FIT FOR THE FUTURE: AUSTRALIAN NURSES’ HEALTH STATUS AND HEALTH BEHAVIOURS

Lin Perry, Christine Duffield, Robyn Gallagher, David Sibbritt and partner NSWNMA
WHO CARES FOR THE CARERS?
WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT NURSES’ HEALTH

• Lots about nurses as a female population group (US Nurses Health Study)
• Some studies of student nurses
• Quite a lot about nurses’ job stress, burn-out and coping
• A scatter of single-site topic studies e.g. smoking
• The Nurses and Midwives e-Cohort study
• As the single biggest healthcare workforce – pitifully little
NURSING & NURSES’ HEALTH:

**Nursing advantage:**
- Working age/ >93% employed AIHW 2013
- Predominantly female
- Largely graduate
- Socio-economic advantage
- High health literacy

**Occupational risk factors:**
- Ageing profiles
- Shift work
- ‘Stress’ → dysfunctional coping
- Manual / desk work
- Occupational exposures & physical injuries
OUR OBJECTIVES

1. Conduct the first representative survey to:
   a) Determine the health of the workforce and prevalence of modifiable risk factors
   b) Identify factors motivating and driving choices of health-related behaviours.

2. Consult to identify research, policy & practices to safeguard the future capability of the workforce and optimise their capacity to deliver care.
We used established questions:

- Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health
- Nurses and Midwives e-Cohort Study
- Australian Health Survey / Australian Census

We used established questions:
CONSTRUCT AND DELIVER AN ELECTRONIC SURVEY

Used established questionnaires where we could:

• Australian Longitudinal Study on Women’s Health
• Nurses and Midwives e-Cohort Study
• Australian Health Survey / Australian Census
• Impact of Adding Nursing Support workers to Patient, Nurse and System outcomes Survey

Used established tools where available:

• SF 12
• Insomnia Severity Index … and others

Our pilot study in 2 Sydney hospitals
WE ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT -

• **Demographic characteristics**
  age, gender, highest educational qualification, ethnicity, carer commitments

• **Workforce characteristics**
  work role, work setting, workplace location, work contract, hours worked per week, shifts worked, workplace injuries and abuse

• **General health and well-being**
  perceived general health, presence of disease and symptoms: continence, pain and sleep, medications, hospital admissions and sick days etc.
WE ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT -

- Health behaviours
diet, exercise, weight/ BMI, smoking, alcohol
(routine health screening uptake)

- Intention to leave their job within 6 / 12 months

- (Job satisfaction
- Quality of life – reports to follow)
RESPONSES

• 5,446 surveys submitted
• 385 (7%) excluded due to missing data
  20 not practicing in NSW
• Final sample 5,041 respondents

• Approx 88,319 RNs and ENs & 9,524 midwives eligible
• NSWNMA ≈ 63,000
• Representative of NSW workforce?
## Respondents vs NSW registrants:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>NSW registrants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean age</td>
<td>48.0 yrs</td>
<td>44.6 yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>88.5%</td>
<td>89.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospital-based</td>
<td>59.7%</td>
<td>62.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metro</td>
<td>65.8%</td>
<td>68.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Work characteristics

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WORK PATTERNS

• Current work contract:  
  **Full time**  
  Part time  
  Casual/pool/agency/other

  - 53.6%  
  - 38.7%  
  - 7.1%

• Av hours worked/week  
  - 34.3 (+/-9.8)

• Work 40 hrs/wk or more  
  - 39.2%

• Shift worker (not days only)  
  - 53.1%

• Av years in RN/RM/EN role  
  - 21.5 (+/-12.8)
“Overall, I am satisfied with my current job”
'In general, would you say your health is –'
HEALTH RECORD

• Av number of sick days 5.5 +/- 12.7
• Av number ‘mental health’ days 1.7 +/- 7.2
• Had hospital admission 16.8%

• Reports at least 1 chronic disease 64.9%
  mood disorders 26.1%
  bone & joint 19.4%
  cardiovascular 19.0%
  respiratory 18.8%
  diabetes 8.3%
### SYMPTOMS

‘SOMETIMES OR MORE OFTEN’ IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symptom</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Back pain</td>
<td>46.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stiff joints</td>
<td>39.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allergies</td>
<td>33.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mouth problems</td>
<td>13.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Night sweats</td>
<td>16.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severe tiredness</td>
<td>43.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Headaches</td>
<td>39.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigestion</td>
<td>24.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constipation</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urine leakage</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breathing problems</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Av total symptom count** 3.4 +/- 2.7 symptom groups per person
How much bodily pain in past 4 weeks?

