

REGISTERED NURSES IN VERMONT

Summary of Board of Nursing Relicensure Survey, March 2001

This survey confirms a looming crisis in Vermont's nursing workforce.

BACKGROUND

In order to provide Vermonters with useful information on the status of Vermont's nurse workforce, the Office of Nursing Workforce Research, Planning and Development has prepared this report. A survey of 6,008 registered nurses (85% of all licensed Vermont nurses) was completed in March, 2001. This survey was included in relicensure materials and was not mandatory. The Vermont Department of Health analyzed the results of the survey. The last survey of RNs done by the Vermont Board of Nursing was conducted in 1997.

KEY FINDINGS

Of those surveyed, 4,346 reported that they worked as an RN in Vermont. The following describes these working registered nurses in the state of Vermont.

Basic Demographics:

- 95% of RNs are female, 5% are male
- 97% of Vermont RNs are Caucasian
- Age range: 21-81 years Median age: 46 years, 75% are over 40 years.

Education:

- 29% completed a Diploma program
- 44% completed an Associate's Degree program
- 37% completed a Bachelor's Degree program
- 5% completed a Master's Degree program
- Less than 1% completed a Doctoral program
- 28% has other non-nursing degrees

Employment (setting of primary position):

- Hospitals employ 40% of Vermont RNs
- Ambulatory care settings, physician's offices, and community health center together employ 15%
- Home health agencies employ 11%
- Long term care facilities employ 9%
- "Other" settings employ 9%
- Schools employ 6%
- Public health agencies employ <3%
- Nursing schools and mental health centers employ <2%
- Assisted Living facilities, independent practice, and correctional facilities each employ <1%
- A second job in a different setting was reported by 20%.
- 14 years is average # of years worked as an RN in Vermont.

DISCUSSION OF THOSE FINDINGS

In order for a high quality health care system to be retained in Vermont, an adequate supply of skilled professional nurses must be assured for years to come. Numerous studies and reports have identified parameters framing a profound nursing shortage. These include: the aging of society², an aging nursing workforce^{1,3}, a decline in nursing enrollments^{4,5}, increasing technology and other advances^{6,7}, and a shrinking pool of qualified nursing faculty⁸. In Vermont, this shortage will be exacerbated by retirement of a large cohort within 10 to 20 years, and, if patterns continue, RNs leaving nursing due to dissatisfaction with assignment or salary. The current pipeline of younger nurses and enrolled students is not adequate to fill this void. This 2001 survey of Vermont's registered nurses confirms that Vermont's workforce is at risk of being inadequate to meet future needs if recruitment and retention initiatives are not implemented.