

Differential Nursing Employment Patterns: A Region IV Analysis of Race and Ethnicity

Executive Summary

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This executive summary summarizes the full and final report of project “Differential Nursing Employment Patterns: A Region IV Analysis of Race and Ethnicity” funded by the Bureau of Health Professions under Cooperative Agreement No. 4 U79HP00035-01-01.

Submitted by:

Principal Investigator: Thomas C. Ricketts, Ph.D.
Project Investigator: Cheryl B. Jones, PhD, RN
Cecil G. Sheps Center for Health Services Research
The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
725 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd, CB 7590
Chapel Hill, NC 27599-7590
Email: cbjones@email.unc.edu

The research team for this study also included Barbara Mark, PhD, RN, FAAN (Co-Investigator); Michael Belyea, PhD (Statistician); Michael Gates, RN, Doctoral Candidate (Research Assistant); and George Pink, PhD (Consultant).

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Reports have highlighted the discrepancy between the racial composition of the registered nurse (RN) workforce and the composition of the population at large (Buerhaus & Auerbach, 1999; Dower et al., 2001). Since there is some evidence that individuals are more comfortable interacting with health professionals of the same racial background, and that professionals who share a common background with the person(s) to whom they provide care may be more sensitive to their beliefs and values, (Coffman, Rosenoff & Grumbach, 2001), the under-representation of persons from racial minorities in nursing raises questions about the willingness of the population to seek healthcare and eliminate racial disparities in health.

Very little is known about nursing employment patterns, such as job change behaviors, and even less is known about how these patterns vary by race. Thus, previous assumptions about RN employment may overlook the influence of important nurse characteristics, and lead to inadequate actions to address nurses' behaviors. The objective of this project was to examine nursing employment patterns for white and non-white nurses to inform the development of recruitment and retention strategies for a highly qualified and diverse nursing workforce to meet changing societal needs.

A secondary analysis of cross-sectional data from the 2000 National Sample Survey of Registered Nurses (NSSRN) was used to examine the employment patterns of 4,779 RNs from the southeastern U.S. Logistic regression and SUDAAN were used to explore mobility in the regional nursing workforce by testing hypotheses of differential nursing employment patterns relative to human capital, professional, employment, and socio-demographic factors. Separate models were estimated for the following nursing employment patterns, relative to RNs who remained in the same job and with the same employer during the previous year: Entrants (new RN graduates during 1999 or 2000); Movers (RN who changed jobs with their employer or changed employers); Returners (RN who left and returned to the workforce); and 4) Leavers (RN who left and did not re-enter the nursing workforce). Interaction terms were included to explore race differences.

The results indicate that some nursing employment behaviors do differ by race. Nurses were more likely to change jobs and/or employers if they were non-white with certain educational backgrounds. Other general findings not distinguished by race indicate that: nurses who were older, with more experience, who earned higher incomes, and who had children under the age of six were less likely to have changed employers than their counterparts (i.e., younger nurses, with less experience, who earned lower incomes, and who did not have children under the age of six at home); as wages increased nurses were more likely to have returned to the profession; as years of experience increased, nurses were more likely to have left the profession; and nurses were more likely to have entered the profession if they possessed an associate degree or were single.

Our findings suggest that race and other characteristics of the nursing workforce are important considerations when developing recruitment and retention strategies to make more efficient use of organizational resources. Health systems leaders may want to look their mix of patients, nurses and "producers" of nurses to anticipate how to adequately staff systems. Further, these findings can inform organizations as they strive to meet the changing needs and desires of the populations served.

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