

## **2010 – 2011 California New Graduate Hiring Survey**

**February 2012**

The difficulty of newly graduated RNs to find employment remains a pressing workforce issue 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 statewide survey was conducted in fall 2011 through the efforts of the California Institute for Nursing & Health Care (CINHC), the California Board of Registered Nursing (BRN), California Student Nurses Association (CSNA), Association of California Nurse Leaders (ACNL), and the UCLA School of Nursing.

**Design and Sample:** A random selection of 7,890 (50%) out of the 15,780 nurses who were newly licensed by exam in California from April 2010 through August 2011 were invited to voluntarily participate in the survey. Each received a letter from the BRN in October 2011 inviting them to access and complete an on-line survey. No personal information was gathered and the all results reported were aggregated. We received 1,492 responses for a 19% survey response rate overall.

### **Results:**

#### **Respondent Profile:**

- 91% graduated from nursing schools in California from April 2010 through August of 2011.
  - 58% graduated in 2010, and 42% graduated in 2011
- The sample reflects 57% of respondents had associate degrees, 40% bachelors, and 3% were masters prepared. The percent responding differs from the actual distribution of new graduates in the state with 10% fewer responses from associate degree graduates 13% more responses from bachelors degree graduates, and 3% fewer responses from masters degree graduates compared to the distribution of new graduates in the state
- 27% of respondents live in the San Francisco Bay area; 24% in the Los Angeles/Ventura area; 15% in Orange /Riverside and San Bernardino counties; 10% in the San Diego area, 7% in the San Joaquin Valley, 6% in the greater Sacramento area, and smaller numbers represented from other regions of the state. This data reflects a greater percentage of newly licensed nurses responded to the survey from the San Francisco Bay area compared to the percent of new graduates in the region (21% new graduates), and a smaller percentage responded from the Los Angeles/Ventura area compared to new graduates in the region (30% new graduates). Responses from other regions are more comparable to the percent of newly licensed nurses residing in each area. As the San Francisco Bay Area and the Los Angeles/Ventura areas have the highest number of new graduates in the state, it is noted that the statewide survey results also reflect this misdistribution.
- 36% of respondents were between the ages of 25-30; 21% were less than 25 years of age, and 16% were between 31-35 years of age, indicating that the entry into practice is consistent with the national trend of nursing as a younger, career oriented profession.
- The majority of survey respondents were White, non-Hispanic (49%) followed by 16% Filipino, 13% Asian/non Filipino, 13% Hispanic, 4% Black/African American, and <1% Native American. A greater number of White, non-Hispanic (5% more) and Filipino (4% more) nurses responded to the survey compared to the actual distribution of new graduates in California, and fewer Asian (4% less) Hispanic (4% less), and Black/African American (2% less) new graduates responded.
- 87% of respondents were female, and 13% male.

#### Work/RN Job Experience:

- 57% of respondents are working in their first job as a registered nurse and 43% are not working as a registered nurse. These results are comparable to prior year survey findings for January 2009-March 2010 graduates.
- Data indicates 54% (N=458) of ADN nurses report working in their first RN job, 62% (N=364) of BSN nurses, and 60% (N=22) of nurses graduating from an ELM program. While the survey indicates a greater percent of BSN graduates are working, a larger number of ADN graduates report having been hired, reflecting the statewide distribution by type of program overall.
- Of the respondents who are currently working as nurses, 62% are working in an acute care hospital; the remainder working in long term care/skilled nursing facility (13%), home health or hospice (5%), community clinic or public health (4%), behavioral health (1%), and corrections (1%).
- The majority of those working as an RN are working full-time (77%), with 14% working part time, and 9% working on call.
- 62% of respondents indicated they were working in a “job of choice”
- When asked how long it took to find their first nursing job, 40% of respondents indicated less than three months ; 30% responded that it took 3-6 months to find their first nursing job, 15% indicated taking 6-9 months, 10% taking 9-12 months, with 6% taking greater than 12 months.
- Jobs were found in a variety of ways: 32% indicated that they knew someone at the hospital or health facility where they eventually went to work; 30% indicated that they used the hospital or health facility Website; 23% had a referral; 19% had clinical experience at the health facility where they were hired; 18% responded that they had previous employment at the hospital or health facility in a non-RN position, and 3% were hired through a job fair. (some respondents indicated more than one answer)
- Among respondents who indicated that they were not working as an RN, 13% had been looking for less than 3 months, 39% had been looking for a RN position 3-6 months, 18% had been looking 6-9 months, 14% had been looking for 9-12 months, and 15% had been looking for longer than 12 months.

