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The American Epidemic: The U.S. Nursing Shortage and Turnover Problem

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: *Nursing shortages have been on the rise throughout the country which has continued to become a problem due to an aging baby-boomer population causing increased turnover through the United States (U.S.). With this need for nurses expected to rise, determining the root causes of this problem are essential for health care providers as costs continue to grow.*

Methods: *The methodology for the qualitative study was a literature research review of case studies as well as a semi-structured interview. Five electronic databases were minded. Thirty-six articles were utilized in this study.*

Results: *Through the use of a conceptual framework the root problems of the nursing shortage and what leads to nursing turnover were evaluated. These studies were based on; aging of nurses, patient demographics, insufficient staffing, a lack of experience, nursing schools, and salary problems to be potential links to increased turnover and overall shortages within the U.S.*

Discussion/Conclusion: *Evaluation of these study problems determined a positive correlation towards both the nursing shortage and to turnover of nurses in health care organizations. These issues established that negative job satisfaction leads to turnover, which leads to the overall nursing shortage problem facing the U.S.*

Key Words: Nursing Turnover, Nursing Shortage, Healthcare Turnover, Job Satisfaction, Nurse Retention, Shortage

INTRODUCTION

In 2012, The Bureau of Labor and Statistics released their findings for projected employment growth between 2010 and 2020. This report shows that the expected need for Registered Nurses (RN's) will rise from 2,737,400 to 3,449,300, which is an increase of 26% (Bureau of Labor Statistics , 2012a). This increase in the need for RN's can be attributed to the rise in the baby-boomer population. With the recent surge of citizens of "baby-boomers" turning 65 at a rate of almost 10,000 persons a day which total 79 million people or 26% of the total population it has become very apparent for the amplified need in RN's to facilitate this ever growing need by this demographic (Barry, 2011). In 2008, the American Health Care Association (AHCA) released results from its study completed in 2007 that 110,000 direct-care staff positions were vacant which was at the time one in six of registered nursing positions but qualified skilled candidates were not available to fulfill the required need (AHCA, 2008). The ACHA also reported that this need to fulfill this empty positions will continue to rise and the amount of vacancies present will also continue to increase which by 2025, the shortage of RN's

will rise to over 260,000, which would be twice as many as the United States (US) experienced in the 1960's (AHCA, 2008, Rosseter, 2012;).

Turnover is defined as the movement of employees from being hired to leaving the current position voluntarily and not staying with the organization (Reference.com, 2013). The increase of turnover has been associated with avoidable turnover, which is the result of the organizations inability to keep the employee in the organization, which has been estimated to be at a rate of 64% compared to 36% of turnover considered to be unavoidable due to marriage, pregnancy, and other life events (Booyens, 2007). Several factors have been given to explain the cause of the nursing turnover and lack of available skilled nurses within the U.S.; job dissatisfaction, RN age increases, demographic changes in patients, insufficient staffing, recent turnover, and supervisor control have been the major links to this continuing problem that is occurring within the healthcare industry involving nursing staff (Rosseter, 2012; Strachota, Normandin, O'Brien, Clary, & Krukow, 2003). Having such high turnover has been a growing problem for healthcare providers and is causing increased expenses and draining financial assests for every open position within a facility, with an estimated \$10,000 to \$60,000 cost per vacancy depending on the specificity of the nursing position (Cleary & Rice, 2005). Over 80% of the total expense comes from the vacancy within the staff and the lost productivity by the organization to cover the duties of the missing employee (Strachota, et al., 2003).

To compound the sistuation of nursing turnover; the inability to educate nurses is another factor in the lack of available nurses. In 2009, 21% of people would consider becoming an RN as their career profession with only one in ten males viewing it as a possible career choice and in 2006, nursing schools denied 41,683 applications into bachelorate degree nursing programs with the major reason cited as lack of faculty being the issue at 74% (Fox & Abrahamson, 2009).

Research Purpose

The primary purpose of this research was to determine the root problems of nursing turnover and, to assess what factors are driving the nursing shortage issue facing the U.S.

