

Study: Who are the Men in Nursing?



As nursing progresses and evolves into a key component of health care, minority recruitment needs to remain a major goal of nursing leaders. One critical component of those efforts is the recruitment of men into nursing. Multiple studies and surveys have shown that due to the growing number of older adults and the aging population of working nurses, the current nursing shortage will last for years to come. Similar studies show that men currently make up a relatively small percentage of the nursing work force. The population of men represents an untapped reserve of future nurses that needs to be addressed and, as one of its goals this year, the Breakthrough to Nursing Committee is going to focus its attention on recruitment and retention of males into the nursing profession. The Bernard Hodes Group, a long-time partner of the NSNA, has done multiple surveys on issues related to men nurses and men nursing students. These studies have given many men the opportunity to speak out and be heard as well as providing possible solutions to making the nursing profession more attractive to the population of men. The Breakthrough to Nursing Committee encourages all BTN programs to incorporate strategies into their current campaigns that will recruit men into the nursing profession.

—Paul Padilla, BTN Director

By Karen A. Hart

Background

In 2004 NSNA partnered with Bernard Hodes Group to conduct an online 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. This survey was conducted in September and October of 2004 and the results were reported in the February/March 2005 issue of *Imprint*.

At the same time, Bernard Hodes Group, in partnership with the California Institute for Nursing and Healthcare, the Coalition for Nursing Careers in California and the American Assembly for Men in Nursing, conducted an online survey of men in nursing.

When we began the preliminary analysis of these surveys, we quickly realized how many commonalities the survey results represented. Men in nursing are a minority in the profession and their experiences, perceptions, and needs mirror those of members of other minority communities.

Men in Nursing

According to a National Sample Survey of Registered Nurses (2000), men represent only 6% of the current RN nursing workforce, a troubling statistic for many reasons. A workforce more evenly divided in terms of gender enables enhanced communications and provides a more balanced experiential worldview. Additionally, more men in the predominantly female profession of nursing can add a unique perspective when dealing with both male and female patients.

The fact that the small percentage of men in the profession has remained virtually the same for decades is the impetus that led us to develop our survey. The 498 respondents shared concerns, experiences and issues that are of value to the health care community at large.

Survey Demographics

Of the men who responded to the survey, 93% were Registered Nurses (RNs) and 7% were students. They were predominantly Caucasian (83%), with Hispanics making up

6% of the sample, Asian 5%, African-American 2%, and Native American 1%. The average age of the respondents was 44 with an average of 14 years in experience. The majority (44%) came to nursing from another career with 20% joining after high school, and another 17% from the military service.

Other important insights

The men surveyed cited three main reasons for choosing nursing as their profession: the desire to help people, the growth potential of the industry given its many career possibilities, and that it provided job stability. Nevertheless, most men found that many stereotypes still thrive, branding other professions as “more appropriate” for men. In fact, even before deciding upon the career themselves, many of those surveyed had also perceived nursing as a profession for women with low remuneration. Yet they noted that nursing has many unique selling points as a career, including: the many career options open within the profession, location flexibility, and one of the few careers not facing layoffs or downsizing.

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Fifty-six percent of those surveyed experienced difficulties in their nursing education, noting that they were often perceived as ‘muscle’ by women colleagues and even uncaring, assumptions purely made on the basis of their gender. Fifty percent also experienced difficulties in the workplace, again because they were seen as ‘muscle,’ were a gender minority in the field, and found communication with women colleagues difficult at times.

Some expressed concerns about the feminization of some nursing traditions, within both the educational and practice settings. Two respondents noted that the recognition gifts their facilities provided for Nurses’ Week were geared solely to women nurses. Another issue addressed the age-old problem of nurses ‘eating their young’, male or women. And some commented on the issues of communication and their perceptions that women nurses do not support each other. These comments were quite similar to those who responded to the NSNA student survey.

Rewards of a Nursing Career

Rated on scale of 1-5, these were the top reasons cited as to why nursing is a rewarding career.

Helping people	4.47
Ability to make a meaningful contribution to society	4.37
Upward career mobility	3.86
Geographic mobility	3.84
Financial security	3.76
Good benefits	3.71
Flexible scheduling	3.63

Of note was that tangible considerations placed significantly lower than those of helping and making a difference.

Additionally, eighty-two percent noted that nursing is plagued by common misconceptions that emphasize the view that nursing is a female profession dominated by women that men are not suited to it because they are not caring, and that men in nursing are gay.

In order to recruit more men into nursing, respondents suggested that recruitment messages should include non-gender specific language. Further, that advertising should emphasize the stability of employment in the field, the many practices available within the profession, and that it requires a high-level skill set. The BTN Survey that NSNA and Bernard Hodes sponsored in 2004 found that many high school guidance counselors told students that they were “too smart” to pursue nursing and were encouraged to become physicians or business executives (Hodes 2004). The Men in Nursing survey found that those surveyed recommended that career counselors should be made aware of what nursing actually entails and that to continue breaking stereotypes, more men nurses should participate in school visits and recruitment into the profession. Shadow programs were also cited as an important recruitment tool as well as ads in men’s magazines.

Summary

Many of the closing comments that respondents shared revisited areas of concern and optimism about the nursing profession and men’s place within it. Emphasis was placed

on the need to recruit more men and minorities into the profession, confront stereotypes, and improve the general awareness and knowledge of what the profession has to offer to all its members.

Just as in the student survey, we were struck by how articulate and passionate respondents were about nursing. Countless respondents indicated that nursing was a 'calling'; that they especially enjoyed 'making a difference' and how unique nursing is for that reason. We also appreciated the humor and self-confidence they demonstrated about the reality of being a minority in the profession, and their 'just do it' mindset. ☺

references

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

Hart, Karen. (2004, November/December). Breakthrough to Nursing National Survey Results. *Imprint*, Vol. 52 No. 2. 30-34.

websites of interest

Hodes Men in Nursing Survey available for free download at:
<http://www.hodes.com/healthcarematters/>

The American Assembly for Men in Nursing:
<http://www.aamn.org/>

Men in Nursing: History:
<http://www.menstuff.org/issues/byissue/nursing.html>

Nurselookup.com (a website promoting men in the nursing profession):
<http://www.nurselookup.com/index.html>

Stacy Motorsports (increasing awareness of nursing opportunities for men in Florida):
<http://www.stacymotorsports.com/>

Male Nurse Magazine:
<http://www.malenursemagazine.com/>

Johnson & Johnson Discover Nursing-Men in Nursing Page http://www.discovernursing.com/jnj-sectionID_1-pageID_53-dsc-landing.aspx

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