrolled in nursing programs across the province. To access a large sample efficiently, this survey will be distributed on-line via Survey Monkey (www.surveymonkey.com). This survey will explore further the issues arising from the individual and focus group interviews. Students will be asked to indicate whether they have considered (or are planning) to leave the program and the factors contributing to this. Demographic information gathered will include age, gender, education to date (other degrees obtained), and work experience in health care and nursing. Students will be surveyed again, using a similar survey, in their second and third year of nursing.

Follow-up Interviews with Students Who Withdraw from the Nursing Program

Students who participate in this project will be followed after their first year to identify students who withdraw from the nursing program. These students will be invited to participate in a follow-up individual interview to identify the factors that contribute to their withdrawal from the program and to identify potential factors or strategies (supports/ resources) that would have encouraged them to remain in the program.

Focus Group Interviews with Nursing Program Faculty

Focus group interviews will be conducted with faculty from four purposefully selected universities in Ontario (geographic representation from the North, south, east and west areas of the province; 4 group interviews, 6-8 individual each). The purpose of these interviews is to identify from their perspective the challenges experienced by first year nursing students, the supports available and needed to be successful (e.g., encouragement, faculty support, mentorship availability), factors that contribute to attrition, and to identify strategies to reduce attrition. Issues raised in these interviews will be explored further with students who receive the above described survey in their second year of nursing school.

Introduction

Although increasing the number of graduating nurses is an important strategy for resolving the nursing shortage, it alone will not guarantee an increased nursing workforce. It is not guaranteed that graduating nurses will actually seek employment in
the profession and continue work in the profession over time. Sochalski (2002) note that more nurses than ever are leaving nursing within four years of graduating. In Canada, it has estimated that 79% of nurses graduating between 1990 and 2000 were registered as nurses in 2001, indicating that as many as 17,000 graduate nurses did not seek employment as nurses in Canada (Canadian Nursing Association, 2002). It is not clear how many of these nurses may have left the profession altogether. It is possible that many of these nurses may be practicing in foreign countries. During the 1990’s as many as 27,000 nurses moved to the United States to seek employment (Industry Canada, 1999). This migration of nurses has been attributed to the lack of full-time nursing jobs available in Canada that resulted from fiscal restraint and restructuring of the health care system (Little, 2007). While there are nurses immigrating to Canada to seek employment, these nurses tend to older and have a low number of years of potential service. It has been suggested that strategies and policies need to be developed to retain graduating nurses in the profession and in Canada (Little, 2007). The graduate nurse turnover rate has been estimated to be as high as 61% (Casey et al., 2004). It has been suggested that graduate nurses who survive their first few years in the workforce will most likely remain in the profession in the longer term (Barron & West, 2005).

A survey study following nurses at the time of graduation, and then at 3, 6, and 12 months following graduation found that nurses experience significant stress as they transition from an academic setting to the workforce (Casey et al., 2004). Within the first year of employment, these nurses struggled with feelings of inadequacy, low comfort and confidence in their nursing role. Identified work issues included their perceived dependence on others while wanting to practice independently, lack of experience communicating with physicians, and perceptions of being overwhelmed by the work. It took at least one year for graduate nurses to begin to feel comfortable and confident in their role as a nurse; between 6-12 months post graduation was the most difficult time for work adjustment. Another study that followed nurses for 15 months post graduation (Maben, Latter, & Clark, 2005) found that as students they had a clear set of ideals and values for their practice, but that these were sabotaged by organizational factors such as lack of support, reduced power/autonomy, and poor nursing role models. The investigators suggested that the inconsistency between what student nurses are taught and how they eventually practice nursing may impact job satisfaction and retention. These findings highlight the need to develop strategies to support graduating nurses as they transition to the workforce. A mentorship program developed to facilitation transition to the workforce identified the potential for this type of strategy to provide new nurses with guidance and support and to facilitate stress reduction, though this is dependent upon adequate time and opportunity to establish and maintain mentorship relationships (Beecroft et al., 2006). Research examining differences in career expectations between nurses who are baby boomers (born between 1943-1960) and Generation Xers (born between 1963 and 1977) suggests that there are generational differences in what nurses
expect from careers and these expectations need to be taken into account when developing strategies to retain younger nurses (Cordeniz, 2002). As an example, there are generational differences in motivators, de-motivators and workplace ideals - Generation Xers tend are more loyal to their own needs, demand more training, and seek greater quality of life in their personal lives than baby boomers.

