



WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

A retrospective analysis of the current employment status of registered nurses newly licensed to practice in Oregon

Beth A. Morris, MPH

Background

To practice in the U.S., registered nurses (RN) are required to hold an active, state-issued license. Oregon licensure occurs through one of two processes: examination or endorsement. Nurses licensed by examination have typically just finished a pre-licensure nursing education program, have not held a nursing license or worked as an RN in any state, and are being licensed for the first time. Nurses who have previously been licensed and practicing elsewhere can obtain licensure by endorsement. Nurse practitioners (NP) are registered nurses who, in addition to RN licensure, have met the requirements for advanced practice certification as an NP.

Over the past five years, an average 4,000 registered nurses were newly licensed to practice in Oregon annually. Approximately 40 percent were new to the profession (RN by examination) and 60 percent were experienced nurses (RN by endorsement).¹ Precise counts of registered nurses receiving advanced practice certification as a nurse practitioner each year were not available for this publication but can be approximated to number somewhere in the low hundreds.^{2,3,4}

The career patterns of registered nurses have long been a topic of conversation and concern. Movement of nurses in and out of the workforce can be expensive for employers who must invest time and resources to recruit and train nursing staff, and may lead to decreased morale among remaining staff, disrupt continuity of care, and have a negative impact on patient satisfaction and patient safety.⁵ A study of turnover in the health care sector found that registered nurses had a median tenure of only 1.4 years compared to a tenure of 4.4 years among other wage and salary workers.⁶ A recent survey of RNs new to the profession found nearly one-fifth left their first nursing job within one year and one-third had left within two years.⁷ RNs working as travel nurses who may leave the state once their assignments end can also contribute to instability within the labor force.

To date, workforce data collected as part of the licensure process administered by the Oregon State Board of Nursing has been used to describe Oregon's nurse workforce in a discrete fashion.^{2,3,4} Unfortunately, insights gained from this type of analysis are limited, because the characteristics of the workforce are largely inflexible from year to year. What we know about the registered nurse workforce has held true for some time: nurses are getting older, are predominantly female, primarily work in hospitals and clinics, and tend to work in urban areas.

The analysis was not entered into with a priori hypotheses or a goal of generating evidence to support a pre-defined policy position. The intent was to take greater advantage of the existing data to develop an understanding of the career paths of nurses newly licensed by the state. By linking existing datasets collected at different points in time, this study was able to pinpoint the career patterns of nurses new to Oregon's workforce.

Terminology

Registered nurses (RN) newly licensed to practice in Oregon: The following RN cohorts were examined:

Registered nurses (RN) newly licensed by exam: RNs who obtained Oregon licensure by examination in 2010 or 2011. These are nurses who have typically just finished a pre-licensure nursing education program, have not held a nursing license or worked as an RN in any state, and are licensed for the first time.

Registered nurses (RN) newly licensed by endorsement: RNs who obtained Oregon licensure by endorsement in 2010 or 2011. These are nurses who had previously been licensed and practicing elsewhere.

Registered nurses (RN) newly certified as a nurse practitioner (NP): Registered nurses certified to practice as a NP in Oregon in 2010 or 2011. Oregon RN licensure may have occurred prior to or concurrent with NP certification.

This term is not synonymous with “newly licensed RN” which is often used in the literature to refer exclusively to RNs licensed by exam. The focus of this study is RNs and NPs licensed to practice in Oregon in 2010 or 2011 regardless of prior professional experience.

Nurses practicing in Oregon / Oregon nurses: Nurses licensed by the Oregon State Board of Nursing who reported they practice in Oregon.

Current status: Status of nurses as of 12/31/2014 based on the most recent Oregon State Board of Nursing licensee data and self-reported employment status provided at license renewal.

Geographic region: Counties were categorized into regional county clusters for analytical purposes as follows:

Central: Crook, Deschutes, Jefferson

Eastern: Baker, Grant, Harney, Malheur, Morrow, Umatilla, Union, Wallowa

Gorge: Gilliam, Hood River, Sherman, Wasco, Wheeler

Mid Willamette Valley: Marion, Polk, Yamhill

North Coast: Clatsop, Columbia, Tillamook

Portland Metro: Clackamas, Washington, Multnomah

South Willamette Valley: Benton, Lane, Lincoln, Linn

Southern/Central (Klamath Basin): Klamath, Lake

Southwest: Coos, Curry, Douglas, Jackson, Josephine

Analysis

Data collected as part of the nurse licensing process administered by the Oregon State Board of Nursing were used to look at three cohorts of registered nurses licensed to practice in Oregon in 2010 or 2011 to assess their current status as of 12/31/2014. Demographic data were collected as part of the initial licensure process. Workforce data, including employment status, practice setting, position, practice location, and intention to leave nursing, were collected at time of license renewal using a bi-annual rolling renewal cycle according to the licensee's date of birth. These data were self-reported. Licensees for whom status as a nurse in Oregon was unknown in 2014 were excluded from the cohort.

