THE OREGON NURSE RETENTION PROJECT:

Final Report to the Northwest Health Foundation

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Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

Overview

The growing demand for healthcare creates a climate in which nurse retention has become a critical strategic priority for hospitals and represents a continued concern for the nursing profession. Research can help identify and prioritize key influences on nurses' turnover and increase understanding of how nurses' working conditions influence retention outcomes. Therefore, the Oregon Nurse Retention Project (ONRP) addressed three important research needs.

o **Research Need #1:** *Nurse retention research needs to describe* <u>both</u> *the critical stressors and positive work experiences that influence nurses' retention.*

o **Research Need #2:** *Nurse retention research needs an empirically-supported model linking positive and negative work experiences to retention outcomes.*

o **Research Need #3:** *Nurse retention research needs to address nurses' perspectives on what interventions would affect their positive and negative work experiences.*

Design and Methods

The ONRP involved collaboration between the Oregon Nurses Association and the Portland State University Department of Psychology (the Principal Investigator moved to Clemson during the project). The research consisted of a series of survey studies involving qualitative and quantitative assessments. At baseline, 428 nurses completed a survey assessing critical turnover pathways and hospital and nurse characteristics expected to influence retention. Then, a subset of 114 nurses completed up to 12 weeks of a weekly work experience survey in which they completed quantitative assessments of their work experiences, provided qualitative descriptions of significant positive and negative experiences, and suggested interventions to improve the quality of their work life. Finally, 343 participants completed a follow-up survey in which we assessed several retention and occupational health outcomes.

Findings

Aim #1. Describing critical stressors and positive work experiences.

We distinguished four general categories of work experiences: *successes* (positive experiences related to task accomplishment), *supports* (positive interactions with coworkers and patients), *demands* (negative events related to task performance) and *conflicts* (negative interactions with coworkers and patients). We investigated the nature of these events in two studies, one using quantitative data from the nurses' responses to the Wave 1 survey data, the other using qualitative data from the weekly work experience survey.

Analyses of the Wave 1 survey data revealed that nurses experienced more successes and supports than demands and conflicts, but there was a wide range of variability between nurses in their experiences. Nearly all of the most frequently experienced negative events dealt with insufficient staffing or performance constraints. The most frequently experienced positive events concerned positive interactions with nurse colleagues (e.g., working well as a team, supporting colleagues).

In the weekly work experience survey, nurses described the most stressful and most positive events they experienced each week. The most positive events reflecting successes fell into three broad categories: events related to professional development (e.g., learning new skills), programs and processes (e.g., organizational systems working smoothly), and opportunities to make a difference in the lives of others (saving lives, relieving pain, etc.). The most

positive supports included receiving support from coworkers, helping others, and feeling appreciated by patients.

Regarding the most negative events, we found four broad categories of work demands. These included work role demands (e.g., a lack of role clarity), difficult patients/families, resource constraints, and staffing demands (e.g., insufficient staff). The most negative conflicts fell into three categories, depending on the source of the conflict. They included conflict with coworkers, conflict with physicians, and conflict with other hospital staff.

Aim #2. Testing a new model of nurse retention.

We proposed the Oregon Nurse Retention Model (ONRM) as a model for understanding nurse turnover and retention. Extensive analyses supported several aspects of the ONRM. Nurses' who experienced more successes and supports also experienced more job engagement and subsequently, stronger organizational commitment. Nurses' experiences of demands and conflicts were associated with higher levels of burnout, but burnout was not related to commitment. Nurses who experienced more job demands also reported less engagement. We also showed that both the personal and organizational context influence the key components of the ONRM. These findings indicate that to promote retention, hospitals should seek ways to create positive experiences for nurses, not just to remove stressors.

Aim #3. Identifying workplace interventions.

Nurses who participated in the weekly work experience survey study provided narrative descriptions of their most stressful and most positive work experiences during each week of the study. They also provided recommendations for workplace changes that would increase the likelihood of the positive experiences and decrease the likelihood of the negative experiences. Working from lists of 180 of the most stressful and 180 of the most positive work experiences, we identified several broad categories of recommended interventions as described by the nurses. Table ES-1 summarizes this list of interventions.

