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**OREGON'S**

**NURSE**

**FACULTY:**

**WHY ARE THEY LEAVING?**



Oregon Center for  
**NURSING**



## MISSION

The Oregon Center for Nursing facilitates research and collaboration for Oregon's nursing workforce to support informed, well-prepared, diverse and exceptional nursing professionals.

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

- Conduct, analyze and disseminate research
- Encourage collaboration and build partnerships with diverse stakeholders to advance nursing
- Promote nursing and healthcare in all settings in which nurses practice

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**A special thank you to the members of the Nurse Faculty Task Force, whose dedication to solving the nurse faculty shortage launched this effort.**

*This work was made possible by the Oregon Nursing Advancement Fund, supported by Oregon's licensed practical and registered nurses.*

SUGGESTED CITATION:  
Oregon Center for Nursing. (2017). Oregon's Nurse Faculty: Why Are They Leaving? Portland, OR: Oregon Center for Nursing.

# OREGON'S NURSE FACULTY: WHY ARE THEY LEAVING?

Having an adequate supply of nurses is critical to providing access and quality health care to Oregonians. There are many challenges to maintaining an adequate supply of nurses, including the aging population of Oregon, and the impending retirement of experienced nurses.

Currently six baccalaureate and 16 associate degree nursing programs in the state graduate roughly 1,400 nurses every year. When considering the large number of nurses moving to Oregon (Oregon State Board of Nursing, 2017), as long as Oregon's nursing programs can graduate the same number of students every year, it is likely Oregon will have enough nurses to meet the need (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2017). In fact, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2015) reports that the registered nurse occupation is the second highest job growth across the country. However, having a sufficient supply of nurses does not mean that nursing shortages no longer exist. The Health Resources and Services Administration claims that nursing shortages represent a problem with workforce distribution across states rather than an overall deficiency in the overall number of employable nurses (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2017).

Nursing programs across Oregon express the same concern; there is a shortage of nurse educators, and the situation is getting worse. The Oregon Center for Nursing (OCN) has tracked the nurse faculty workforce for almost 10 years, and the results are clear. It is challenging to recruit and retain nurse educators because salaries are not competitive with practicing nurse salaries, nursing educator workload is high, and the cost to become a nurse educator is substantial.

In 2008, OCN released "Oregon's Nurse Faculty Workforce" and published updates in 2011 and 2014. These studies described nurse educator demographics, retirement plans, job satisfaction, and reasons educators considered leaving the field. In 2014, OCN reported more than 89 percent of nurse educators said their overall job satisfaction is high, but almost two-thirds had considered leaving education in the past year. In addition, the study found more than 50 percent of active nurse faculty indicated they planned to retire within 10 years (Oregon Center for Nursing, 2015).

In 2016, after release of this study, OCN convened the Nurse Faculty Task Force, a group of nurse educators and stakeholders committed to finding solutions to educator shortages, and identifying best practices to recruit and retain nurse faculty. As the group discussed recruitment and retention strategies, they decided Oregon needs more information about the nurse faculty who left their positions. Why do nurse faculty leave education as a work setting? What are the

circumstances around their separation from employment? In addition, how could this information better inform policymakers and administrators on recruitment and retention strategies?

To answer these questions, OCN conducted a survey to expand on previous work by directly asking nurse educators who recently left their positions about their decision to leave nursing education.

## METHOD

The Oregon State Board of Nursing (OSBN) tracks all nursing program faculty positions, including the nurse educator's name, program affiliation, position title, and email address. At OCN's request, OSBN compiled the list of nurse educators who left their faculty positions between January 2014 and February 2017. After cleaning the data and removing duplications, the survey was sent via email to 494 persons. Of these, 22 emails returned as undelivered, and OCN excluded those individuals from the study as no attempt was made to obtain a valid email address.

