



The need for professional nursing to reflect the growing diversity in today's society reaffirms the goals of NSNA's Breakthrough to Nursing project. The BTN Committee chose this year's theme, "A Profession Moving Forward Through the Door of Diversity," to support BTN goals of increasing recruitment/retention of minority groups within the nursing profession, and increasing faculty awareness of the needs of minority students. To celebrate the upcoming 40th anniversary of the BTN project, we can look back at the past and recent history of Breakthrough to Nursing.

BY TONYA BROWN

"NURSING: A PROFESSION MOVING FORWARD THROUGH THE DOOR OF DIVERSITY"

Breakthrough to Nursing National Survey Results

Student Comments Focus on Passion for Nursing, Diversity, and Challenges



by Karen A. Hart

Overview

In response to a request last spring by the NSNA Board of Directors, and in light of the 40th anniversary of the Breakthrough to Nursing Program (BTN), the Bernard Hodes Group offered to develop a survey to gauge member demographics, solicit input on diversity issues among the nursing student population, and gather member insights and perceptions about the BTN program. We also agreed to develop a separate faculty survey which mirrored the student survey, and to create a new logo for BTN, which can be found on the front cover of this issue and above.

Working with NSNA's management and Board, we created the surveys and hosted them on our web site from September 1 - October 15, 2004. NSNA communicated with members via a series of e-mail *blasts*, encouraging members to complete the survey. We also ran an ad in the September/October issue of *Imprint*, directing members to the survey site URL. A total of 2,057 students and 121 faculty members responded, totaling nearly 600 pages of comments.

Survey Results

Demographics

Survey respondents (both students and faculty) represented a broad range of schools and geographical locations. Seventy-four percent of the sample were under 35 years of age; 17% were between 34 and 44; 8% were between 45 and 54; and 1% were between 55 and 64. In the faculty survey, the largest percentage (50%) was between 45 and 54, one quarter of respondents (26%) were between 55 and 64, and one fifth (18%) were between 35 and 44 years old.

Nine in ten nursing students (92%) were female, and 81% were Caucasian. African-American students comprised 6% of the student sample, Asian Americans and Latino/Hispanic each were 3%, Mexican Americans were 2%, and Native Americans were 1%. These numbers are somewhat more diverse than the most recent findings from the National Sample Survey of Registered Nurses (2000), which identified 94% of the current nursing workforce as female, and 88% as Caucasian.

On the faculty side, 94% of respondents were Caucasian, with African-Americans comprising 3% of the sample, Asian Americans 2% and Latino/Hispanics 1%.

In the student survey, only 33% of respondents entered nursing programs directly after high school. Of the two-thirds who did not enter nursing directly after high school, 49% had prior careers, and 27% came to nursing after marriage and family. Three percent came to nursing after military careers, and the remaining 21% were those who had completed another college degree. The high percentage of students who did not enter nursing right after high school made the “nontraditional” student the majority of the respondent base.

Challenges to Entering Nursing

Student respondents were passionate and articulate about nursing and what it means to them. They professed a vision of nursing as a “calling,” a vocation, and a dream, a theme echoed many times in the responses. There were some universal themes expressed, such as the difficulty of being accepted into nursing programs and the long waiting lists for such programs. Another impediment was financial. Some students indicated that their parents' incomes made them ineligible for grants and loans. Others provided insights into the financial and emotional hardships of attending school, having jobs, and simultaneously caring for their families.

High school guidance counselors were almost universally portrayed as being of little assistance in guiding interested individuals to nursing careers. Some respondents were advised not to pursue nursing careers, but rather to become physicians or business executives.



Many were told they were “too smart” to be nurses, and many men reported that they were not even offered nursing as an option. Many respondents who recalled wanting to be nurses 20 or more years ago recounted being discouraged by guidance counselors at that time, and are only now entering nursing as a second career. Clearly, we need to reach high school counselors and provide them with the background information they need to effectively promote nursing careers.

Other respondents indicated a variety of impediments to entering nursing, such as ethnic or cultural stereotypes of the profession, resistance from family members, and financial strain. Another common response was the lack of mentors, particularly from individuals who self-identified as minorities. A few respondents were fortunate to find mentors who inspired them and helped them. Such encounters, however, were relatively rare.

Sadly, some respondents stated that practicing nurses discouraged their interest in the profession. Many students commented on their experiences of “nurses eating their young” in clinical settings. But the common theme in many of these stories was the passion to forge ahead despite obstacles.

