

Review Article

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Beyond the Challenges: An Optimistic Perspective on Nursing as a Career

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ABSTRACT

The nursing shortages in the United States are well documented in the literature, with COVID-19 further escalating the workforce shortage and exposing the drawbacks in the healthcare systems, such as unsafe work conditions, high levels of burnout, and long-standing neglected issues in the health care system, lead nurses to leave the profession. Studies have estimated that more than 100,000 Rn's left the profession during 2021, which is a significant drop, unlike in the past 40 years [1]. While these problems are substantial and discussed in previous literature beyond the challenges in the nursing profession, this paper focuses on an optimistic perspective on nursing as a career.

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Figure 1: Nursing Careers Pathways Chart [2].

Introduction

The nursing workforce is dominant in the healthcare profession due to the quantity and nature of the work, consisting of LPNs, RN, and APRNs who work in various care settings such as hospitals, academic settings, community, long-term care settings, and home care [3]. The nurse's role is essential in providing frontline care, coordinating with care teams, and ensuring quality and continuity of care. Once nursing work is disrupted or diminished, it results in adverse outcomes such as medical errors and missing care [4]. Nurses also work in roles other than direct patient care, such as managing research and education, making nursing a profession. Nurses' roles are complex, making it difficult to specify their tasks to recognize the shortage and address the gaps [4].

Additionally, the scope and practice of nursing are evolving endlessly. Some studies claim that RNs leave frontline care to advance their education, causing nursing shortages; on the contrary, some studies argue that frontline nurses or any advanced nursing

positions aim to improve patient safety, which is fundamental for the nursing profession. The nursing workforce in 2018 accounted for 3.35 million in the United States. The national average RN earnings per annum during this year was \$76,000 which amounts to \$255 billion excluding the benefits, which is evident that nurses are the most significant contributors to the country's economy [3]. Even during the recession in the United States, RN employment increased, and hospitals hired 250,000 RNs to fill the additional workforce, where the demand for nurses has been dramatically growing. Although nursing workforce challenges have been an ongoing issue in the healthcare system, they were intensified globally and across the United States during COVID-19 [3]. However, the pre-and post-COVID-19 studies on nursing workforce metrics reveal that, per the forecast, the growth in the FTE RNs will reach 4.64 million, with a minute difference from the post-COVID studies forecast of 4.46 million FTE RNs [1]. Therefore, the research indicates that the dramatic drop in the nursing workforce during the first two years of COVID-19 is transient, and the workforce has significantly improved from 2022 to 2023 [1].

Additionally, the critical aspect that affects nurses' performance and choice of entering the nursing profession, health policy, and the users of health services is the Image of the nursing profession, which is the public perception of the nursing profession and its roles. Literature indicates that if the Image of nursing is positive, nursing performance and productivity increase [5]. A positive perception attracts new talent, increases the morale of current practitioners, allows them to be held in high regard, and encourages them to innovate. Although perception carries the profession a long way, the public perception of nursing is incoherent worldwide. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has placed nurses at the forefront for their dedication and commitment to saving lives and sustaining the healthcare system by battling the virus, which

has shifted the public perception towards the nursing profession worldwide [5]. Which impacts the profession positively.

Additionally, choosing nursing encompasses multiple positions and unfolds the career with various specialties such as managerial, legal, strategy, human resources, practitioners, scientists, executives, educators, and others for the individuals who are willing to learn the skills, adapt to the roles, and advance the education. Nurses currently working in the profession have not just left the profession. They adapted to the changes and extended their experience, intelligence, and holistic approach to impact the healthcare profession [6]. Therefore, nursing is a dynamic and rewarding profession for one who likes to advance. Further, the literature suggests that organizations must create a road map for nursing professionals to be motivated, engaged, and successful as a retention strategy that hospitals or other care settings can acquire, which leads to reaching their fullest potential with a clear career roadmap map while serving in every necessary role along the way [7].

Further, nursing is a globally demanded profession due to the aging population and increased disease management and care complexities due to seasoned nurses' retirements [8]. Therefore, the nurses will have all-time opportunities from local to global health.

In conclusion, policymakers, stakeholders, and political leaders must take responsibility to transform the nursing profession's Image and change the paradigm of the nursing profession to welcome new talent and empower the profession to reach its potential to impact global health as one of the largest professions in health care nursing offers significant economic benefits through improved patient outcomes, reduce hospitalizations, increased workforce productivity through better health and minimize the cost on safety

errors. Recognizing the actual value of the nursing profession is imperative to reward the community and the workforce. When it is supported with adequate funding and resources to promote safety for the workforce, it reaches its potential. It is the ideal career choice for one who is compassionate about care and leadership.

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