OCN designed the survey instrument was designed in-house and was based on faculty exit interview and survey tools from the University of California at San Francisco, Penn State, and the University of California at Irvine (Penn State, 2016; University of California, Irvine, 2016; University of California, San Francisco, 2016). The survey instrument asked about the former nurse educator's demographic information (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity, age, and educational attainment), their last faculty position, and teaching experience. The instrument also asked about the reasons for their leaving a faculty position and information about any subsequent job or position obtained immediately after leaving the identified faculty position. The survey instrument is included as Appendix A.

All identified former nurse educators received an email invitation to participate in the survey online via Survey Monkey in early April 2017, and the survey closed in mid-May 2017. The completed survey responses were compiled and analyzed using SPSS. Univariate descriptive statistics were calculated for each question.

Of the 472 survey invitations sent, OCN received 206 completed surveys representing a 44 percent response rate.

# RESULTS

## HOW MUCH TURNOVER DO NURSING PROGRAMS EXPERIENCE?

In OCN's 2015 report "Where Are They Now? A retrospective analysis of churn among registered nurses in Oregon," nurse educators generally stayed in their positions over a three-year period from 2011 to 2014. Of the 429 nurse educators examined, 49 percent of nurses who worked as educators in 2011 held the same position compared to 2014.

However, this study shows there may be more turnover in recent years. There are approximately 720 faculty positions in nursing programs across the state (Oregon Center for Nursing 2015). With 472 verified faculty job separations, this means almost 70 percent of nurse faculty positions were vacated at some point during the three-year survey period. According to Compdata Surveys (2015), the average annual vacancy rate at a higher education institution is 12.8 percent. This shows significant challenges to retaining nurse educators.

## WHY DO NURSE EDUCATORS LEAVE THE FIELD?

OCN's previous work identified the top reasons why faculty generally left their positions. This most recent study also verified the reasons why exiting nurse faculty leave nursing education. Overwhelmingly, nurse faculty leave their positions due to low compensation. As discussed in previous reports, nurse faculty earn significantly less than their nurse counterparts working in a clinical setting. Difficulties in repaying student loans and earning a living wage have been reported as challenges to accepting nursing education positions.

The Exiting Nurse Faculty survey also verified the second most common reason for considering leaving nurse education; unmanageable workloads. In OCN's 2014 study, 33 percent of respondents said they considered leaving nursing education because they desired a more manageable workload. In the 2016 survey, 39 percent of nurse educators reported high workload as a reason for leaving.

In the OCN's 2014 report, 17 percent of respondents said they considered leaving nursing education because of a desire to return to patient-focused practice. However, of nurse educators who actually left their position, about half responded that they left because of at least one challenge (includes lack of appreciation, lack of collegiality, insufficient mentoring, lack of opportunities) with leadership and administration from their employer. These comments came from both community college nursing programs and university nursing programs.

TABLE 1 - WHY DO NURSES LEAVE NURSING EDUCATION?

	<i>Why Nurse Educators Considered Leaving the Field (2014)*</i>	<i>Why Exiting Nurses Left Nursing Education (2017)</i>
#1	Low Compensation (46%)	Low Compensation (53%)
#2	High Workload (33%)	High Workload (39%)
#3	Desire to Return to Patient Centered Care (17%)	Lack of Collegiality (29%)

\*Oregon's Nurse Faculty Workforce: 2014 Update

This survey approached the question of why nurse educators leave their academic positions in two ways. First, it asked respondents to mark up to five issues that played a role in their decision to leave the program (Table 2). Then, respondents were asked to identify the most important reason for their decision to leave their nurse educator position (Table 3).

Not surprisingly, more than half of respondents said low pay factored into their decision. More than a third stated the unexpected and unrealistic workload (38.8 percent) played a major role, followed by the lack of collegiality (29.1 percent), lack of appreciation for their work (26.7 percent), and insufficient mentoring (22.3 percent).

When asked to pick the one, most important issue leading to the decision to leave, low pay continued to be chosen more frequently than any other decision, with 18 percent marking this factor. The second most frequently chosen factor was unexpected / unrealistic workload (15 percent). Personal / family issues (12 percent) and retirement (10 percent) were the third and fourth most frequently chosen responses, respectively. Interestingly, lack of collegiality and lack of appreciation did not factor more highly in the list of most important factors, despite being marked by more than a quarter of respondents when asked to select all issues leading to the decision to leave. Table 3 shows the total list of factors respondents stated as the most important reason to leave their faculty position.

