

2011 – 2012 California New Graduate Hiring Survey

January 2013

The difficulty for newly graduated RNs to find employment has been a concern, and continues to remain a pressing workforce issue for the third consecutive year in California. After several years of investing in building the workforce and increasing nursing program educational capacity, the current economy continues to impact hiring in the short term, threatening to undermine the progress that has been made. This is occurring as the nursing workforce continues to age, the state's population ages and grows, and changes resulting from health reform are anticipated. These factors will dramatically escalate the demand for nursing care in the near future, and California will again face a significant nursing shortage.

To better understand the employment experience of newly licensed RNs, a third annual statewide survey was conducted in fall 2012 through the efforts of the California Institute for Nursing & Health Care (CINHC), the California Board of Registered Nursing (BRN), the Association of California Nurse Leaders (ACNL), the California Student Nurses Association (CSNA), and the UCLA School of Nursing with funding provided by Kaiser Permanente Northern California.

Design and Sample: A random selection of 5,147 (50%) out of the 10,294 nurses who were newly licensed by exam in California from September 2011 through August 2012 were invited to voluntarily participate in the survey. Each received a letter from the BRN in October 2012 requesting them to complete an on-line survey. No personal identification information was gathered and all results reported were aggregated. A total of 1,219 responses were received for a 24% survey response rate overall.

Results

Respondent Profile:

- 88% graduated from nursing schools in California, with 11% graduating from other states, and 1% graduating from another country. All were newly licensed as an RN in California between September 2011 and August 2012. Peak months of graduation were reported as anticipated in either December 2011 (26%) or May 2012 (43%).
 - 42.5% graduated in 2011, and 57.5% graduated in 2012
 - 13.2% were licensed in California in 2011, and 86.8% licensed in 2012
- The sample reflects 51.2% of the respondents had associate degrees, 44.2% baccalaureate, and 3.4% were masters prepared. (1.3% of respondents indicated "other" degree) The percent responding differs somewhat from the 2010-2011 prior year BRN annual school report of actual distribution of new graduates by type of degree in the state with 11% fewer responses from associate degree graduates 13% more responses from baccalaureate degree graduates, and 3.3% more responses from master's degree graduates.
- 26% of respondents live in the Los Angeles/Ventura area; 19% in the San Francisco Bay area; 16% in Orange /Riverside and San Bernardino counties; 11% in Northern California; 11% in the San Diego/Imperial county area; 7% in the San Joaquin Valley; 5% in the Greater Sacramento area; 2% in the Central Coast and 2% in the Northern Sacramento Valley. Responses from nurses residing in these regions are felt to be comparable to the distribution of nursing schools within each area. As the Los Angeles/Ventura and San Francisco Bay Areas have the highest number of new graduates in the state, it is noted that the statewide survey results also predominantly reflect these regions.
- The majority of respondents or 36% were between the ages of 25-30; 26% were less than 25 years of age; 14% were between 31-35 years of age; 10% age 36-40; 7% age 41-45; 5% age 46-50, and 3% over 50 years old indicating that the entry into practice age is consistent with the national trend of nursing as a younger, career oriented profession.

- The majority of survey respondents were White, non-Hispanic (53%) followed by 16% Asian/non-Filipino, 14% Hispanic, 14% Filipino, 5% Black/African American, and 1% Native American. 84% of respondents were female, and 16% male.

Work/RN Job Experience:

- 54% of respondents are working in their first job as a registered nurse with 46% not yet working as a registered nurse. These results indicate fewer newly licensed nurses are working as compared to each of the two prior year sample survey findings which found 57% working. While the data indicates a 3% reduction in employment from the prior two years, some sample variation may be influenced by regional differences in the number of responses and other contributing variables, concluding that the employment picture may have declined slightly, or has at least not improved.
- Data indicates 53% (N=621) of ADN nurses report working in their first RN job, 55% (N=536) of BSN nurses, and 59% (N=41) of nurses graduating from an Entry Level Masters Degree program. While the survey indicates a slightly greater percent of BSN graduates are working compared to ADN nurses, when these percents are applied to the new graduate nursing population in California overall, it is noted that a larger absolute number of ADN graduates are working, consistent with the statewide distribution of new graduates by type of program overall.
- Of the respondents who are currently working as nurses, 66% are working in an acute care hospital; with the remainder working in long term care/skilled/post acute nursing facilities (11%), home health or hospice (4%), community clinic or public health (4%), behavioral health (2%), and corrections (1%). Employment in “other” settings was reported by 13% of respondents in specific and varied settings. While the pattern of employment setting distribution is comparable to prior years, a 4% increase in acute care hospital employment is noted.
- The majority of those working as an RN are working full-time (76%), with 15% working part time, and 9% working in occasional positions, per diem, or on call.
- 65% of respondents indicated they were working in a “job of choice”
- When employed nurses were asked how long it took to find their first nursing job, 53% of respondents indicated less than three months; 27% responded that it took 3-6 months to find their first nursing job, 13% indicated taking 6-9 months, 4% taking 9-12 months, with 2% taking greater than 12 months. This data indicates that 13% more nurses found employment within 3 months of licensure as compared to 40% who were employed within 3 months in the prior survey year.
- Jobs were found in a variety of ways with the most frequently reported: 22% used a hospital or health facility website; 17% had clinical experience at the health facility where they were hired, 14% indicated that they knew someone at the hospital or health facility where they eventually went to work, 12% were referred, and <1% were hired through a job fair. (Note: more than one category could be selected).
- Among respondents (N=652) who indicated that they were not working as an RN, 14% had been looking for less than 3 months, 44% had been looking for a RN position 3-6 months; 23% had been looking, 6-9 months; 11% for 9-12 months and 8% had been looking for longer than 12 months.

