

Research RECAP



Are there differences in reasons why acute care nurses want to stay or leave their jobs based on age?

What is this research about?

The Canadian health care system is experiencing high rates of nurse turnover. High turnover contributes to nursing shortages. It is costly for healthcare organizations and has a negative impact on patient care and nurse well-being. Acute care settings have the highest rates of nurse turnover. As a result, it is important to promote strategies that increase the ability of organizations to retain nurses.

Existing research identifies reasons why nurses want to stay in their jobs but this research does not consider differences in reasons based on age. To consider the impact of age, it is helpful to group nurses into different generations. There are three distinct generations of nurses in Canada: Generation Y, Generation X and Baby Boomers. A fourth generation, Veterans, have all surpassed the normal age of retirement of 65 years. Each generation has different values, expectations and perceptions.

The purpose of this study was to compare the reasons why acute care nurses want to stay or leave their jobs across nursing generations.

What you need to know:

There are differences in the reasons why acute care nurses want to stay or leave their jobs based on age. Significant differences were found across generations of nurses for eight of 10 reasons to stay and for eight of 15 reasons to leave. For example, pay is important to younger generations, while additional vacation time is important to older generations. However, workload and staffing mattered most to nurses across generations.

What did the researchers do?

Researchers administered surveys to 9,904 Registered Nurses working in acute care hospitals in Alberta and Ontario. Data from 3,950 surveys were analyzed. The survey included two items that asked nurses to identify reasons for staying at their job and reasons for leaving their job. Survey items were based on information gathered from previous focus groups exploring reasons why nurses want to stay or leave their jobs. This study identified 10 reasons for acute care

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nurses to stay and 15 reasons for acute care nurses to leave their jobs. Statistical analysis was conducted and results were interpreted

What did the researchers find?

The researchers found that the most effective ways to retain acute care nurses involve promoting reasonable workloads and ensuring manageable nurse-to-patient ratios.

Nurses across the three generations chose the same reasons to stay in their jobs most frequently: reasonable workloads and manageable nurse-patient ratios. Similarly, nurses across generations chose the same reasons to leave most frequently: inadequate staffing and unmanageable workloads.

Significant differences were found across generations of nurses for eight of 10 reasons to stay and for eight of 15 reasons to leave.

Findings included:

- Pay is a more important reason to stay for Generation Y, the youngest generation, compared to older generations.
- Additional vacation time is a more important reason to stay for Baby Boomers than for younger generations.
- Job opportunities elsewhere was a more important reason to leave for younger generations compared to older generations.

Despite statistical differences, the top five reasons to stay were ranked similarly across generational cohorts. Due to the large sample size, statistically significant differences may not represent meaningful differences across the three generations.

How can you use this research?

This research may help healthcare leaders, hospitals and policymakers to understand and improve nursing workload and nurse-to-patient ratios. This research may also prompt healthcare leaders to consider retention strategies targeted to different generations. Further longitudinal research is needed to assess the effectiveness of retention strategies tailored to each generation.

Original Article:

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

Tourangeau, A.E., Thomson, H., Cummings, G., & Cranley, L.A. (2013). Generational-specific incentives and disincentives for nurses to remain employed in acute care hospitals. *Journal of Nursing Management, 21(3), 473-82.*

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