TABLE 2 - ALL REASONS THAT FACTORED INTO LEAVING NURSE EDUCATOR POSITION

	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>		<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Low Compensation	110	53.4%	Retirement	27	13.1%
Unrealistic Workload	80	38.8%	Lack of Opportunities	26	12.6%
Lack of Collegiality	60	29.1%	Interpersonal Conflict	26	12.6%
Lack of Appreciation	55	26.7%	Non-inclusive Environment	25	12.1%
Insufficient Mentoring	46	22.3%	Loss of Funding	9	4.4%
Offered Another Position	34	16.5%	Lack of Diversity	5	2.4%
Personal/Family Issues	32	15.5%	Asked to Leave	2	1.0%

TABLE 3 - MOST IMPORTANT REASON FOR LEAVING NURSE EDUCATOR POSITION

	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>		<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Low Compensation	37	18.0%	Loss of Funding	5	2.4%
Unrealistic Workload	31	15.0%	Insufficient Mentoring	4	1.9%
Personal/Family Issues	24	11.7%	Asked to Leave	3	1.5%
Retirement	21	10.2%	Lack of Opportunities	2	1.0%
Lack of Collegiality	18	8.7%	Lack of Diversity	0	0.0%
Lack of Appreciation	12	5.8%	Non-inclusive Environment	0	0.0%
Offered Another Position	10	4.9%	Other	24	11.7%
Interpersonal Conflict	6	2.9%	Missing	9	4.4%

“Support faculty more effectively. The pay is too low to have to deal with that much drama”

# WHERE ARE EXITING NURSE EDUCATORS GOING?

Most nurse educators had arranged new employment before resigning their education positions, however only about a quarter said they were recruited to their new positions. Tables 4 and 5 shows how nurse educators left their previous positions.

**TABLE 4 – HOW NURSE EDUCATORS LEFT FACULTY POSITION**

	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Resigned with Job	117	56.8%
Resigned without Job	43	20.9%
Retired	32	15.5%
Asked to Leave	5	2.4%
Missing	9	4.4%
Total	206	

**TABLE 5 – WAS THE NURSE EDUCATOR RECRUITED FOR ANOTHER POSITION?**

	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Recruited	33	28.2%
Not Recruited	75	64.1%
Missing	9	7.7%
Total	117	

“ Been **supportive** of my professional goals; also could have **treated me with respect**. The director was very adversarial and **unkind** towards me. ”

Table 6 outlines where exiting nurse faculty accepted their new position. Of those who left with another job, 44 percent left their academic job for a direct-care nursing job and 16 percent left for an academic position at another institution. In OCN's 2015 study on nursing workforce churn, 20 percent of nurses who worked as educators in 2011 moved on to a different position by 2014, and of those 20 percent, 35 percent became a staff nurse, 12 percent became a nurse manager or supervisor, and 10 percent became a nurse consultant. Thus, because many nurse educators are also clinically educated, they appear more likely to abandon academia and pursue a direct care nursing when they are dissatisfied with their faculty appointments.

**TABLE 6 – WHERE DO NURSE EDUCATORS GO AFTER LEAVING FACULTY POSITION?**

	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Academic Institution	19	16.2%
Direct Care Nursing	52	44.4%
Other	37	31.6%
Missing	9	7.7%
Total	117	

“ While **money is not the only factor** for choosing a nursing position, it became a primary reason for leaving. While in academic nursing, I was working  $\approx$  60 hours per week to make ends meet. This **became unhealthy for life-work balance...**As a Master's prepared nurse; I was making the same as a newly graduated RN. Then of course, there are the immense student loans I took on to gain a Master's of Nursing. While working in academic nursing, I was **unable to keep up on the payments...** ”

## WHEN DO NURSE FACULTY LEAVE THEIR POSITIONS?

It is more likely for a nurse educator to leave within five years in a particular program, and to be teaching for five or fewer years (Table 7). Very few nurse educators left their positions after 10 years of either being at the school or total teaching experience (Tables 7 and 8). Respondents noted “lack of mentoring” as one of the main reasons why they left their positions, indicating additional mentoring, particularly in the beginning of their nursing education career, could retain nurse educators longer.