Job dissatisfaction is commonly identified as a key factor responsible for turnover rates and departure from the nursing profession. Hart (2001) found that 55% of nurses who were thinking about leaving nursing expressed low satisfaction with their jobs. In an international study looking at job satisfaction among nurses, 33% of nurses from Canadian hospitals expressed low job satisfaction (Aiken et al., 2001). Mercer (1999), in a study that identified significant nursing dissatisfaction, found that 54% of nurses would not recommend the nursing profession to others.

There is much research examining nursing job satisfaction (Aiken et al., 2001; Albaugh, 2003; Bartram, Joiner, & Stanton, 2004; Coomber & Barriball, 2007; Forsyth & McKenzie, 2006; Lu, While, & Barriball, 2005; Melnyk, 2006; Newman & Maylor, 2002; Price, 2002; Ruggiero, 2005). Dissatisfaction with the nursing role has been associated with job stress (Bartram et al., 2004; Coomber & Barriball, 2007); leadership issues (Coomber & Barriball, 2007), including conflicting expectations between nurses and managers (Forsyth & McKenzie, 2006), workplace violence (Jackson, Clare, & Mannix, 2002), and low nursing to high patient ratios (Aiken et al, 2002). Although, there is some evidence that job dissatisfaction is related to poor financial compensation (McFarland, Leonard, & Morris, 1984; Swansburg, 1990), results from other studies are inconsistent (Coomber & Barriball, 2007). A Canadian study (Irvine & Evans, 1995, as cited in Andrews & D,) found that the relationship between salary and turnover rate was weak; environmental conditions were the main reasons for staff turnover. Many of these issues associated with job dissatisfaction are longstanding. In 1984, McFarland and colleagues found that nurses were dissatisfied with: lack of involvement in policy and decision-making, problems with supervisors, poor working conditions, inadequate salary and lack of job security.

Many studies have identified job stress as a significant source of job dissatisfaction (Bartram et al., 2004; Chang et al., 2005; Coomber & Barriball, 2007; Swansburg, 1990). Job stress has been associated with shift work, family-work balance, inadequate resources and feelings of low job status (Bartram et al., 2004); mandatory overtime, unrealistic workloads, lack of recognition and respect, and increased paper work (Maryland Nursing Association, 2001), and high workload (Bartram et al., 2004; Chang et al, 2005).

Most studies examining nursing job satisfaction and retention are conducted in the United States, United Kingdom, and Australian; there are few Canadian studies. Similarly, most
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Studies focus on nurses working in the acute care sector; few include nurses working in other health sectors (long-term care, community). Cameron and colleagues (2004), in a survey study with 1,248 Canadian nurses working in acute care and community settings, found that, in general, community nurses were more satisfied with their jobs than hospital-based nurse, though they were dissatisfied with their financial compensation. Nurses working in hospital and community settings perceived low levels of organizational support in their work though those in hospital settings perceived lower levels of support and autonomy than their community counterparts. In another Canadian study, Baumann and colleagues (2001) described a healthy nursing work environment as including supervisor and co-worker support, autonomy, reasonable work demands and flexible scheduling. Consistent with this, another Canadian study (Tourangeau & Cranley, 2006) found that intentions to stay in the nursing profession were associated with workplace cohesion and collaborations; other predictors of intentions to remain in the profession included older age, job satisfaction, years of employment in current workplace and personal characteristics.

