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Title:

Insights into the Nursing Faculty Shortage

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Summary:

Registered nurses are trained to care for patients while also assessing medical conditions, and administering treatment and medications. They are employed in hospitals, physician's offices, long term care facilities and as home health aides.

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Scrubs, Nursing, Education, Nursing Scrubs, Nursing Uniforms, Nursing School, Healthcare, Nursing Training, Careers, Medical Careers

Article Body:

Registered nurses are trained to care for patients while also assessing medical conditions, and administering treatment and medications. They are employed in hospitals, physician's offices, long term care facilities and as home health aides. Nurses are becoming an increasingly important part of the healthcare system due to rising costs and growing demand. With the increasing need for nurses in the coming decades, it seems that the United States cannot produce enough nurses to fill the supply.

Healthcare careers are the fastest growing occupation in the country, and nursing tops the charts as the fastest growing occupation within the healthcare field. Why, then, are prospective nursing students being turned away from nursing schools? In the last year that statistics were available, it was estimated that nearly 16,000 students who were qualified to attend a nursing program were turned away. One reason for the shortage of registered nurses is the lack of faculty to instruct and train prospective nursing students. With a vacancy rate over 8 1/2% and rising, the faculty shortage limits the number of students who can become nurses.

Faculty shortages are not the only reason that prospective students are turned away from nursing schools. Budget constraints have limited school's abilities to update classrooms and lab equipment. There is a shortage of clinical opportunities for students in many areas. While the state and federal government have taken aggressive steps to recruit nurses in advance of the growing need, with tuition help and improvement of working conditions, their efforts are stymied by the inability of colleges to meet the demands of a growing healthcare crunch.

<b>Lack of faculty is a main factor in nursing shortage</b>

In what is probably the biggest determining factor in how many students are accepted by a school, there are simply not enough nurses teaching at the college level. While some nursing classes, such as core mathematics and chemistry classes do not require a nurse, others do. In fact, a certain percentage of the positions requiring a nurse require that the nurse have a doctorate degree. In contrast, the number of nurses who are seeking their doctorate degree is relatively small. It is estimated that many of the unfilled faculty positions are those that require doctoral education.

Why the shortage of nurses with doctorate degrees? While receiving your doctorate in any field is an accomplishment, it is a simple fact that a nurse can become a nurse anesthetist, a midwife, or a nurse practitioner and make a larger salary and be in heavy demand. Even nursing faculty positions that require only a masters program must compete with the lucrative positions available in the private sector. Nursing specialists are widely used in many communities to provide care for those without access to a physician. These nurses are RNs, with their bachelor and masters degree. As a certified nurse practitioner, the nurse has a great deal of autonomy in her practice and is well compensated.

Because of the specialized nature of the degree, nurses that wish to receive their doctorate must often leave the area where they are and move to a more urban area. At the completion of their training, they often do not return. Many of the nurses that complete a doctorate program, as many as one-fourth, state at graduation that they have no plans to work in academics, and head straight to the clinical setting.

In the past, nursing instructors received a more competitive salary, but as the demand for nurses has increased in the private sector, their salaries have quickly outpaced the salaries of those in education. Now, as more nursing instructors reach retirement age, there is no one to fill their positions. Often nurses who have spent their entire careers in the educational setting enter the clinical setting to raise their income before retirement age.

<b>What can be done?</b>

The shortage of nursing faculty is a well documented and studied problem. With the demand for nurses increasing rapidly, it is important to find a way to increase the number of nurses who can be trained. Some plans are in place to help remedy the nursing shortage. Federal funds are being used for faculty development programs and to collect data on faculty vacancy rates.

<b>Approaching retirement</b>

With many nursing instructors reaching retirement age, the problem of nursing faculty shortages is not expected to go away. The problem creates a vicious cycle, with a growing demand for nurses in the clinical setting raising salaries and benefits. This draws even more nurses out of the academic setting. The shortage of faculty leads to a decrease in the number of students who are accepted into nursing programs. Again, this creates a greater shortage. It is estimated that the nursing shortage, in the clinical setting only, will grow by 6% a year. This shortage can be traced back to the shortage of nursing faculty members