How often experienced bodily pain in past 4 weeks?
COMPARED TO THE AUSTRALIAN POPULATION -

? Broadly similar ?

• Mental health diagnoses, eg diagnoses in previous 12 months:
  23% anxiety/ depression compared to
  20% any MH diagnosis in 2007 population

• Chronic diseases eg 17% hypertension compared to
  22% age 18 yrs + with measured high BP in 2012

• Asthma rates higher - 15.0% versus 10.2%

Shouldn’t nurses look better than the general population?

• 50.6% excellent/ very good health
  55.1% of Australian population
Do we eat 2 portions of fruit pd?
YES 54.6%
Australians: 48.3%

Do we eat our veggies? (5 portions pd)
YES 10.9%
Australians: 8.3%
Any smoking 13.1%
Daily smoking 7.9%
Australians 16.3%

Tobacco smoke exposure:
At work: 11.5%
Own home: 6.6%
Others’ homes: 5.5%
Public places: 0.2%
Outdoor areas: 25.4%

6% intend to quit within 6 mths……
Drinking 5+ days per week: 10.8%
‘Risky drinking’: 14.8%
Australians: 19.5%
Average BMI 27.8 (+/- 6.2) kg/m² (n=4503)

Under/normal weight 34.6%
Overweight 28.0%

Australians: 35% overweight
28.3% obese

Obese 27.0%
Waist circumference (n=3,508): 88.3%
Australian women: 66.6% at increased risk

medium risk 15.1%
‘at risk’ 44.1%
high risk 29.1%
Within 6 months: 6.0%
Within 12 months: 22.2%
NURSES WERE MORE LIKELY TO INTEND TO LEAVE IF THEY -

• Were younger
• In a foundational role
• Worked in residential aged care, rehabilitation or disability
• Reported less job satisfaction
• Experienced workplace injury or abuse

Nurses were less likely to intend to leave if they –

• Were family care providers
• Worked in inner regional areas
THOSE WHO INTENDED TO LEAVE -

• Poorer general health
• More sick days
• More hospitalisations
• More often diagnosed with anxiety
• Experienced:
  more severe bodily pain,
  more symptoms of back pain, severe
  tiredness, indigestion, depression, breathing &
  sleeping problems
TAKING EVERYTHING INTO ACCOUNT, NURSES LESS LIKELY TO INTEND TO LEAVE IF -

- **Older**: every 5 years of age reduced the odds of leaving by more than 7% (OR=0.924; 95% CI: 0.892, 0.957)

- **Worked in** inner regional areas (OR=0.76; 95% CI: 0.63, 0.91)

- **Did not work** night shifts (OR=0.76; 95% CI: 0.65, 0.90)

- **Reported better** job satisfaction (OR=2.64; 95% CI: 2.43, 2.86)

- **and better** general health (OR=0.92, 95% CI: 0.84, 0.99)

Those with breathing problems 34% more likely to intend to leave (OR=1.34; 95% CI: 1.03, 1.76)
NEXT: CONSULTATION STAGE:

• Identify research, policy & practices which policy-makers and managers can initiate to safeguard the future capability of the workforce and optimise their capacity to deliver care.
WITH THANKS - TO THE FUNDERS, AUSTRALIAN RESEARCH COUNCIL LINKAGE GRANT WITH PARTNER NEW SOUTH WALES NURSES & MIDWIVES ASSOCIATION

and 5,446 Australian nurses & midwives