The Job Placement and Employment Pathways of the Nursing Graduates of College of Nursing Riyadh for the Academic Year 2005 – 2011

Haya Al Fozan, MBBS, ABOG, SBOG, FRCPSC[1]   Wafa Abu Zuhri, MNSc [2]
1.Dean, College of Nursing-Riyadh King Saud Bin Abdulaziz University for Health Sciences
2.Director, Internship Program, College of Nursing-Riyadh, King Saud Bin Abdulaziz University for Health Sciences

Abstract
Objective: This study has explored the employment pathways of the nursing graduates of ×× University - College of Nursing-Riyadh relative to their job placement and employment behavior from September 2005-2011. **Method:** A qualitative research design using exploratory descriptive interpretive approach for the purpose of extensiveness, understanding and in-depth explanation**.**   College of Nursing, Riyadh, KSA All College of Nursing graduates was considered eligible for the study provided they had passed the minimum of two years after graduation until the time of data collection. 374 graduates were qualified for the study**.** A self-developed questionnaire was utilized with the following categories: Demographic, Academic, Job placement (employment, transfer, and resignation), career promotion and post graduate studies. The data were collected from subjects utilizing different techniques, depending on their geographic locations, such as a face to face interview, phone interview and e-mail correspondence. **Results:** Out of 374 subjects, 367 were initially employed after earning a BSN degree which leads to the general employment rate of approximately 98% among CON graduates. 91% of graduates retained their first two years employment, 89% retained till the end of their third year and 86.4% up to the end of their fifth employment year. 99% of the graduates were staff nurses during the first employment and only 1% belonging to education/research position. Moreover, 58.4% of the subjects chose the specialized areas such as: critical and cardiac unit, operating room and emergency nursing as career paths. **Conclusion:** The result of this study is reflecting an emerging image of a dedicated career- oriented female nurses and sustainable workforce of the country. The study is a valuable contribution to quality improvement relative to preparation and building of a credible workforce along with peer academic institutions and concerned policy makers. Similar studies are extremely needed on national workforce performance in the country.

INTRODUCTION
The College of Nursing-Riyadh (CON-R) aspires to offer a BSN curriculum that is capable of producing graduate nurses who are value driven, critical thinkers and technologically proficient, committed to providing safe, quality and humane care.

Several reports and research findings on structure induction program for new graduate nurses' revealed a significant impact on the nurses' confident, clinical competence and turnover rate (Krozek, 2008), (Baumann et al., 2008, American Association of Colleges of Nursing 2009 and 2010, Ulrich et. al, 2010 and Maxwell, 2011). Likewise, the retention rate improved the fresh nurses' graduate within the first two years of employment which is ranging from 40% -100% secondary with the implementation of nursing residency program along with other curriculum and clinical setting changes (Maxwell 2011). However, on December 2009, Dr. Patricia Benner and her team found out that many new nurses of todays were "undereducated", to meet the nursing demands across various health settings which could lead easily to unsustainable workforce. Furthermore, she recommended introducing a one-year residency program for nursing graduates that focused on clinical area of specialization upon initial employment. Above all, she recommended that new graduate to earn a Master's degree in nursing within 10 years of initial licensure. Such recommendations would considerably affect retention for newly graduate nurses and will increase their functionality at the bedside**.**

In fact, almost 70% of the total nursing workforce in the kingdom is an expatriate (Ministry of Health Annual Report 2012).

To date in Saudi Arabia, there are very minimal literature that critically examined and described a national nursing workforce in the area of retention and drop off. Although, there was a preliminary data presented by Dr. Abu Zinadah (2010), the former chairperson of the Nursing Scientific Board of the Saudi Commission for Health Specialties, that the turnover rate among Saudi registered nurses within the first 2-5 years of employment reached 50% (Abu Zinadh 2010). Along this vein Al-Both'hi et.al., (2010) cited the limited support offered to newly recruited Saudi nurses in local hospitals and its potential harm in work stability. With these findings, to know the real cause of escalating rapid turnover among Saudi nurses Al-Turki (2010) investigated the prevalence of the burned out syndrome among Saudi nurses with an average work experience of 27.3 months. He found out that almost 80% of study subjects reported high to moderate frequency rate of

emotional exhaustion while 88% reported depersonalization. He also stated and nurses working in high acuity areas were more emotionally exhausted and depersonalized compared to nurses working in general areas and outpatient clinics. On the other hand, Al-Both'hi (2010) recommended introducing a structured recruitment process for fresh Saudi nurses in the emergency department as a current practice in three hospitals in Riyadh, which revealed lack of the appropriate organizational and professional support for newly recruited graduates which poses a potential harm for workforce stability.