Diversity and Underrepresented Populations

We found many interesting commentaries on the issue of diversity and underrepresented groups. Some students felt we were reinforcing prejudice in addressing the issue;



others felt minorities were given more favorable treatment in terms of scholarships and tuition assistance. Others noted that although they lived in diverse communities, they did not see diversity reflected in their health care facilities. Some minority respondents recounted incidences of bias in their schools and in clinical settings. There were many comments about the issue of men being minorities in nursing.

Older students with families, second-career, and second-degree students represented 67% of student respondents. This group encountered their own issues in attending nursing school, including juggling classes, jobs and family, and the lack of time to devote fully to any of these responsibilities. A few respondents noted ageism in the school and clinical environments, and some made critical comments about the structure and task-oriented thrust of nursing programs.

Nursing and the Media

Many respondents commented on the need to promote nursing, both in mainstream media and recruitment advertising, particularly highlighting diversity in nursing. There were some comments on the need for more inclusive representation of nurses on television news shows, documentaries, and other venues where nurses are consulted as health care experts.

There were many comments regarding stereotypes about nursing and the need for positive media portrayal of the profession in order to recruit new students. Stereotypes about male nurses were also of concern.

Enhancing BTN: Reaching the Underrepresented

Respondents provided a variety of ideas for reaching underrepresented individuals. Those who are active

in BTN reported using the NSNA video and brochure, as well as the Johnson & Johnson posters, video and brochures, in outreach activities. Several male respondents liked the Oregon Center for Nursing and Virginia Partnership for Nursing “Are You Man Enough to Be a Nurse?” campaigns. (See Resources)

Respondents recommended direct outreach to communities through mentorship programs, community job fairs and seminars, and the distribution of information to community centers, health centers, grocery stores, hospitals, and physician waiting rooms. Some recommended providing information to young children at school to take home to their parents so that both parents and children could learn more about nursing. Several recommended providing information in several languages. Along with recruitment materials, many cited informational articles about nursing careers in community newspapers as a recruitment technique.

Outreach Possibilities

Recruitment into nursing is a multifaceted endeavor, as this survey highlights. Many respondents urged that we reach young people early, preferably during elementary school. Research has shown that children decide the career they don't want by age 11. (Career Perceptions and Decision-Making Project, (March 1998). By high school, students must have an educational plan so that they have the necessary prerequisites to be accepted into a nursing program. For the most part, outreach to high school students is preaching to the converted. Many respondents applauded summer nursing camps, and hospital “shadow” opportunities, and they suggested hospital summer internships for high school students.

The other audience for recruitment into nursing is the older and second-career student, a group a bit more difficult to reach. Some of the community-centered events and outreach suggested by students would be successful in reaching this group.

Many respondents urged that in sharing nursing's message with potential recruits, we emphasize the diversity of options within the profession. The consensus was that many individuals would be interested in careers in specialty areas and in the plethora of options beyond traditional bedside nursing.

Many older students recommended more school-sponsored childcare for students, and outreach to often-neglected rural communities and to Native Americans. There were also requests for flexible classroom and clinical hours to accommodate the nontraditional student, and more emphasis on the ADN, diploma, and BSN options in nursing. Students felt shorter programs would be of more interest to second-career and older students, from both a scheduling and financial perspective.

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Other recommendations were to provide more scholarships targeting older students and men, and to provide more information about scholarships, tuition reimbursement (at the practice level), and other financial assistance to those in the nontraditional population.

Survey respondents have given us wonderful insights and a lot of food

for thought. There is much work to be done within the nursing profession and the health care industry to improve recruitment into nursing. NSNA's Breakthrough to Nursing program will benefit from the input of the membership on these important issues. ☺

references

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Service Administration, Bureau of Health Professions, Division of Nursing (2000). *National Sample Survey of Registered Nurses*.

Foskett, Hemsley-Brown. (1997). *Career Perceptions and Decision-Making Project (CAPDEM)*. University of Southampton,

resources

NSNA Breakthrough to Nursing Program
www.nсна.org/activities/breakthrough.asp

The Campaign for Nursing's Future/
Johnson & Johnson
www.discovernursing.com/materials.aspx

Are You Man Enough to be a Nurse
Campaign/
Oregon Center for Nursing
www.oregoncenterfornursing.org/about/posters.htm

Are You Man Enough to be a Nurse
Campaign/
Virginia Partnership for Nursing Campaign
www.virginiapartnershipfornursing.org/meninnursing/



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