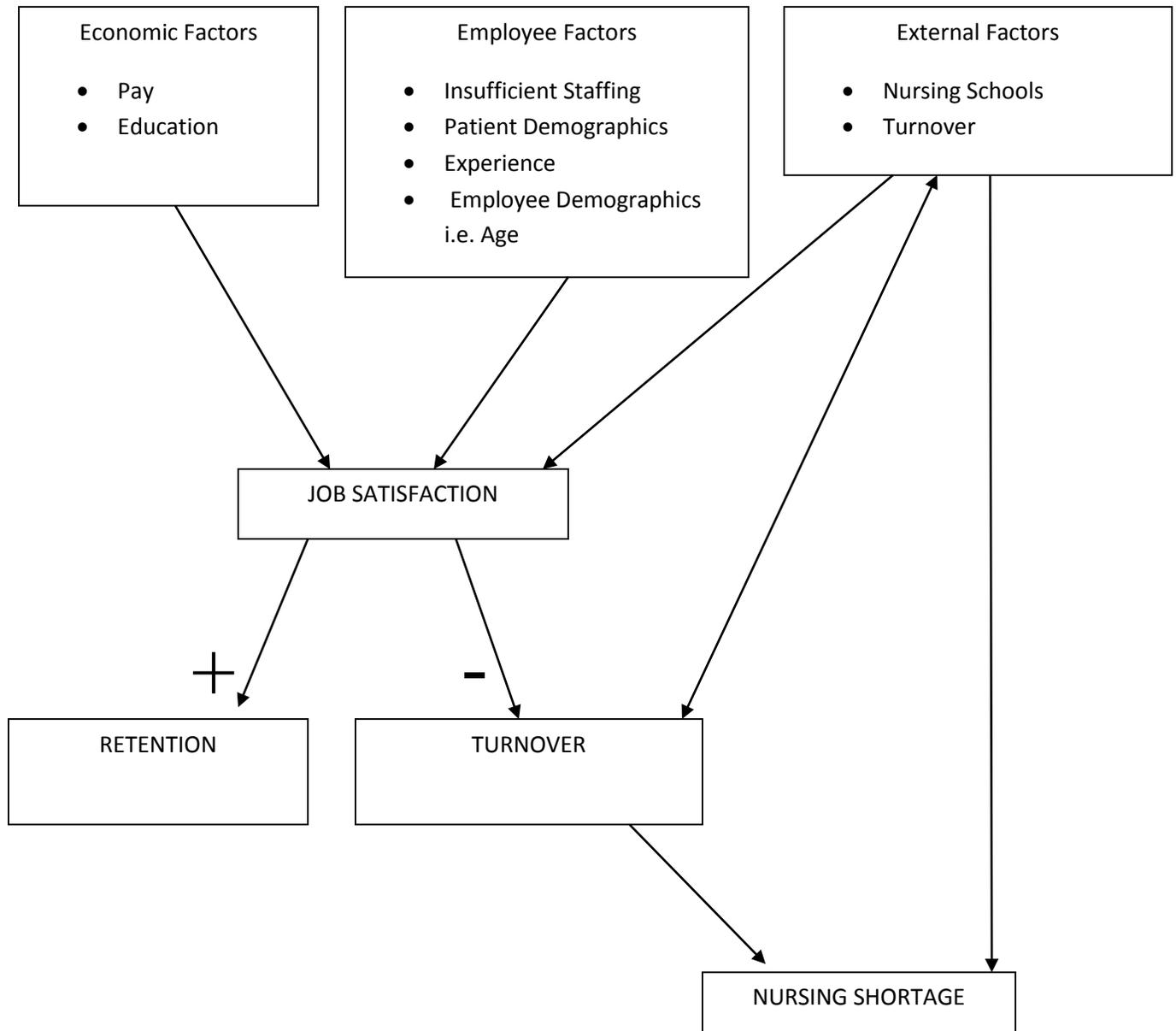
METHODOLOGY

The primary hypothesis of this research was: the nursing shortage problem is growing due to high turnover and low levels or nursing school graduates. A secondary hypothesis was: dissatisfaction in the workplace is leading to greater turnover by nurses currently in the field.