We in CON-R consider the job placement indicators of our graduates and their employment pathways as well as their employment behaviors to be the key indicators of our academic performance and success. In fact, many academic accreditation bodies identify graduates' employability rate, adaptation to the real work environment, retention rate and frequency of pursuing postgraduate studies as success indicators of the baccalaureate nursing program. Therefore, exploring job placement indicators of the CON-R graduates is crucial and significant to enhance and improve the quality of the college program. Likewise, such findings are important to local policy makers in order to support, guide and advance the vulnerable national nursing workforce that accounts only for almost 30% of the total nursing workforce as per statistical report released by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Ministry of Health on 2012.

THE AIM OF THE STUDY
This study aims to explore and describe the job placement indicators, namely: the employability, retention and drop off rates pertinent to the graduates of the College of Nursing over the period from September 2005 to 2011. It also explores the graduates' employment behaviors in relation to: timely completion of probationary period, career development and perusal of postgraduate studies.

MATERIAL AND METHODS
College of Nursing (CON) Program
The CON was established on March 2002 in order to respond to a critical shortage of national nurses. It admits female Saudi nationals only and awards a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) to two educational streams. Stream I has, as its intake, secondary school graduates who follow what is known as the "conventional BSN program". Stream II, however, admits holders of Bachelor of Science degrees who follow upon admission what is known as the "Graduate Entry Accelerated BSN Program". This program is the first of its kind in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and is designed to expedite the process of graduation by recognizing applicants' previous learning; thus, increasing the supply of nurses in the local market.

Graduates from both streams have to complete an internship year following the successful completion of the degree course work. Internship training directed by the CON-R and managed and facilitated collaboratively by CON-R and the recruited clinical settings. The training focuses basically on two themes: consolidation of taught knowledge and skills and socialization to the new role of registered staff nurses. Completing the internship training successfully is a mandatory requirement within the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to award the BSN degree and to grant professional registration for licensure purposes.

Method
An exploratory descriptive interpretive qualitative research design was used to achieve the aim of this study that was conducted at the CON in Saudi Arabia. All CON graduates, irrespective of the stream of admission, were considered eligible for the study provided that the nurse graduates had passed the minimum of two years after graduation until the time of data collection. Two years post-graduation was necessary as an inclusion criterion so that enough data about the subject's employment history could be drawn. Ethical approval was granted for this study by King Abdullah International Medical Research Center through their Institutional Review Board. Likewise, the principles of privacy and confidentiality were considered to keep the identity of the subject anonymous

Along this vein, out of the total graduates, there were 374 qualified for inclusion in this study by September 2013 which marked the month of the completion of data collection. Data collection started on September 2011 until September 2013. Therefore, those who graduated on or after 2012 were not included in the study. A self-developed questionnaire was utilized in order to obtain the pertinent data. Likewise, the survey included questions cited under each of the following categories:
1. Demographic
2. Academic
3. Job placement (employment, transfer, and resignation)
4. Career promotion
5. Post graduate studies

The contact details of the graduates were extracted from CON database, former records of the Deanship of Admission and Registration, the Scholarship Office at the Ministry of Higher Education in Riyadh, and the records of the Corporate Human Resource and Recruitment Department at the Ministry of National Guard in

Riyadh as it was allegedly recognized as the primary employer of CON-R graduates.

The data were collected from subjects utilizing different techniques, depending on their geographic locations, such as a face to face interview, phone interview and e-mail correspondence. All subjects were informed about the nature and purpose of the study. The completion of the survey and/or approving proceeding with interviews was acknowledged as an implicit consent.

Data analysis

Data was transcribed from hardcopies to a softcopy file on a structured Excel 2007 database template which was later encoded to SPSS file version 16.0. Data analysis was performed utilizing mainly descriptive statistics.

For the sake of analysis the following variables were defined:

Retention rate: is a measure of the number of CON recruited graduates staying with their same employers scaled to the total number of CON recruited graduates over a certain period of time.

Employability rate: is a measure of the number of employed CON graduates scaled to the number of the total graduates from the same program over a certain period of time.

RESULTS

In order to promote understanding and clarity, the results of the study were categorized as follows: Demographic and Academic Profiles**,** Job Placement (Employment; Retention and Resignation), Pattern of Job Transfer, Promotion History and Post Graduate Education.

