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Nurses With a Second Degree Could Impact Workforce: Study Compares New Registered Nurses With Second Degree RNs

As the United States continues to experience a nursing shortage that is expected to grow to one million nurses by 2016, a new research study highlights a pool of potential candidates who could alleviate the shortage in an economical way. The study, published in the January/February 2009 issue of the *Journal of Professional Nursing*, compares nursing graduates whose first baccalaureate degree was in nursing with nursing graduates whose first baccalaureate degree was in another field and who obtained a second baccalaureate degree in nursing. Findings from the study, funded through a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, suggest that second degree nurses are an efficient new solution to the current nursing shortage.

Through a 16-page survey, the study sampled 953 newly licensed registered nurses from 34 states and Washington, D.C., and asked questions about how they felt about their jobs, information about work settings and their intent to stay at their current job. The nurses had been licensed from five to 18 months prior to taking the survey.

According to the study, second-degree students are more likely to be older, married with children, male, and non-white, be more positive, and have more family-work conflict. Because they also have more work experience, they may have coping advantages over newer, younger nursing graduates during the period immediately after leaving school and entering the workforce. This finding is significant, since some new registered nurses have left their first jobs in frustration from a lack of coping skills or the knowledge to do their jobs. New nurses who only had a baccalaureate nursing degree generally had more workgroup cohesion and negativity and were more likely to intend to leave.

"Second degree candidates bring life experiences to their jobs that are valuable to employers," said Carol S. Brewer, PhD, RN, associate professor in the School of Nursing at the University at Buffalo, Buffalo, NY, and lead author of the study. "Second degree graduates may be particularly attracted to employers who mitigate family work conflict, and promote work group cohesion." Second-degree nurses also can be educated in much less time in accelerated programs than first-time baccalaureate nurses because they already have college degrees. However because they are older, they many have shorter work careers. Understanding which group is more productive in the workforce will help organizations design recruitment and retention programs for each group. "Nurses in second degree programs are a great source of new nurses for the health needs of Americans. They usually complete nursing programs in 12-

15 months,” said Christine Kovner, PhD, RN, FAAN, professor at New York University’s College of Nursing and co-author of the study. “At NYU we are a large second degree program. I have found teaching these students delightful and think they are wonderful new nurses.” This research used a sub-set of nurses involved in a larger RWJF-funded study by Brewer and Kovner which tracks changes in the careers of a group of newly licensed nurses over 10 years.

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