The methodology for this study was a literature review. The electronic databases of PubMed, EBSCOhost, Academic Search Premier, ProQuest, and Google Scholar were searched for the terms 'nursing turnover' or 'nursing shortage' or 'healthcare turnover' and 'job satisfaction' or 'nurse retention' or 'shortage.' Reputable websites of the American Association of Colleges of Nursing, the American Medical Association, the American Health Care Association, and the Center for Disease Control were also mined. The search was limited to articles published between 2000 and 2013 in the English language. Original articles, reviews and research studies including primary and secondary data were included. Relevant articles were selected after review of the abstracts was preformed. Thirty six resources were selected for this research. The literature search was conducted by PC and validated by AC. Further, a semi-structured interview with expert human resources professional whom well versed in issues facing

nurses and employment of nursing professionals being the Vice President of Human Resources (HR) for a 1200 bed facility in the Mayo Clinic Care Network. This professional will be referred to as Expert in HR throughout the review (Appendix A). This interview was recorded and only pertinent information was used for this literature review. A conceptual framework was adapted from Coomber and Barriball (2007).

Figure 1: Driving Factors that Lead to Nursing Turnover and the Nursing Shortage: Conceptual Framework



Source: Adapted from (Coomber & Barriball, 2007)

Figure 1 depicts three major factor categories that lead to job satisfaction, which is either positive or negative leading to retention or turnover of the nursing staff. External factors and

negative job satisfaction leading to turnover are the drivers of the nursing shortage issue facing the U.S.

RESULTS

Aging Nurses

The average age for nursing staff is growing at an increased rate. In 2004 the average age was 46.8 years old and grew to 47 years of age in 2008 (Buerhaus, Staiger & Auerbach, 2008). As providers are starting to age, those over the age of 50 make up 44.7% of the total healthcare staff population in 2008 which has rose from just 33% in the year 2000 and average almost 43.7 hours of work per week (U.S. DHHS, 2010). Higher percentages of nurse professionals who are ageing primarily those over the age of 50 work in nursing homes, academic education programs, and the home health setting; and are more likely to stay with their same employer from year to year as compared to the younger generation of nurses which are more likely to move to different settings as providers age (U.S. DHHS, 2010).

Several issues that arise with an aging workforce is the increase the retirement of these well skilled nurses. Chronic pain, tiredness, exhaustion have been identified as major stressors to this aging staff who have been dealing with increasing pressure due to high work demands and nursing shortages (Gabrielle, Jackson, & Mannix, 2007). In 2009, the cost of losing nurses especially those from the ageing population with their expereince in the field cost the healthcare organizations between 1.2 and 1.3 times the annual yearly salary or about or 5% of the total budget of healthcare providers (Palumbo, McIntosh, Rambur, & Naud, 2009). The combination of these stressors and increase in ageing suggest in the increased need for older nurses in the workplace, and require managerial recognition and to change the delivery to fit the health needs of its ageing nursing population (Gabrielle, et al., 2007).

Patient Demographics

As the population of the U.S. and the baby-boomers generation reaches 60 years and older, the ratio of nurses to the elderly population is decreasing by an average of 40% between 2010 and 2020 due to the increased age of the U.S. population and the nursing population decreased due to high rates of turnover (University of Illinois College of Nursing, 2001). The ratio of baby boomers aging from 50 to 65 to a population age of 85 and older decreased from 11 to 1 in 1996 to an estimated 4 to 1 by 2050 (Stone & Wiener, 2001). With the changing population, and a majority of the population turning 60 by 2020 changes will have to occur in order to affectively aid and help the new demographic in the U.S. that will have more long-term conditions that ever before (Kinnair, 2012). The long term conditions such as dementia care, requires specilized training and has been often left out of general nursing education, which requires the need for continual practice which after nurses receive it, is difficult for healthcare providers to keep such trained employees due to the salary requirements (Kinnair, 2012).

The recent recession affecting the U.S. over the past five years has temporarily slowed down retirement by nursing professionals, but in 2010 it was expected that 14.2% of nurses were planing to retire (Healthcare Association of New York State, 2010). With the new current national healthcare reform known as 'ObamaCare' will create greater access to healthcare services from the ageing population and those over the age of 60, which will cause inceased need

for nurses to provide more treatment to this demographic of patients (Healthcare Association of New York State, 2010).