Data for nurses licensed to practice in Oregon in 2010 or 2011 were collected during calendar years 2010 and 2011. Data regarding current status were collected during calendar years 2013 and 2014 and is assumed to represent their status as of 12/31/2014.

Cohorts examined were:

- Registered nurses newly licensed in Oregon by exam
- Registered nurses newly licensed in Oregon by endorsement
- Registered nurses newly certified in Oregon as a nurse practitioner

Current status was assessed by assigning one of the following classifications to each licensee based on his/her status as of 12/31/2014:

- An Oregon nurse
- Not an Oregon nurse
 - No longer licensed in Oregon
 - Licensed in Oregon but practicing elsewhere
 - Licensed in Oregon but not practicing
 - Licensed in Oregon but unemployed – seeking a nursing position

Within each cohort, current status among those classified as an Oregon nurse was further examined by:

- Practice area
- Position
- Practice setting
- Geographic region

Proportions within each practice area, position, setting, and geographic region were compared to those seen in Oregon's overall nurse workforce (Oregon RNs for the two RN cohorts and Oregon NPs for the NP cohort) to determine where differences exist.

Discoveries

The diagram below summarizes what was discovered about the career paths of nurses newly licensed to practice in Oregon who were working in the state at follow up. Proportions within each practice area, position, setting, and geographic region were compared to those seen in Oregon’s overall nurse workforce². Results are presented separately for each of the three nurse cohorts examined.

The current status and distribution of new licensees across practice areas, positions, settings, and geographic regions are presented on the pages that follow.

CAREER PATTERNS AMONG OREGON NURSES NEWLY LICENSED TO PRACTICE IN THE STATE IN 2010/2011 AS COMPARED TO OREGON’S NURSE WORKFORCE OVERALL

	Registered Nurses Newly Licensed by Exam				Registered Nurses Newly Licensed by Endorsement				Registered Nurses Newly Certified as a Nurse Practitioner			
	<u>Practice Area</u>	<u>Position</u>	<u>Setting</u>	<u>Geographic Region</u>	<u>Practice Area</u>	<u>Position</u>	<u>Setting</u>	<u>Geographic Region</u>	<u>Practice Area</u>	<u>Position</u>	<u>Setting</u>	<u>Geographic Region</u>
MORE LIKELY TO PRACTICE...	Medical/Surgical	Staff nurse	SNF/Long term care	Mid Willamette Valley	Critical care/ICU/CCU	No differences	No differences	Portland Metro	No differences	NP-not Primary Care	No differences	Eastern
	Psychiatric/Mental health		Residential care		Pediatrics							
	Geriatrics											
	Long Term Care											
LESS LIKELY TO PRACTICE...	Surgery/Recovery	Nurse Manager/Supervisor	No differences	Portland Metro	No differences	No differences	No differences	South Willamette Valley	No differences	NP-Primary Care	No differences	No differences
	OB/Gyn/Women's health							South/Central				
	Pediatrics							Southw est				
	p<.01				p<.01				p<.10			