Table ES-1. Nurses' proposed interventions.

Category	Examples
Promote the value of nursing	Encourage physicians to value nurses Increase awareness of nurses' contributions
Develop/enforce polices, laws, and rules	Define and respond to improper conduct Follow existing rules, policies, laws
Clarify role responsibilities	Performance evaluations with follow-up Increase accountability
Increase nurse participation	Participative decision making Increase voice
Improve communication systems and skills	Across shifts Across units/levels
Provide training/development	Interpersonal skills, communication skills Professional development programs
Improve staffing management	More staff; better staff mix Increased staff during changes
Remove performance constraints	Quality and quantity of equipment and supplies Computer technology issues
Reward good practices	Provide positive feedback Recognition programs
Do nothing	Good events: no changes are needed Bad events: nothing to be done other than to quit

Deliverables, Reports, and Presentations

We created a website www.onrp.webnode.com to disseminate the results of the research to the larger nursing community. We also plan to work with ONA to create additional reports that summarize the research for study participants, describe the research for other Oregon nurses, and provide recommendations to hospital management based on our findings. To date, our scholarly products include 12 conference presentations, 3 Masters Thesis research projects, one additional grant funded, and multiple journal articles in various stages of completion. The Principal Investigator also will give a keynote address at an international conference on Organizational Psychology and health care in Portugal this fall; this talk will focus on ONRP research related to positive events in nursing.

Conclusions and Directions

Two recurrent themes unite most of the findings in this report. First, our findings highlight the importance of positive work experiences. Positive experiences contribute to nurses' occupational health and retention outcomes above and beyond negative experiences. In fact, among nurses who completed the entire study, positive experiences were more strongly related to organizational commitment and turnover intentions. The benefits of positive work experiences stemmed from their effects on nurses' work engagement. Of course, negative experiences may be important for other outcomes that we did not investigate, such as nurses' health and well-being or patient safety.

Second, and equally important, the stories told to us by our participants and the data participants provided to our questionnaires, both highlight the occupational stressors that create challenges for nurses. Nursing work is demanding under optimal circumstances, but the challenges of nursing work can be compounded when nurses lack important material or human resources. Participants made many recommendations about how to solve some of their recurrent challenges and we hope this report encourages decision makers to renew their efforts to improve working conditions in nursing care.

We plan to pursue three research directions based on our findings from this study. First, our findings suggest the value of internet-based stress management interventions that ask nurses to write about their work experiences. For example, we found that nurses who completed at least 8 weeks of the weekly surveys reported greater benefits from participating in this research program. Second, we hope to conduct additional studies addressing nurses' perspectives on which interventions would be most useful. Our findings provide an initial list of possibilities we would like to examine in future research. Third, we will pursue several streams of research that emerged as over the course of this project. Two examples of these research streams are studies of aging workers and interpersonal conflict in the workplace. All of these directions are quite exciting and none would have been possible without the support of the Northwest Health Foundation.

Parting Comments

We felt it would be appropriate to end by sharing some of the positive comments about the study from nurses who completed the weekly surveys.

o *It felt therapeutic to me. I felt valued for my opinions. I look forward to hearing results and how they will be utilized.*

o *If this study can help managers to realize the importance of adequate staffing it will be more then worthwhile. Thanks.*

o *"I just want to say that I've been telling other nurses about this survey, and explaining the questions you ask. They are all fascinated, several wish they could join. And I've realized that processing interactions through this survey has / been changing how I interact with people when there are conflicts and bad feelings. I am much more likely to go out of my comfort zone and approach people to resolve problems right away. Also have had a lot of insights both into what I can do to make things better and what organization can do. So thank you so much. This is a great / process. Very well-thought out questions."*

o *It was a great study that gave me insight into my own misery. I look forward to seeing some of the results (hopefully) in the future, to see how similar my experiences and dissatisfaction were.*

o *I really hope that the study helps the profession retain good nurses; these paragons help us all.*

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