Reasons for Difficulty in Finding Employment and Attitudes Regarding Internships:

- The reasons given for not finding a job included no experience (92%), no positions available (55%), or their work experience was not applicable (30 %). 35% were told a BSN degree was preferred or required, and 7% were told they were out of school too long.
- Data from respondents not yet working as an RN indicated 23% are working in non nursing/non healthcare jobs (17% working part time, and 6% full time). 18% indicated they were working in a health care job but not as a RN, 15% are continuing their education, and 13% indicated they were volunteering in a health related service. 31% of respondents also indicated “other” with 312 open ended narrative responses submitted to describe what they were doing while looking for RN employment. While these open ended responses are not able to be accurately quantified, typical categories reported with the greatest frequency and often being done in combination included: volunteering, continuing their nursing education to obtain a BSN, MSN or Advanced Practice degree, taking CE courses to increase skills, working in a temporary RN role or position, working in the healthcare field but not as an RN, working in a non health care job – often continuing in a prior job, working as an LVN, and participating in an RN Transition program or unpaid internship.

Interest in transition to practice (internship) program

- Respondents were asked about their level of interest in participating in a “transition to practice or new graduate residency program (internship) following graduation and prior to being hired”. Data indicates:
 - Interest in a program as an unpaid internship (75%)
 - Interest in a program if payment of tuition was required (43%)
 - Interest in a program if it provided an opportunity to work in non-acute health care facility (64%)
- 20% of respondents (N=201) indicated they had participated in a transition to practice or new graduate residency program (internship) following graduation and prior to being hired with a majority of these (70%) also indicating the program helped them to gain employment.
- Incentives to participate in such a new graduate program included:
 - Opportunity to gain experience as a licensed RN (94%)
 - Opportunity to increase skills, competencies, and confidence (90%)
 - Improving resume (82%)
 - Obtaining college credit applicable to BSN or MSN degree (57%)
 - Deferment of student loans (50%)

Statewide Survey Summary

(Note: Survey results sorted by region are also available on the California Institute for Nursing & Health Care website www.cimhc.org)

This survey was a snapshot of the hiring dilemma new RN graduates are facing in California and these findings are a resource for nurse leaders seeking innovative ways to support nurses in maintaining and advance their competencies until jobs can be found, or by considering employment strategies to hire more recently graduated nurses. A possible concern in interpreting these results is noted related to the low survey response rate (24%) as it may not be representative of all newly licensed graduates. Nurses who have not found employment may also have been more likely to answer the survey, and if so, the actual employment rate may be higher than reported.

The results reflect the demographics of new graduates from the annual BRN school survey and their regional distribution, and also mirror data from prior employer surveys of nurses. In 2009 a survey conducted by CINHC and the Hospital Association of Southern California (HASC) forecasted that 40% of new graduates may not be able to find future employment in California hospitals because of a lack of available positions, and annual surveys of Nurse Employers in California conducted by the University of California San Francisco each fall since 2010 have also indicated up to 50% of new graduates may not find employment in hospital settings.

The prior two annual surveys of new graduates in California completed in fall 2010 and 2011 indicated that 42% were not yet employed. Data from this current survey indicate a slight decline in the employment rate of newly licensed RNs compared to each of the prior two years. New graduate employment data has also been collected annually since 2008 by the National Student Nurses' Association (NSNA). Their fall 2011 survey of members indicated 54% of nurses were employed approximately four months following graduation. When this national employment data was broken down by region, a range of 55% to 72% was reported with the Western region having the lowest employment rate of 55%, and employment in California specifically reported to be 47%. (Mancino, D. (2011) Inaction is Not an Option. Dean's Notes, 33 (1), 1-3)

California needs to retain newly licensed RNs engaged in the nursing workforce as they are a critical resource for ensuring the state has the supply of nurses to provide care to the people of California. The California Employment Development Department (EDD) forecasts approximately 10,500 new nurses are needed annually for population growth and replacement of nurses who retire or leave the state through 2018. California had 10,666 new graduates in 2011 indicating that workforce demand and pipeline supply are in balance. It is evident from the survey that newly licensed nurses are working hard to obtain employment, often working a combination of temporary or part time jobs, and considering options outside

traditional hospital settings. As the economy improves and the expected exodus of experienced nurses occurs, the demand for new nurses will dramatically increase. This trend will be further impacted by the increased demand resulting from health care reform. Hospitals have historically been the largest employer of nurses and new graduates, with hospital vacancy rates in California reported to be 3.9% in the 3rd quarter of 2012. Nurse leaders from both academia and service must continue to share best practices and innovative strategies to ensure that new RNs maintain and gain essential competencies needed during this temporary employment hiring lull. The nurse shortage is not over.

This current survey also indicates the use of unpaid internships has been an effective way to maintain newly licensed RN engagement in the work force, providing opportunities to increase skills and competencies, while seeking employment. Community-based RN Transition Programs conducted by schools of nursing in partnership with service partners have been successful in providing additional education and clinical experience to newly licensed nurses in the state, with 26 schools of nursing now having conducted one or more programs for over 900 newly licensed RNs over the past 3 years. Preliminary hiring results from these programs indicate that over 85% of participants have obtained jobs as RNs.

The research team wishes to thank all of the new graduates who took time to share their hiring experiences with us. These results will be shared with nursing leaders and others concerned about the difficulty new graduates are having finding RN jobs and instrumental in informing strategies which support and improve the employment of newly licensed nurses.

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