Current Status of Nurses Licensed to Practice in Oregon in 2010 or 2011

Current Status (2014) – Overall

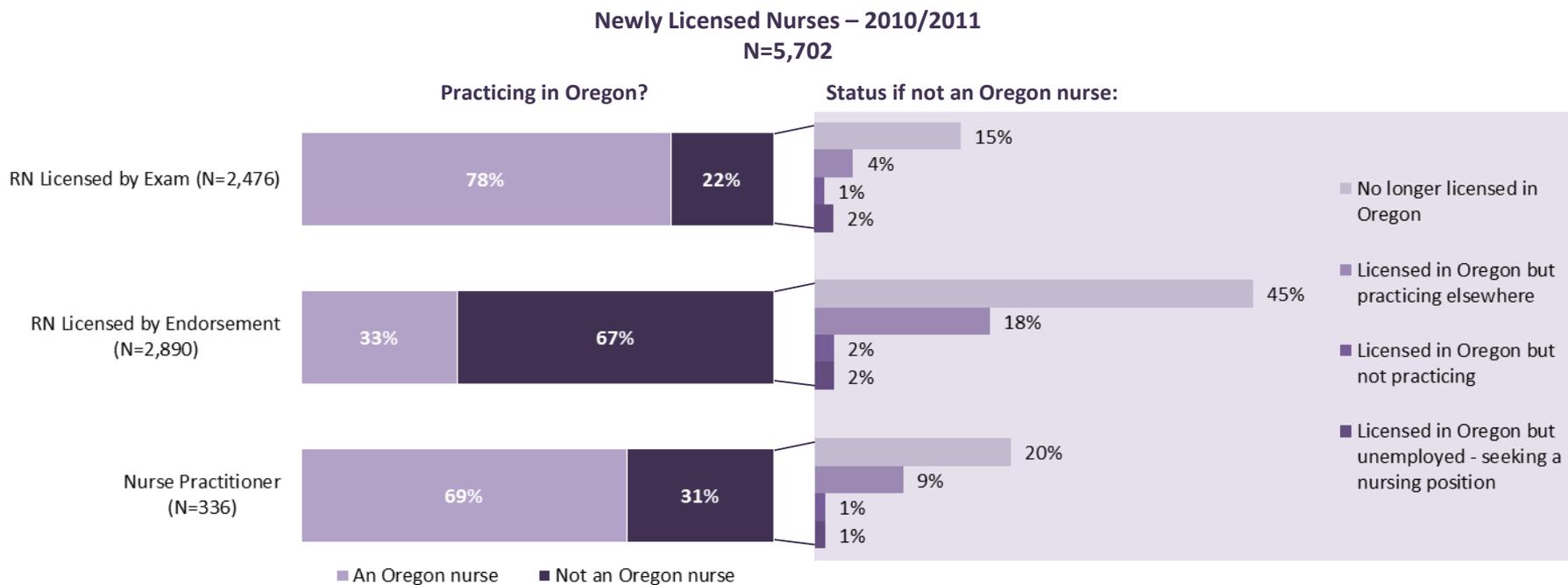
Of the registered nurses (RNs and NPs) newly licensed in Oregon examined here, just over one-half (55 percent) were practicing in the state at follow up.

Eight of 10 (78 percent) RNs licensed by exam were working as an Oregon RN at follow up.

Three of 10 (33 percent) RNs licensed by endorsement were working as an Oregon RN at follow up. This is likely due to a large number of traveling nurses who obtain Oregon licensure for temporary assignments in the state.

Seven of 10 (73 percent) RNs certified as a nurse practitioner were working as a NP in Oregon at follow up.

Results are shown below. The status of nurses no longer practicing in Oregon at follow up is shown to the right.

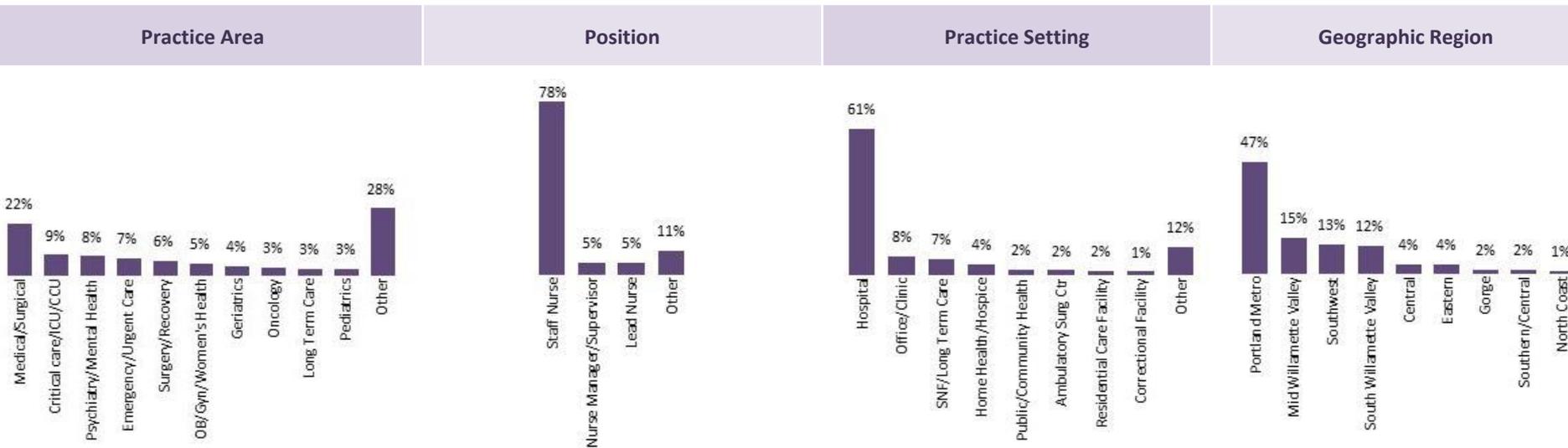


RNs Licensed by Exam

Current Status (2014)