Insufficient Staffing

Due to the decreased staffing of nurses, because of high turnover of nurses and retirement, it is becoming more difficult for current active nurses to affectively provide quality patient care to their patients. If nurses are required to service more patients due to a lack of staffed nurses it has been shown to increase infection rates in hospitals (Cimiotti, Aiken, Sloane, & Wu, 2012). With decreases in disease control, due to insufficient staffing within hospitals, the inability for patients to receive proper treatment are continuing to become more difficult as exposure to infections diseases have been increased between 50% up to 200% due to possible needlestick injuries and near-misses, which occur an estimated 400,000 to 600,000 times annually nationwide, due to amplified fatigue because of an increased patient load (Stone, Clarke, Cimiotti, & Correa-de-Araujo, 2004). In addition, 88% of nurses have reported safety concerns with 75% observing a decrease in patient care due to work stress, overworking, and concerns about health with over 60% fearing back injuries, and 45% fearing HIV or hepatitis due to needlesticks (Stone, et al., 2004). Also it has been found that workgroup learning was lower with hospitals where turnover rates were between 3.3% and 4.5% compared to hospitals with 0% turnover as an organization (Bae, Mark, & Fried, 2009).

In 2005, it was found that 75% of nurses believed that the nursing shortage presented a major problem for the quality of life and a quality work life, due to an increased amount of time spent with an increased patient load because of the high turnover and retirement of ageing nurses (Buerhaus, Donelan, Ulrich, Desroches, & Dittus, 2007). The nurses surveyed about the increasing shortage of nurses available to serve patients 98% stated an increased stress on their nursing career, 93% an impending lowering of quality care towards patients, and 93% mentioned it as a reason to leave the profession (Buerhaus, et al., 2007). It has been estimated that the need for nurses will rise from the year 2000 nursing staff requirements to between 500,000 to 800,000 by the year 2020 with an additional to many nurses retiring due to age (Aiken, 2005). Due to increased patient load due to low staffing, for each patient that is added to the nurses current high workload, nursing burnout rised by 23% and job dissatisfaction rised by 15% for each nurse on staff which led to increased turnover of nursing staff (Aiken, 2005).

In 2007, it was found that 13% of newly licensed nurses after the first year of working had left their original job and over 37% felt a strong desire to change jobs due to long hours, overworking, stressful situations, and understaffing (Kovner, et al., 2007). Also in 2005, the average RN turnover rate was 13.9% , and a 16.1% vacancy rate in hospitals which an average cost-per-hire totalling \$2,821 per nurse (Bernard Hodes Group, 2005).

Lack of Experience

While many nurses positions are open the inability for healthcare providers to hire qualified nurses has become a growing issue. The major job requirement that has withheld many potential applicants to apply for open nurses positions are the words, “No New Graduates” (Kurtz, 2013). Due to the recession healthcare organizations are seeking nurses who are much higher qualified than previous since there are fewer nurses who have the years of expereined desired by the healthcare organizations, because these organzations no not want to spend the

additional funds to train new nurses (Staiger, Auerbach, & Buerhaus, 2012). In 2011 36% of new nurses who have graduated were still unemployed four months after they have graduated; as 80% of healthcare organizations were hiring nurses with experience instead of new graduates (Jannetti, 2011). This problem has been even higher in California with 47% of all new graduates within the state with a nursing degree are unemployed as 51% of nurses who were working part-time now working in full-time positions (Jannetti, 2011).

Nursing School

It has been reported that by 2020, 3.4 million nurses will be required from the current level of 2.7 million in 2010; almost 764,000 of these positions will be Certified Nurse Assistants (CNA), (Bureau of Labor, 2012b). This high number of CNAs could be a direct result of the lack of graduate nursing programs, with graduate nursing programs turning away 37,412 qualified applicants in 2004 (Siela, Twibell, & Keller, 2008).

With over 32 million more American's gaining access to healthcare due to the 'ObamaCare' provisions, an increase of 5.1% enrollment in entry-level nursing school programs in 2011 was not sufficient to meet the upcoming demands that are facing the healthcare industry with over 50,000 new graduates leaving nursing school only 24% of those graduating had job offerings upon the time of graduation (Jannetti, 2011). The goals established by the Institute of Medicine in 2011, has called for over 80% of the nursing workforce to hold baccalaureate level degrees by 2020 will not be achieved due to the driving need for specialized care of the new patient demographics (American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2011). The major driver causing a shortage of nurses has been the inability for nursing schools to accept all those qualified for entrance into nursing school with over 78,587 applicants turned away from nursing schools in 2011; due to insufficient faculty and budget constraints being the biggest two factors (American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2011).

