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Career Progression of Migrant Nurses in Ireland: Nurse Migration Project Policy Brief 5

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Career Progression of Migrant Nurses

The career progression of migrant nurses within the Irish health system was an issue raised in our discussions with key stakeholders. Concern was raised that few migrant nurses had achieved managerial grades in Ireland (CNM1 or CNM2) and that perhaps this stemmed from a reluctance to apply for senior posts. Evidence internationally suggests that migrant health workers frequently occupy less desirable posts [1,2] within the health systems of their host countries and that they struggle to achieve career progression [3]. A number of reasons have been cited for their stalled career progression and these include poor take-up of training [4], a lack of transparency in the management of promotions [3] and *'discrimination in the quality of support given to candidates in the promotion process. . .whereby chosen candidates were pre-selected and coached whilst others were ignored or received inadequate or misleading support'* [3].

This policy brief, which presents findings on the skills and expertise of Ireland's migrant nurses and offers an insight into their perception of promotions and career progression in Ireland.

Methods

This policy brief presents the results of a recent survey of 337 migrant nurses in Ireland, undertaken between February and July 2009 by the Nurse Migration Project, RCSI. On behalf of the research team, the Irish Nursing Board forwarded self-completion postal questionnaires to a random sample of 1536 non-EU nurses on the Nursing Register. The postal survey achieved a response rate of 20% and a sample size of 309. A parallel sampling strategy to recruit respondents from 3 Dublin hospitals resulted in the recruitment of a further 28 respondents. The final quantitative data (N=337) were analysed using SPSS statistical software.

Migrant Nurses' Skills and Expertise

Although Ireland is heavily reliant on migrant nurses to staff its health system, there is little information available about skills and experience that migrant nurses have brought to the Irish nursing workforce.

- Upon arrival to Ireland, respondents had, on **average, ten years nursing experience.**
- Prior to their migration to Ireland, **47% (158) of respondents had held a senior nursing post** (senior staff nurse or midwife, managerial post, lecturer or clinical instructor post).
- In terms of nursing specialism prior to migration, 38% (130) of respondents had worked in more than one nursing field, 16% (53) had worked in Intensive Care and 14% (46) had worked in Surgery.

There have been reports of 'brain wastage' of migrant health workers in host countries, wherein highly trained personnel have found themselves in posts that offer limited or no opportunity to use their skills and experience' [1]. The following sections will examine whether or not migrant nurses perceive this to be the case in Ireland.

'Before I came to Ireland I was working in an acute hospital handling various cases of medical, surgical, paediatric and maternity but never geriatric cases. It's a huge transition/ transformation on my part but somehow I managed to adapt and handle it well thanks to orientation and adaptation placement plus the kindness, sympathy and huge help from hospital nursing director, Irish colleagues and of course the lovely and caring patients' (Respondent 178)

Current Post in Ireland

- **70% (235) of respondent migrant nurses work at staff nurse/midwife level** in Ireland. Only 7% (25) have achieved a managerial grade.
- **81% (274) of respondents felt that their skills and qualifications were accepted or fully accepted by their Irish medical and nursing colleagues.**
- **47% (158)** of respondents report that the **grade they currently work at is the same** as that which they worked at prior to migration, **22% (73) stated that they currently work at a lower grade** and 3% (10) at a much lower grade than prior to migration.

Although a quarter of respondent migrant nurses, have '*experienced a radical drop in status, coming from a senior position in their home countries*' [5], most are working at a grade similar to that worked at prior to their arrival.

'I was lucky to be assigned to a workplace where everyone was treated equally in spite of any cultural diversity. It helped a lot for me to settle down and call Dublin my second home. I was encouraged by superiors to attend study days to update my skills as well as availing of promotional opportunities'
(Respondent 198).

'Salary increase is not enough to compensate for extra responsibility'
(Respondent 103)

'I don't like any promotion: I've been there before. I need less stressful job'
(Respondent 244)

'Opportunities are mostly offered to Irish nurses even though they are newly qualified and less experienced'
(Respondent 162)

Career Progression and Promotions

- Only **19% (63) of respondents have applied for promotion** in Ireland.
- The main reasons cited for not going for promotion include that respondents are **content in their current posts (34%)**, that a **promotion involves too much extra work and stress (26%)** and a **feeling that Irish people are preferred for promotions (19%)**.
- Of those respondents (63) who have applied for promotion in Ireland, **71% (45) have achieved a promotion**.
- Those respondents who have lived in Ireland for longer were more likely to have applied for promotions, with **30% (15) of those who had arrived in 2003/4** and **25% (33) of those who had arrived between 2000/2** having applied for promotions in Ireland compared with 19% (63) of respondents overall.
- The sector within which respondents were employed appeared to have an impact on their hopes for promotion. Although 57% (192) of all respondents felt that there were promotional opportunities available for them in the workplace, **only 42% (19) of those who worked in the nursing home sector** felt this way. This echoes research findings from the UK [3]

Bullying and Discrimination

A related finding to emerge from our survey is that experiences of bullying and or discrimination were fairly commonplace among respondent migrant nurses.

- **55% (184) of respondent migrant nurses reported that they had experienced bullying or discrimination in the workplace.**
- 34% (115) of respondents reported bullying by Irish nursing colleagues and 25% (85) reported bullying by nurse management. 5% (17) had been bullied by NCHDs or consultants.
- The response to bullying or discrimination varied, but the most popular course of action was to discuss the bullying with colleagues 21% (72), with only 16% (54) of respondents raising the issue with management.

A workplace which tolerates bullying and/or discrimination may not provide the type of supportive atmosphere necessary to encourage migrant nurses to progress their careers and reach their full potential in Ireland.

Conclusion

Our survey of migrant nurses have revealed both positive and negative findings:

- Although only 7% (25) of respondents have achieved a managerial grade, the majority of respondents (81%) feel that their skills and qualifications are accepted by their Irish medical and nursing colleagues.
- While only 19% (63) of respondents have applied for promotion, those who have had been largely successful, with 71% (45) achieving promotion.

It would appear that the main challenge in terms of the migrant nurse career progression is to identify and remove the barriers which currently discourage migrant nurses from applying for promotion.

References

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For More Information

The Nurse Migration Project is a HRB funded project (2006 to 2009) which involves both qualitative and quantitative surveys of migrant nurses. It is led by Dr. Niamh Humphries, Professor Ruairí Brugha and Professor Hannah McGee, Division of Population Health Sciences, Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland. Further information available from Dr. Humphries: nhumphries@rcsi.ie or at <http://tinyurl.com/NiamhHumphries>. Further research updates will be released and disseminated in future Policy Briefs.