Among the cohort of registered nurses newly licensed by exam in Oregon in 2010 or 2011, 8 of 10 (78 percent) were working as an Oregon RN at follow up. Their distribution within practice area, position, practice setting, and geographic region is illustrated below. One of 5 reported a practice area of medical/surgical. Four of 5 are working as a staff nurse, and 3 of five work in a hospital setting. The vast majority (87 percent) practice in regions encompassing the I-5 corridor. About one-half practice in the Portland Metro region.

Oregon RNs Newly Licensed by Exam – 2010/2011
N=1,937



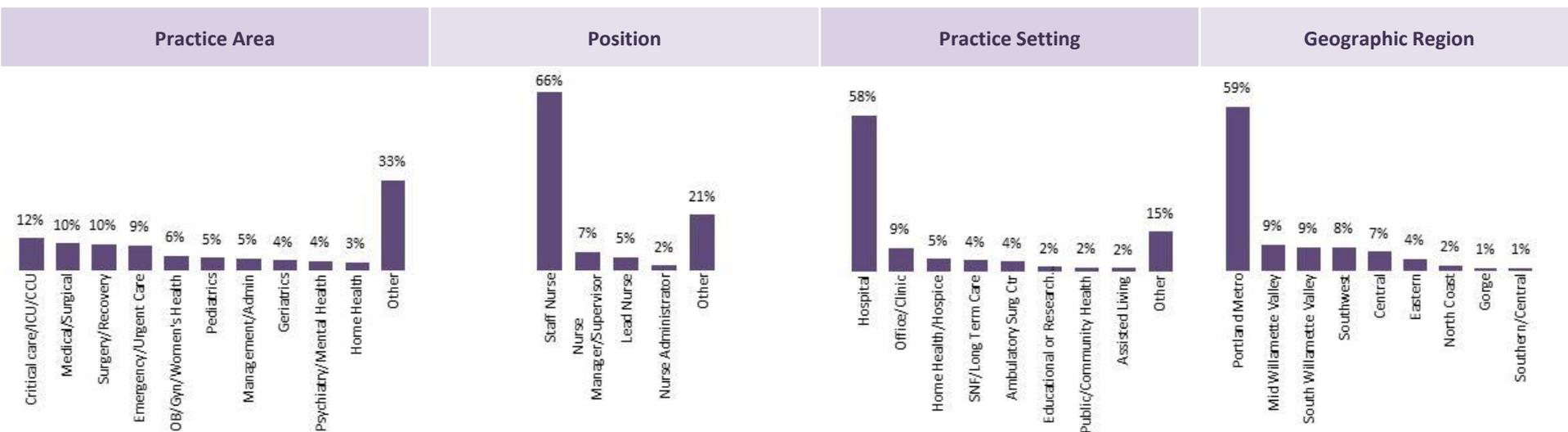
Note: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

RNs Licensed by Endorsement

Current Status (2014)

Among the cohort of registered nurses newly licensed by endorsement in Oregon in 2010 or 2011, three of 10 (33 percent) were working as an Oregon RN at follow up. Their distribution within practice area, position, practice setting, and geographic region is illustrated below. There is considerable diversity across practice areas. Most (66 percent) work as a staff nurse, and nearly 3 of 5 work in a hospital setting. The vast majority (85 percent) practice in regions encompassing the I-5 corridor. Six of 10 practice in the Portland Metro region.