**TABLE 7 – HOW LONG WERE NURSE EDUCATORS AT INSTITUTION BEFORE LEAVING**

	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>
<11 Months	37	18.0%
1-5 Years	114	55.3%
6-10 Years	27	13.1%
11-15 Years	8	3.9%
15+ Years	13	6.3%
Missing	7	3.4%
Total	206	

**TABLE 8 – HOW LONG WERE NURSE EDUCATORS TEACHING OVERALL BEFORE LEAVING**

	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>
<11 Months	22	10.7%
1-5 Years	94	45.6%
6-10 Years	42	20.4%
11-15 years	17	8.3%
15+ Years	24	11.7%
Missing	7	3.4%
Total	206	

## ARE ALL NURSE EDUCATORS LEAVING FOR SIMILAR REASONS?

As stated above, several demographic characteristics of nurse educators was also collected. These data indicate that respondents are similar to the population of nurse educators across the state in terms of gender, age, race/ethnicity, and by the type of faculty appointment (i.e., full-time vs. part-time, university vs. community college).

Additionally, this analysis attempted to determine if these issues differentially affect specific sub-groups of nurse educators. That is, are one group or groups of nursing affected to a greater degree than other groups? This analysis indicates that the issues leading nurse educators to leave their faculty appointments is systemic across the state. Nurse educators across all academic settings and demographic characteristics seem similarly affected. This is important because it suggests that any faculty retention strategies be adopted globally, and not to focus on specific sub-populations of nurse educators, such as males or faculty at community colleges.



Higher wage **compensation vs. workload**. Including hours spent grading and lab time, salary was **less than half** of what I was making as an **hourly wage** working in the hospital.



# DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There is an ample literature outlining the many challenges of recruiting qualified nurse educators, that include noncompetitive salaries to those in clinical practice settings, the high cost of advanced education, dissatisfaction with academic workloads, and limited funding and resources necessary to expand the number of nurse faculty positions.

As can be seen from the results of this survey, principally Tables 2 and 3, the same factors that inhibit recruitment also are at play in the retention of nurse educators. These findings show that low pay and unrealistic workloads lead to many nurse educators leaving academia, many for clinical positions.

In light of these findings, the Nurse Faculty Task Force developed a series of recommendations that could increase retention, and thereby the availability of qualified nurse educators.

- Educate the legislature and the public about benefits of loan repayment and tax credit programs for nurse educators.
- Develop or compile orientation programs for new nurse faculty to help them align their expectations with the realities of the job (see also, Baker, 2010)
- Assess nurse faculty workload and develop reasonable workload policy for use at all schools. Provide individual guidance to help faculty control workloads.
- Develop and implement professional development programs that includes coaching/mentoring for new faculty, educating deans and directors about the importance of such programs, and highlighting leadership opportunities.
- Orient university/college leadership about how nursing programs operate and educate students.
- Create new positions to deal with common tasks, such as assessments and evaluations; reducing work for chair/director and full-time faculty.

Oregon nurse faculty consistently express dissatisfaction with their pay and workloads. Significant demands often fall on nurse educators, as many have responsibilities in addition to teaching, such as curriculum development, committee work, writing grants, conducting research, publishing and advising

students. Additionally, the salaries of nurse educators are typically much lower than that of their colleagues in clinical practice settings. Efforts to improve the effects of these issues could greatly increase the ability of nursing programs to retain nurse educators. Because of the close tie between nursing education and adequate, high quality nurses in direct care practice, the recruitment and retention of high caliber nurse educators is paramount.

“**Appreciate me and my clinical experience!!**”

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