Registered Nurses in Israel: Workforce Supply – Patterns and Trends

Nurit Nirel, Yifat Yair, Hadar Samuel
Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute

Shoshana Riba, Sima Reicher
Nursing Division, Ministry of Health

Orly Toren
Hadassah University Medical Center

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Executive Summary

In recent years, a severe shortage of nurses and an imbalance between supply and demand have led to a growing preoccupation in the Western world with the supply of nursing staff. Surveys conducted outside of Israel have advanced understanding of the structure of the nursing workforce, identified deficiencies and contributed to the planning of professional training.

In Israel, the Ministry of Health keeps a record of the number of licensed nurses classified by clinical field and professional status. In addition, the Central Bureau of Statistics publishes a report with the estimated number of nurses employed, by geographical area. Despite this, until the current study, no comprehensive survey had been conducted that would contribute to planning with regard to characteristics of nursing work, distribution of employment by nursing specialty and by economic sectors, percentage of nurses leaving nursing work and their reasons for doing so, and survival rates in the profession whether full-time or part-time. Such information makes it possible to examine the workforce supply taking account of future sources that will supplement it and should help with decision-making on policy for the nursing workforce.

The study goals were:

1. To examine characteristics of employment and the workforce
2. To examine mobility between organizations, between the community and hospitals, and between specialties in the nursing profession
3. To examine nurses' attitudes towards their work and their profession
4. To forecast the supply of registered nurses (RNs), using data from the survey regarding the numbers leaving the profession and data from other sources regarding the future sources for additions to the workforce.

Methods

1. A nationwide telephone survey, which was conducted from October 2008–February 2009, of a random sample of 3,200 registered nurses of working age (up to 60), whether or not they were working in the nursing profession (10% of the study population)
2. Analysis of administrative data regarding: a. The total number of new RN licenses issued every year; b. The number of nurses completing advanced training every year, by specialty; and c. The number of RNs leaving the country, (data from the Nursing Division at the Ministry of Health); and mortality data (from the Central Bureau of Statistics).

Findings

Employment Characteristics

Most RNs (89%) are employed in the profession and the percentage of those in full-time positions is quite high (67%). As expected, the rate of full-time positions is higher among nurses working in hospitals. To the best of our knowledge, the rates of employment in the profession and
the percentage of full-time positions are higher than those of nurses abroad. The working week for nurses fixed by collective labor agreements is 40 hours in the community and 36 in hospitals. The average number of weekly work hours is 37.9; in hospitals, it is 38.5 (i.e., above that fixed by the labor agreement); in the community, it is 36.5 (i.e., below that fixed by the labor agreement). When we examined temporary absence and return to the workforce over a 10 year period, we found that on average, in any year, 2% of RNs were temporarily not working as nurses for, on average, a year (excluding nurses on maternity leave of up to 6 months).

**Workforce Characteristics**

The current RN workforce is mature – 45% of the nurses are over 45 – and highly trained and skilled: 55% have advanced (specialty) training, 48% have a bachelor's degree and 18% have a master's or PhD. Furthermore, the current workforce is stable. Few leave nursing completely and, in our sample, the annual percentage of nurses leaving over the last 10 years was very low – less than one percent per year. On the other hand, 23% of the currently employed nurses have made some shift within nursing in the last 10 years (63% of them made only one move). Most of the moves have been from hospitals to the community.

**Nurses' Attitudes towards their Jobs and the Nursing Profession**

Seventy-two percent of the RNs are very satisfied with their place of work and their job and 60% with the nursing profession. It is interesting to note that the satisfaction levels are much higher for place of work and the job than for the profession (and this is contrary to our findings regarding physicians and paramedics).