Although previous research had identified some factors associated with nursing turnover and leaving the profession, it is not clear whether these factors are relevant for the Canadian context, whether they are relevant across all health care sectors, and how they develop over time. In general, there is support for greater understanding of the factors that impact job satisfaction, job stress, turnover, and attrition in order to develop strategies to support recruitment and increase retention of nurses (Coomber & Barriball, 2007; Little, 2007; Lu et al., 2005). Although strategies to retain nurses have been identified in the literature (Casey et al., 2004; Buchan, 2002; Newman & Mayor, 2002; Ulrich, 2003; Upenieks, 2005), further research is needed to explore various strategies within the Canadian context. Most of the research that has been conducted on nursing job satisfaction and retention has used a survey methodology; qualitative methods are needed to acquire a more in-depth understanding of the issues impacting recruitment and retention of nurses.

Research Objectives: Qualitative Survey of Graduating Nursing Students

The purpose of this study is follow fourth year graduating nursing students into their first year in the workforce and to follow a purposeful sample of new nurses (first year post graduation) through to 3, 5, and 7 years after graduation to obtain a greater understanding of the issues impacting retention and job satisfaction and to identify factors that may contribute to turnover and nurses intentions to leave the profession. The ultimate goal of this study is to identify potential strategies for recruiting and retaining new nurses.

Key research questions:

- What expectations/objectives do graduating nurses have for their nursing careers?
What motivates, excites and inspires them as they anticipate their future nursing practice?

- Are these expectations/objectives realized as graduating nurses select their first nursing positions? What factors contribute to the realization of their expectations/objectives?

- Do graduating nurses alter their expectations/objectives over time? In what ways do their expectations/objectives change? What factors contribute to these changes?

- What supports or resources do graduating nurses need to ensure job satisfaction and retention? What supports or resources are needed as nurses progress through their careers?

- What are some of the sources of dissatisfaction with their jobs, workplace, or career choice?

- What strategies do nurses intend to engage in to manage their dissatisfaction as they progress through their careers? Do any nurses have intentions to leave their jobs or the profession? What factors are associated with these intentions?

Methods

Both quantitative and qualitative methods will be used in this study.

Individual Interviews with Graduating Nurses

Nursing students will be interviewed in their final (graduating) year and again at the end of their first year in practice to learn more about the expectations that new nurses have for their nursing careers and first jobs as nurses and to identify potential strategies to facilitate and support their transition into the workplace. Students will be recruited from nursing schools across the province. Individuals interviews can be conducted in person (if there are enough students per site to warrant travel costs) or via telephone.

Individual and Focus Group Interviews

A purposeful sample of nurses working in their first year in the profession will be recruited and followed at 3, 5, and 7 years post graduation. These nurses will be recruited from Southwestern Ontario and will be representative of rural/urban locations, and acute care, long-term care and community health sectors. To maximize response rate and retention of research participants, they will be compensated for their participation and when possible, breakfast or lunch will be provided during focus group interviews. Demographic information obtained from this sample will include employment status (full/part-time, casual, parental/disability leave), change in employment, and change in
marital status.

Survey of Job Satisfaction

All of the nurses participating in this study (individual and focus group interviews) will complete a survey assessing job satisfaction. Many studies examining nurses job satisfaction use generic job satisfaction surveys; this study will use a job satisfaction survey specific to nursing. This survey measures satisfaction (using a 5-point Likert scale) with 20 facets of nursing practice (Murrells, Clinton, & Robinson, 2005). Although relatively new, preliminary research indicates that this survey is a reliable and valid tool for measuring nursing job satisfaction in a variety of health care settings.

Timeline

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<td>Focus group interviews with 1st year nursing students</td>
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<td>Survey of first year nursing students</td>
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<td>Follow-up survey with nursing students (2nd year)</td>
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<td>Follow-up survey with nursing students (3rd year)</td>
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<td>Follow-up interviews with students who drop out</td>
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<td>Survey of nursing school faculty</td>
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<td>Individual interviews with graduating students</td>
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<td>Follow-up with graduating students in their first year</td>
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working year

- Job satisfaction survey

Longitudinal study: Focus group/individual interviews with new nurses:
- First working year
- Third working year
- Fifth working year
- Seventh working year
- Job satisfaction survey

Reference List


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