#### Reasons for Difficulty in Finding Employment and Internship Attitudes:

- The reasons that were given for not finding a job were either no experience (92%) or no positions available (54%). 42% were told a BSN degree was preferred or required, and 6% were told they were out of school too long.
- Data from those not yet working as an RN indicated that 28% are working in non nursing jobs with 21% working part-time, and 7% working full time. 12% indicated working in a health care job as a non RN, and 13% indicated they were volunteering in a health related service. 47% of respondents indicated “other” options with narrative explanations written in. While these open ended responses are not able to be quantified, the most frequent categories indicated new graduates were working as RNs in short term, temporary or on-call jobs, several of which were in seasonal and non acute care settings such as a flu clinic. The next most frequent entry was volunteering, followed by those continuing to work in prior non health care jobs, those continuing in school for a BSN or MSN degree, and those continuing to work as an LVN.
- When asked about interest in participating in a non-paying internship, the majority of respondents (80%) indicated they would be interested.
- The opportunity to increase skills and competencies was the overwhelming incentive to participate in an internship as indicated by 95% of the respondents. Other incentives reported were:
  - Exposure to employers (91%)
  - Improving ones resume (86%)
  - Obtaining college credit applicable to BSN or MSN degree (58%)
  - Deferment of student loans (42%)
- 80% would be willing to participate in an unpaid internship and 43% would be willing to pay a tuition fee to participate.
- 76% indicated that if given the opportunity to work in a non-acute health care facility they would consider this opportunity.

This survey was a snapshot of the hiring dilemma new RN graduates are facing in California and its findings are a resource for nurse leaders seeking creative ways to employ recently graduated nurses. The

low response rate (19%) is a possible concern and the results should be interpreted with caution as representative of all newly licensed graduates. Nurses who have not found employment may 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 its regional distribution, with some over responding from the SF Bay Area. The results also mirror data from prior employer surveys of nurses. In 2009 a survey conducted by CINHC and the Hospital Association of Southern California (HASC) indicated that 40% of new graduates may not be able to find jobs in California hospitals because of a lack of available positions, and the Survey of Nurse Employers in California conducted by the University of California San Francisco in fall 2010 also indicating up to 50% of new graduates may not find employment in hospital settings.

The first survey of new graduates completed in fall 2010 indicated that 42% were not yet employed. Data from this most recent survey indicate no change in the employment rate of newly licensed RNs who responded to the survey from the prior year. New graduate employment data has also been collected annually since 2008 by the National Student Nurses' Association (NSNA). Their fall 2011 survey of members indicates 54% of nurses were employed approximately four months following graduation which is a 10% increase in national employment from their prior year survey. 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 reported to be 47% .(Mancino, D. (2011) Inaction is Not an Option. Dean's Notes, 33 (1), 1-3)

California needs to keep newly licensed RNs engaged and in the nursing workforce as they are the critical resource for ensuring the state has the nurses to provide care to the people of California. 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 demand will be further impacted by the increased demand expected from health care reform. Hospitals have historically been the largest employer of nurses and new graduates, but hospital vacancy rates in California were reported to be only 3.7% in the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of 2011, indicating there were not many RN jobs available in hospitals. Nurse leaders from academia and service must begin to share best practices and innovative strategies to ensure that new RNs maintain and gain competencies during this temporary employment hiring lull, as the nurse shortage is not over.

This current survey also indicates that the use of unpaid internships may be a way to keep the newly licensed RN engaged in the work force, providing an opportunity to increase skills and competencies, while they seek 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 20 schools conducting programs for over 750 newly licensed RNs over the past 2 years. Preliminary hiring results from these programs indicated that well over 70% of participants found jobs as RNs.

The research team thanks all of the new graduates who took time to share their hiring experiences with us. These results will be shared with others concerned about the difficulty new graduates are having finding RN positions.

#### **Study Team:**

Louise Bailey, MEd, RN, Executive Officer, California Board of Registered Nursing

Suzette Cardin, DNSc, RN, FAAN, Assistant Dean, University of California Los Angeles School of Nursing and Principal Investigator for the survey

Deloras Jones, MS, RN, Executive Director California Institute for Nursing & Health Care

Patricia McFarland, MS, RN, FAAN, Executive Officer for Association of California Nurse Leaders and California Student Nurses Association

Carolyn Orłowski, MSN, RN, Southern California Regional Coordinator CINHC and Survey Project Lead

# **EMPLOYMENT CHALLENGES CONTINUE FOR NEW GRADUATE RNs IN CALIFORNIA**

## **TALKING POINTS**

*A statewide survey of new graduates was conducted in fall 2011 by CINHC in partnership with the BRN, ACNL, and UCLA. The survey was sent to a random selection of 7,890 RNs who were newly licensed in California over an 18 month period, between April 2011 and August 2012. Responses were received from 1,492 RNs for a response rate of 19%.*

### **Issues and Talking Points**

**1. *New graduate RNs recently licensed in California are having difficulty finding employment as nurses. This remains a pressing workforce issue as evidenced by the most recent survey data.***