In 2002 it was shown that was a 12% lacking of nursing educators needed to fulfil the requirements due to unfilled faculty positions, retirement, and the lack of preparedness of students applying for entry-level nursing education programs (Southern Regional Education Board, 2002). The inability for nursing schools to accept new students into their nursing programs has made it extremely difficult and with nursing schools reaching capacity each term and even accepting more than the schools can hold, in 2004 nursing schools in the state of New Jersey were over capacity by 42% which denied 1,621 qualified applicants into the programs throughout the state, makes it difficult on staff to properly education their students (New Jersey Collaborating Center of Nursing, 2004).

Salaries

During the 1980's and early 1990's nurse salaries were rising on an average of 3% each year but since 1997 a drop of 17% (Peterson, 2001). Basic nurse salaries average \$60,700 with the lowest 10% averaging \$40,000 and the highest 10% averaging \$83,400; yet most of the providers who are compensated in the higher 10% are in management positions (Online Nursing Degrees, 2013). Since 2000, those providers who are working for unionized hospitals have been able to negotiate a 3%-5% increase in wages (Peterson, 2001). However in 2002, it was found in the state of New York 45% of nurses viewed the primary reason for dissatisfaction was salaries and compensation (Online Nursing Degrees, 2013).

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research was to examine the root problems of nursing turnover and to assess the factors driving facing the nursing shortage within the U.S. The results of the literature review and the conformation of data in real world applications with an expert in the field demonstrated that the nursing turnover problem and the nursing shortage within the U.S. is multi-faceted.

With the factors an aging nursing population seeing an increase in retirement by nurses will only increase, the changing demographics of the U.S. population; specifically the “baby-boomer” population reaching retirement ages and require inceases in need for the healthcare system, insufficient staffing has lead to higher stress and greater workloads. The Expert in HR specifically expressed that often nurses describe the need to more nurses to ease the patient workload and relieve the strains of the day to day work within the healthcare system. As healthcare organizations try to face the issues facing nurses such as insufficient staffing and the lack of experience of the nurses that are desired by the organizations, the costs of hiring and retaining nurses lead to both issues. To change these problems costs need to be reduced and more training needs to be available to those nurses who seek more education and to reach the qualification levels desired by hospitals. When nurses are able to have the levels of education and experience needed to provide proper care to patients it will be almost impossible for healthcare organizations to hire nurses and paid them according the levels appropriate for the position (Expert in HR, 2013).

Possible solutions to many of the problems have arisen from increased education, fellowship programs similar to those for doctors, monetary incentives by healthcare organizations for education, legislation initiate by state and federal government, and web-based training for continual medical education (Expert in HR, 2013) While these are possible affective solutions for the problems in nursing the issue that will always face healthcare providers is the overall costs that will occur in implementation of these possible programs. Without assistance from state and federal government little to no ground will be made in fixing this growing problem.

Limitations

Limitations for this literature review were possible publication bias, researcher bias, the number of databases used, the number of sources examined, and the time given to examine the topic. Also further and continued research needs to be preformed to track trends and to understand if issues change over time.

CONCLUSION

High turnover of nurses and the nursing shortage within the U.S. have caused constraints to the healthcare system and limited proper care to patients. This literature review has indicated that the problem of increased turnover and the shortage of nurses have many different facts or topics that result in the overall problem. The need for continued research is necessary in order to further understand this growing problem within the U.S.

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Appendix A

Expert in Human Resources Interview Questionnaire

VP of Human Resources for 1200 Bed Facility within Mayo Clinic Care Network

1. How difficult is it to hire qualified nurses?
2. How much money is spent in order to hire a qualified nurse?
3. Is turnover an issue in your facility? Why?
4. How important is the nursing staff to the organization?
5. Do you believe nursing schools are a factor in ability to hire qualified nurses?
6. How many positions are currently open for nurses in your facility?
7. Do you see any solutions to the nursing shortage?