



How do nurses feel about their hospital environments?

What is this research about?

Strong human resources are imperative for a strong health care system. It is important to have a strong nursing workforce due to the variety of roles nurses play across sectors and the strong relationships they have with clients. Understanding the nursing workforce, work environments and nurse' responses to these environments is necessary for creating strategies that improve patient, nurse and organizational outcomes. There is little research examining and comparing nursing environments, particularly in acute care settings.

The purpose of this paper was to describe and compare nurses' evaluation of their work, their professional nursing practice environment and their responses to their work environment. This paper investigated how Registered Nurses (RNs) and Registered Practical Nurses (RPNs) working on medical/ surgical units evaluated their nursing practice.

What you need to know:

This paper reports how RNs and RPNs rated their hospital work environments. While reports from RNs and RPNs were similar, notable differences emerged. RPNs may need additional incentive and praise of their efforts to support professional development. RNs may need additional incentive and encouragement to increase participation in continuing professional education.

What did the researchers do?

A total of 8,456 RNs and RPNs working in 75 Ontario acute care hospitals that completed the Ontario Nurse Survey in 2003 were included in the study. Survey concepts included: employment information, evaluation of care, career intentions, history of injury, job related feelings, condition of practice environment, job satisfaction, patient care processes and demographic information. Researchers examined and compared RN and RPN

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responses in three general survey categories: respondent characteristics, nurse evaluations of their work environments and nurse evaluation of their responses to these environments.

What did the researchers find?

While many responses of RNs and RPNs were similar, important differences were found. These included:

Respondent Characteristics

- The RPN workforce was on average older than the RN workforce (by 3.2 years).
- A significantly higher percentage of RNs were employed full time than RPNs.
- A significantly higher proportion of RPNs reported current enrollment in a university or college course.

Practice environment

- More than twice as many RNs than RPNs reported regularly working 12-hours shifts (72.3% and 34.2%).
- Twice as many RNs than RPNs reported having experienced sharp injury at work (49.8% and 27.7%).
- RNs and RPNs rated their overall professional practice environments as weak however RNs rated it lower than RPNs.
- RNs and RPNs evaluated their manager's abilities and support as weak however RPNs rated them lower than RNs.
- The highest rated aspect of practice environment was the presence of nursing foundations for quality care however this was reported higher in RPNs.
- The lowest rated aspect for RNs and RPNs was adequacy of staff and resources.

Responses to work and practice environment

- Neither RNs nor RPNs reported high job satisfaction, however RNs reported higher job satisfaction than RPNs.
- Both RNs and RPNs reported experiencing moderate levels of exhaustion and burnout, however RNs experienced more.

How can you use this research?

Based on findings from this paper, opportunities for improving practice environments can be identified. The lowest rated aspect of the practice environment for RNs and RPNs was adequacy of staff and resources. This finding may have implications for health care leaders and policy makers. Administrators should plan to have enough qualified nursing staff to achieve desired patient outcomes. To improve outcomes, this research may help nursing leaders take action to:

- Improve nurse managers ability to lead and support staff;
- Improve nursing participation;
- Strengthen the foundation of high quality care through continuing education programs and ensuring clinical competence of nurses;
- Ensure adequate staffing and resources;
- Promote stronger collaboration between health disciplines (e.g. nurses, physicians and allied health professionals)

Original Article:

To learn more about this study, we invite you to read the original research article:

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