

OLDER RN RETENTION: *Remedies & Reminders*

Nothing substitutes for experience
Older and wiser

The truth in these proverbs is especially relevant in healthcare. We want and NEED experienced nurses caring for us. With large numbers of nurses nearing the traditional retirement age, it is time to reconsider the older nurse's role in our healthcare workforce. Critical nursing shortages make retaining experienced nurses even more essential.

In 2001, 18% of Vermont's nurses were over 55. Where will they be in ten years? What will they be doing?



Madeline Nolan RN age 81, 60 years of nursing

THE OLDER NURSE: *Clues for Retention*



Adam Riesner

Office of Nursing Workforce,
Research, Planning and Development
University of Vermont
Rowell 216
Burlington, VT 05405-0068
(800) 458-2741

Barbara McIntosh PhD
Mary Val Palumbo ND, APRN
Betty Rambur DNSc, RN

Current data shows that older nurses who intend to keep working for more than five years work in settings of less patient acuity. Long term care and community settings are more attractive than hospital settings to the 55+ nurse. Nurses over 55 also tend to practice in more rural settings. Eighty percent (80%) of those still working after age 65 are working part-time.

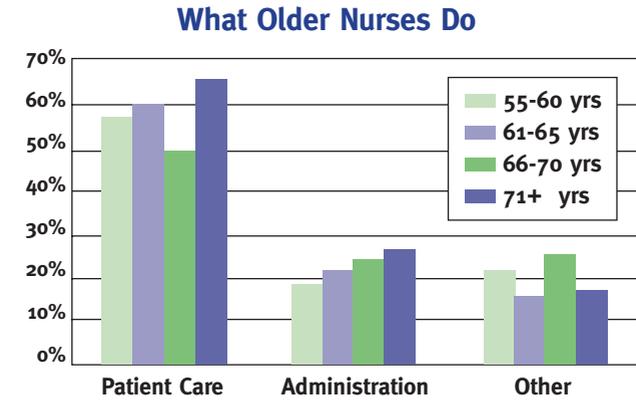
Nursing is a demanding, yet rewarding profession. What needs to be considered when employers want to encourage older nurses to stay on the job?

Vermont nursing workforce research makes it clear that some management practices make a difference.

The most important determinant of job satisfaction among older nurses is working with helpful and friendly people.

- Build an environment grounded in respect and support.
- Recognize and reward supportive co-worker behaviors.
- Employers should model open and continuous communication

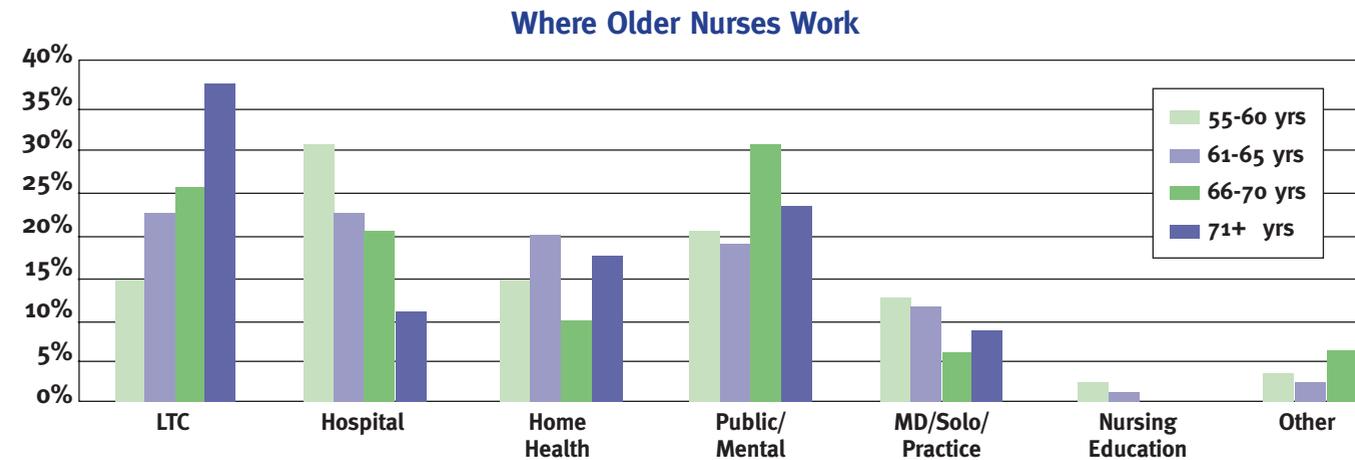
Older nurses who intend to keep working are more satisfied on a number of dimensions including



security, personal growth and development, support for continuing education and career development. They have the opportunity for independent thought and action on the job and are satisfied with the mission and vision of the organization.

The importance of different job characteristics varies by age cohort. Older nurses value autonomy and younger nurses seek more skill variety.

- Encourage more experienced nurses to make more decisions.
- Rethink job design and task mix



Creative staffing patterns are important in retaining aging nurses.

- Increase flexibility in hours of work and nurse control over hours
- Create more part-time opportunities
- Expand mentor roles for experienced nurses

Career engagement is higher among older nurses who report that their jobs involve feedback from supervisors and coworkers, autonomy, and feedback from the job itself.

- Reward experience with autonomy
- Open feedback channels so everyone is confident about outcomes
- Discuss the structure of the job, don't take it as a given

Personal development and continuing education are very important to older nurses who intend to keep working.

- Offer regular development/training opportunities for nurses of all ages
- Develop programs to ease transitions to long term care and community health setting
- Discuss personal development options with all nurses
- Treat each nurse as an essential part to achieving the organization's goals and mission

A primary reason for leaving given by nurses of all ages is job assignment.

- Discuss job content
- Rotate difficult assignments
- Review person/job fit.
- Create more flexible assignments based on physical needs

Job Satisfaction Ratings

(Nurses age 55-65, stayers vs. leavers in five years. *)

| Job Dimensions | % Satisfied or Extremely Satisfied | |
|--|------------------------------------|-----------------|
| | Stayers (n=177) | Leavers (n=177) |
| Job security | 83.3 | 68.2 |
| Personal growth and development from job | 67.8 | 52.8 |
| Support for continuing education in organization | 69.0 | 53.4 |
| Attention paid to career development | 40.2 | 31.4 |
| Independent thought and action on job | 84.4 | 68.2 |
| Mission and vision of organization | 68.2 | 56.3 |

*No difference in satisfaction with pay, supervision or flexibility in hours.

The results and suggestions above are drawn from three studies:

2001 Board of Nursing RN Relicensure Survey

Job Analysis and Retention Survey, 2003

This research was funded by: HRSA Rural Health Outreach Grant and the VT. Agency of Human Services

Older Nurses Intention To Leave In 12 Months