Demographic and Academic Profile

The subjects of the study were all female graduates of the CON-R from year 2005-2011. 59% belongs to the age group ranging from 20 to 30 years old and the remaining 41% were between 31 to 41 years old. Moreover, the place of origin of the subject at the time of enrollment in the female colleague was distributed as follows: Central Region (Riyadh and surrounding areas) 31%, Western Region 6%, and Eastern Region 63%. Also, there were 58% of the subjects were enrolled in the college as Stream I BSN students and the other 42% were enrolled as Stream II students. The Grand Point Average (GPA) upon completion of the BSN degree were distributed as follows: 11.8% had a GPA between 2 - 2.74 out of five, 67.6% had a GPA between 2.75 - 3.75, and the remaining 20.6% had a GPA equal or above 3.76.

Job Placement (Employment; Retention and Resignation)

In the midstream of the study, out of the total 374 subjects, 367 were initially employed after earning a BSN degree. The data leads to a general employment rate of approximately 98% among CON-R graduates over the period from September 2005 to 2013. Furthermore, data revealed an escalating employability rate of nurse graduates from 71% within the first three months of graduation into 88% within the first six months and 97.3% within the first year. The average general waiting time to first employment was 87.7 days with a range between 3 to 570 days. However, there were seven (7) subjects who met the criteria and were not employed, 4 of them due to personal reasons and the remaining 3 subjects were not located due to change of address; henceforth, complete data was not attained. Moreover, out of the total 367 employed subjects, 196 or 53.4% were recruited in Riyadh, 155 or 42.2% in Eastern Region and 16 or 4.4% in Western Region. 94% of the study subjects were initially recruited by the Ministry of National Guard Health Affairs (MNG-HA) across the Kingdom where 6% joined the other different health sectors. MNGHA was the main recruiter of CON-R graduates as detailed in Table 1. This is not surprising as MNGHA is recognized to be the main host clinical setting for the CON-R students' and interns' clinical training.

Table 1: Recruiters of CON Graduates from September 2005 - September 2011.

Recruiter	No. of Recruited CON-R Graduates	Percentage
MNGHA – King Abdulaziz Medical City Riyadh	184	50.1%
MNGHA – King Abdulaziz Medical City Al-Ahsa	95	25.9%
MNGHA – King Abdulaziz Medical City Jeddah	14	3.8%
MNGHA – Imam Abdulrahman Hospital in Dammam	53	14.4%
Ministry of Health	9	2.5%
Military Hospitals	6	1.6%
Others	6	1.6%

The findings revealed that 99% of CON-R graduates joined clinical positions in hospitals when first employed and only 1% joined education/research positions. It also showed that more than half of the graduates (58.4%) chose critical care and other specialized areas such as cardiac, operating room and emergency nursing as their career paths when first employed, 33.2% chose general medical surgical or paediatric inpatient areas and the remaining 8.4% selected outpatient clinics. As for the length of the probationary period (normally 90 days), 360 subjects (98.1%) reported that they completed timely their probationary period, while 1.9% reported an extended probation up to a maximum of six months. On the other hand, the retention rate of CON-R graduates were calculated within the first two years, three years and five years of employment. Data revealed that 91% of

CON-R graduates retained their first employment by the end of the second employment year, 89% retained it by the end of the third employment year and 86.4% retained it by the end of their fifth employment year.

The time since resigning from the first job ranged between four to forty five months. 50 graduates (13.6%) quitted employment with their first employer. Reasons for resigning first employment were summarized as follows: joining postgraduate studies or joining other employers who granted them a scholarship for postgraduate studies (44.7%), seeking better career development opportunities (19.1%), joining employers closer to their resident areas (17%), child/family care related issues (12.7%), stressful working environment (6.3%). Furthermore, data revealed that 39 (78%) out of the total 50 graduates who quitted the first employment had joined their second employment within an average time of 4.4 months. Their second employers were: King Saud bin Abdulaziz University 29.7%, private hospitals 27%, MNG-HA 21.6%, Ministry of Health 21.6% and 5.4% were employed by military hospitals. Out of the 39 graduates who joined second employment, 32 graduates (82%) retained their second employment until the time of data collection. The remaining 7 graduates (18%) resigned from their second employment within an average time of 17.2 months to seek better career development opportunities or better work environment. Moreover, 6 (86%) out of the 7 who resigned their second employment had joined a third employer within a week of their resignation date. All of them retained their third employment up to the time when data collection was completed.