- 43% of RNs newly licensed in California within the prior 18 month period are not yet employed as an RN. These most recent findings are consistent with the initial new graduate employment survey conducted in the prior fall of 2010 identifying 42% of new graduates were not employed at that time.
- The current employment picture is consistent with other data sources including the 2009 survey of hospital CNO's conducted by California Institute for Nursing & Health Care (CINHC) and the Hospital Association of Southern California (HASC) which indicated that 40% of new graduates may not be able to find jobs in California hospitals because of a lack of available positions, and the Survey of Nurse Employers in California conducted by the University of California San Francisco in fall 2010 which also indicated up to 50% of new graduates may not find employment in hospital settings.
- While 57% of RNs graduating within the prior 18 month period are employed as an RN, it is reported to be taking longer to find a job with 40% employed within three months, 30% in 3-6 months, 15% in 6-9 months, 10% in 9-12 months, and 6% greater than 12 months.
- A slightly greater percentage of ELM and BSN graduates have been hired compared to ADN graduates with 54% of ADN nurses working in their first RN job, 62% of BSN nurses, and 60% of nurses graduating from an ELM program.
- The demand for more nurses with a minimum of a Baccalaureate degree in nursing is a growing trend expressed by employers. 42% of new graduates who are not yet working indicate the lack of a Baccalaureate Degree to be a reason they are not yet employed.
- ADN graduates still comprise the largest *number* of newly licensed RNs in California with Community Colleges providing the majority of pre licensure programs and 60.4% of the pre licensure nursing graduates, resulting in a greater *number* of ADN RNs newly employed overall.
- Nurses newly licensed in California report working predominantly in acute care hospitals (62%); the remainder working in long term care/skilled nursing facilities

(13%), home health or hospice (5%), community clinics or public health (4%), behavioral health (1%), and corrections (1%).

**2. *After several years of investing in building the nursing workforce and increasing educational program capacity, the current economy continues to impact hiring in the short term, threatening to undermine the progress that has been made.***

- This trend is occurring as the current nursing workforce continues to age with large numbers of nurses anticipated to retire in the next few years as the economy improves.
- As the state's population ages and grows, and changes resulting from health reform are implemented, increased demand in health care is expected to escalate the need for nursing care in the near future.
- A majority of new graduates who are not yet employed indicated the reason to be no nursing experience (92%). Employers are giving hiring preferences to experienced nurses now seeking employment due to the economy and part time nurses working more hours.

**3. *Acute care hospitals have historically been the largest employer of nurses and of new graduate RNs, however demand is changing, with RN vacancy rates declining in the past two years, currently statewide at 3.7% (3<sup>rd</sup> qtr 2011).***

- Hospitals cite the cost of hiring new graduates and conducting new graduate residency programs in this time of economic downturn as being too costly when other options are available to them to fill nursing vacancies – options include hiring experienced nurses, part time staff working more hours, and utilizing long term travelers.
- As the economy improves and the expected exodus of experienced nurses occurs, the demand for new nurses will dramatically increase.
- This demand will be further impacted by the increased needs resulting from health care reform.
- Nurse leaders from academia and service must continue to share best practices and innovative strategies to ensure that new RNs remain engaged in the workforce, and maintain and advance competencies during this temporary employment hiring lull.

**4. *Significant progress has occurred to build California's nursing work force by increasing educational capacity over the past several years. Positioning the nursing workforce to meet future healthcare demand also includes strategies for advancing education and preparing the workforce for new roles and varied practice environments including community based care.***

- Employment opportunities are anticipated to grow in community based ambulatory and non- acute care settings as care continues to shift from hospitals and new demand from health care reform is realized.
- Pre licensure RN programs have historically prepared nurses for entry level positions predominantly in acute care settings. Future programs need to include a

broad scope of instruction so students gain experience in community based practice settings and more new graduates will be interested in and qualified for such roles.

- California continues to experience a strong increase in student enrollment in baccalaureate (37%) and entry level masters (85%) programs in the past 4 years. This trend is important to sustain and expand in order to position the nursing workforce for expanded roles and community based care.
- Options for a seamless transition from ADN to BSN and MSN education are increasing with universities and community colleges working together to develop academic pathways including California's Collaborative Model of Nursing Education (CMNE).

**5. *California needs to keep newly licensed RNs engaged in the nursing workforce as a critical resource to ensure the state has the nurses needed to provide care to the people of California. Concerns about new graduates not obtaining employment in the short term requires creative solutions, including:***

- Better understanding and communication of where nursing jobs are available, and the academic preparation needed to prepare new graduates for hiring.
- Replication of community based new graduate RN transition programs conducted by schools of nursing in partnership with employers to support new graduates to gain experience and advance competencies for their RN roles. Program expansion in partnership with additional health care employers from varied practice environments and specialties including non-acute care settings is important to prepare and provide nurses in emerging job markets.
- Structuring transition programs and residencies as pathways to potential employment through deliberate education and practice partnerships can provide a qualified workforce to fill needed vacancies.
- Conducting post graduate internships has been successful in providing additional education and clinical experience to newly licensed nurses in the state, with 20 schools conducting programs for over 750 newly licensed RNs over the past 2 years. Preliminary hiring results from these programs indicated that well over 70% of participants have obtained jobs as RNs.
- Evaluating the costs and outcomes of such programs, including options for sustainability involving new partnerships and programs, remains a priority for action.