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Retirement Intentions among Rural and Remote Nurses in Canada

Abstract

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Background: The proportion of the Canadian nursing workforce over the age of 60 continues to increase, with many working part time (CIHI 2012, 2015) and the outflow to retirement climbing (CIHI, 2014). The average age of registered nurses in Canada was approximately 45 in 2010, and 47 in rural Canada. Little is known about the older nursing workforce in rural Canada, including their intention to retire, plans to work, or aspects of their practice and work environments that influence their intention to stay in the workforce. Understanding the older nursing workforce is particularly important in rural and remote settings where shortages can close healthcare services for entire communities. This presentation will discuss results from the Nursing Practice in Rural and Remote Canada II (RRNII) study, a national survey implemented in 2014-15 with the assistance of the nursing regulatory bodies.

Purpose/Objectives: : The purpose of this presentation is to examine rural and remote nurses' intention to retire within the next five years, leave their employment, delay retirement, or retire but maintain some form of casual employment. As well, factors that may contribute to their retention will be explored.

Methodology: Over 9000 Registered Nurses (RNs), Nurse Practitioners (NPs), Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs) and Registered Psychiatric Nurses (RPNs) in rural and remote communities across Canada were invited to participate in the survey. The survey was available in French and English, in paper form or online. The response rate was 40% with 3822 nurses from all provinces and territories responding from the full range of practice settings including primary care, acute care, community health, home care, mental health and addictions, and long-term care.

Findings/Impact/Outcomes: Study results show that nearly 30% of nurses in rural and remote Canada plan to retire within the next 5 years, with 58.4 years as the average age of those intending to retire. Approximately 5% of nurses are retired and occasionally work in nursing. Retirement plans vary across several dimensions, including provincial and territorial and type of nurse (RN, NP, LPN, RPN). Variations in retirement plans according to size of community, area of current practice, current position, shift work, self-reported health, and practice setting will be given specific attention. Of particular focus will be the factors that contribute to nurses' intent to remain in their current positions and communities.

Conclusions: In rural and remote Canada, a significant percentage of nurses plan to retire within the next 5 years and a substantial number are retired and still working. Strategies that are specifically tailored to the realities of rural and remote communities, workplaces, and the nursing workforce are needed.

Policy Relevancy: The aging nursing workforce has serious implications for rural and remote communities and their health services. Policy initiatives and workplace practices that adequately prepare for imminent vacancies, optimal work environments, and minimal gaps in rural and remote health services are required.