A multivariate analysis revealed that the nurses' feelings about their salary and their relationship with their superior affected their satisfaction with both their job and the profession itself. However, while their feelings about work overload and interpersonal relations within the nursing staff, as well as their age and the district in which they worked, all influenced their satisfaction with their job, they did not influence their level of satisfaction with the profession. Conversely, their satisfaction with the nursing profession was affected by several factors that did not affect satisfaction with their job: whether or not they worked in the community, the economic sector in which they worked, and whether they held management or teaching positions. The main factors that bothered them about their work were their salary level (particularly among nurses working in the community), too much bureaucracy, work overload, limited promotion prospects, and verbal and physical violence from patients and their families (mainly among hospital nurses). We found that the main factors keeping them in work in the nursing profession were love of the profession; contact with people; being able to give and contribute something; satisfaction; variety and interest; flexibility; and the pay and social benefits. Only a few said they continued nursing for lack of choice. The main factors they named as important in order to keep nurses in a position or organization were: remuneration, relationships with their superior/management, a reduced workload, greater prospects of promotion, social benefits and better interpersonal relations within the nursing staff.
The Likelihood of New RNs Remaining at Work in the Profession
Using a survival analysis, we found a 97% likelihood that RNs would continue to work in the profession for 5 years. In other words, it was probable that 97% of those entering the profession would continue to work in it ("survive") for at least 5 years. The likelihood of surviving 10 years was found to be 93% and for 20 years, it declined to 88%. However, survival rates differed among age groups. For example, when we compared the age groups currently in the workforce, we found that the likelihood of young RNs continuing to work in the profession for 10 years was 77%, compared to 94% and 96% in the older age groups. In addition, we found that the likelihood of nurses with advanced training certification remaining within nursing employment after 10 years was 97% compared to 87%; after 20 years, it was 94%, compared to 78% among nurses without advanced training licenses.

Variables Predicting Leaving Work in the Profession
To examine the factors predicting RNs leaving work in the profession, we conducted a Cox regression multivariate analysis. In this statistical analysis, the dependent variable was the risk of leaving work in the profession, which comprised two components: time (number of years working as an RN) and the "event" (leaving or remaining in nursing work), in other words, the likelihood of leaving work in the profession after a certain number of years. After controlling for other variables in the equation, we found that each of the following variables had an independent effect on the likelihood of leaving nursing work: Young age (24–34) (vs. older age groups); no advanced training (specialty) (vs. having advanced training); working in the private sector (vs. other sectors); being married with young children (under 18) (vs. other family status).

Supply Prediction
We conducted supply projections for 5, 10, 15, and 20 years ahead. The projections made use of the findings from the Cox regressions noted above, which had revealed that age affected the likelihood of leaving nursing work. The age variable was also found to be connected to the rate of starting work in the profession as well as mortality rates in the population. These study findings enabled us to include the age variable in our supply projection equations, since we had data on the age distribution of the employed nursing workforce as well as the survival rates of this workforce by the same age groups. We also had the estimated age-group distribution of future sources for the nursing workforce and of those expected to leave nursing work. We based the supply projections on the assumption that apart from the natural change in the age-group distribution, the exit and entry rates would remain constant. The supply forecasts show that the number of RNs in the workforce is expected to decrease over the next 20 years, from 28,500 RNs in the profession in 2008 to 21,201 in 2028 – a decline of 25% by the end of the period, or, in terms of the percentage of nurses per population, a decline from about 4 employed RNs per 1,000 population in 2008 to about 2 employed RNs per 1,000 population in 2028.

The supply projection equations presented in this report do not reflect all the variables that were identified in the Cox regression analysis as being related to the likelihood of leaving nursing work. The Cox regression analysis had revealed that, in addition to the age variable, the following
also affect the likelihood of leaving nursing work: advanced training (the likelihood of leaving nursing work is significantly greater among nurses without advanced training); economic sector (the likelihood of leaving nursing work is greater among RNs working in the private sector); family status (the likelihood of married nurses without children under 18 leaving nursing work is significantly lower than those of married nurses with young children). At this stage, we have not entered these variables into the projection equations. In some cases, this is because we did not expect any change in the distribution of the variable and in others because, although it is reasonable to assume there will be a change in the future, we cannot yet estimate the extent of the change. Obviously, at a later stage these variables can be included in projection equations, once projections of the likely changes in these variables have been developed.

Conclusions
The study findings are consistent with senior health professionals' impressions of the work characteristics of nurses in Israel. They provide more rigorous supply projections than were available in the past and contribute to decision-making regarding the training and recruitment of the workforce. The findings could serve as a foundation on which to base future studies about the demand for registered nurses and the relationship between supply and demand. In this way, they could contribute to the process of long-term strategic planning for this workforce.
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