Oregon RNs Newly Licensed by Endorsement – 2010/2011
N=959



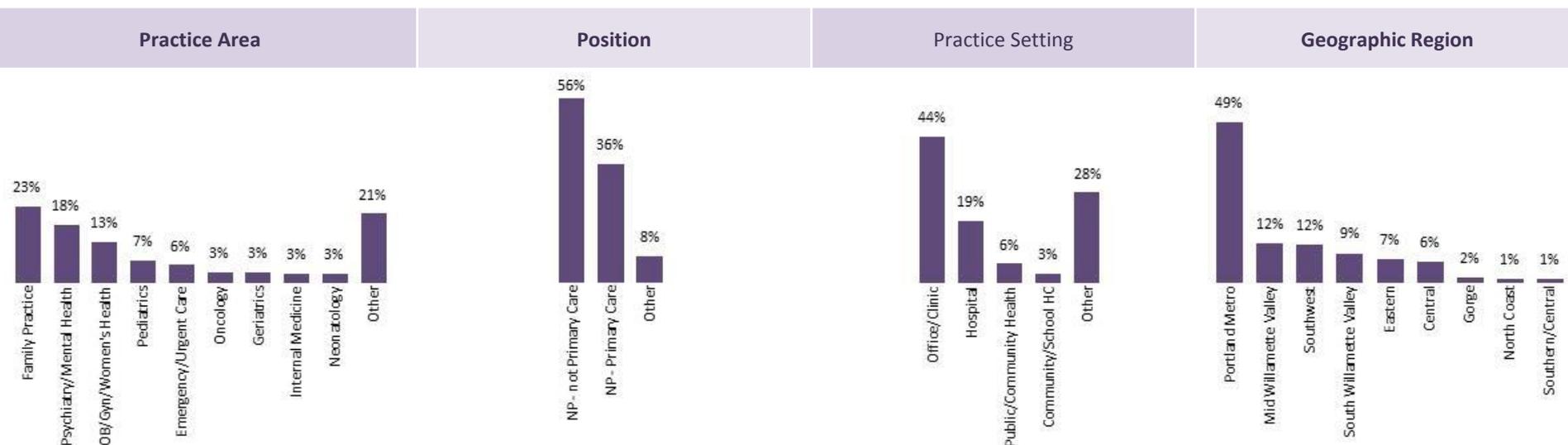
Note: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Nurse Practitioners

Current Status (2014)

Among the cohort of nurse practitioners newly licensed in Oregon in 2010 or 2011, seven of 10 (73 percent) were working as an NP in Oregon at follow up. Their distribution within practice area, position, practice setting, and geographic region is illustrated below. The top three practice areas—family practice, psychiatry/mental health, and obstetrics/gynecology/women’s health—account for slightly more than one-half of Oregon’s newly certified NP workforce. About one-third work in a primary care-focused position. Forty-four percent report they work in an office/clinic. The vast majority (82 percent) practice in regions encompassing the I-5 corridor. Five of 10 practice in the Portland Metro region.

Oregon RNs Newly Certified as a Nurse Practitioner – 2010/2011
N=232



Note: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

References

1. Data provided upon request by the Oregon State Board of Nursing, provided upon request. (2015).
2. Oregon Health Authority. (2015). *Oregon Health Professions: Occupational and County Profiles-2014*. Portland, OR: Oregon Health Authority. Retrieved from <https://apps.state.or.us/Forms/Served/le8120.pdf>
3. Oregon Health Authority. (2011). *Oregon Health Professions: Occupational and County Profiles-2010*. Portland, OR: Oregon Health Authority. Retrieved from <http://oregoncenterfornursing.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/2011-Oregon-Health-Professions-Profiles.pdf>
4. Oregon Health Authority. (2013). *Oregon Health Professions: Occupational and County Profiles-2012*. Portland, OR: Oregon Health Authority. Retrieved from <http://oregoncenterfornursing.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/2013-Oregon-Health-Occupation-Profiles-Report.pdf>
5. Duffield C, Roche M, O'Brien-Pallas L, Catling-Paull C. (2009). *Implications of staff 'churn' for nurse managers, staff, and patients*. *Nurs Econ*, 27(2), 103-10.
6. CareerBuilder. (2011). *Turnover: How to cure the retention problems ailing your health care organization*. Retrieved from <http://www.careerbuildercommunications.com/pdf/turnoverrx-whitepaper.pdf>
7. Kovner, C., Brewer, C., Fatehi, F., Katigbak, C. (2014). *Changing trends in newly licensed RNs*. *AJN*, 114(2), 26-34.



About the author: Beth A. Morris, MPH, is a health services research consultant with a primary focus on survey methodology, data management, and statistical analysis. Her principal areas of interest are health workforce research and health care quality improvement. Contact Beth at morrisbetha@gmail.com.

Suggested Citation: Morris, B. (2015). *Where are they now? A retrospective analysis of the current employment status of registered nurses newly licensed to practice in Oregon*. Portland, Oregon: Oregon Center for Nursing.

Oregon Center for Nursing
5000 N Willamette Blvd, MSC 192
Portland, OR 97203

503-305-4732
ocnadmin@up.edu
oregoncenterfornursing.org