Pattern of Job Transfer

The analysis of data revealed that 51 employed graduates (13.9%) out of the total 367 had requested transfer during their first employment after an average time of 23 months from initial employment date. 41% of them requested relocation to different region within KSA. The remaining 59% of those who requested transfer were mobilized to different units or department within the same employment facility. The main reasons driving transfer requests were: seeking better career development opportunities and working environment, moving closer to family residence area and lastly joining a position with less working hours as compared to the 12 hour shift in inpatient units.

Table 2:   Pattern of Job Transfer among CON Graduates.

Pattern of Transfer	Frequency	Percentage
Same employer, same area of practice, different job location	25	49%
From general medical surgical inpatient units to specialized/critical care inpatient units	13	25.5%
From specialized/critical care inpatient units to general medical surgical inpatient units	3	5.9%
From inpatient units to outpatient clinics	7	13.7%
From inpatient units to education/research	3	5.9%
Total	**51**	**100%**

Promotion History

When the promotion history of graduates was examined, it appeared that almost 11% of CON-R employed graduates were able to secure their first career promotion in an average time of 38 months from the initial recruitment date. Likewise, 9% of them were holding acting positions while waiting for the final credential approval of their promotion. 56% of them were promoted to clinical coordinator positions, 26% to clinical educator positions and 20% were promoted to intermediate leadership positions such as nurse manager and director.

Postgraduate Education

Data indicated that out of the total 374 graduates who were included in this study, 31 (8.3%) had joined postgraduates degree program(s) in nursing. Only 18 out of the 31 had completed the degree requirement successfully, whereas the remaining 13 were still enrolled scholars at the time of data collection. Furthermore, 15.8% of graduates reported that they were seriously considering joining postgraduate program within the next two years. However, 51% of graduates reported that they were not interested at all in pursuing a postgraduate qualification.

DISCUSSION

This study is considered to be the first of its kind in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia based upon the authors' best of knowledge. Although nursing workforce issues in the kingdom are viewed to be of critical importance, yet there were a minimal number of studies that had been conducted to explore the reality of national nursing graduates' performance within the workforce environment. As a result, comparing the outcomes obtained in the course of this study with similar national data was not possible. However, we hope that the results shall contribute in establishing a future baseline national data.

A highlight of study was reviewed relative to the data analysis on the high employability rate of CON-R graduates. 88% of graduates were employed within the first six months of graduation compared to 97.3% within the first year of graduation. Such results were comparable to some of the top international institution statistics

(Maxwell 2011). Unfortunately, there was no data available on other national nursing and non-nursing graduates' employability rates so the results could be compared. A major contributing factor to high employability and the retention rate of our graduates, we believe, is the recruitment linked nursing internship program that CON-R implements in collaboration with major potential employers such as the Ministry of National Guard Health Affairs.

In a related matter, it was noticed that the annual statistics related to the six-month employability rate of graduates had dropped slightly below the overall average of 88% to reach 79% during the period from 2009 to 2011. In contrary, the one year employability rate remained around the same overall range of 97% during the study. A possible interpretation for that is introducing new guidelines by national recruiters demanding the completion of professional registration and licensure requirements prior to securing job offers or proceeding with recruitment. The professional registration process with the national nursing professional body could take more than six months; as a result, employment was delayed. Furthermore, it was noticed that the complexity of recruitment process varied significantly among employers and even within the different locations of the same employer thus affecting the employability rate within the first six months of graduation.

The results also revealed that 98% of CON-R graduates were able to fulfil job expectations and pass their probationary period timely, thus indicating successful preparation of the graduates for the real workforce market by CON-R. It also acknowledged the level of support cascaded to graduates by their employers.

Interestingly, the results disputed the stereotyped opinion held by the public that national nurses are seekers of positions where they work office hours rather than shift rotation. In fact, results revealed that only 8.4% of subjects selected working in outpatient clinics compared to 91.6% who selected bedside nursing in inpatient units.

On the other hand, the results contradicted some tentative data that estimated an extensive loss of almost 50% of the national nurses in form of drop off within the first two to five years of employment (Abu Zinadah 2010). The results showed that CON-R graduates maintained a rather high retention rates, 91% & 86.4% within the first two and five years of employment respectively. Such rates were an achievement by itself and enforced again the proper preparation of CON-R graduates for the real work environment.

In a related matter, analysis revealed that even the majority of those who quitted their first employment had only done to pursue better and more challenging career choices or postgraduate qualifications. As well, more than 50% of the Saudi nurses are confident with their capabilities to choose more specialized areas that require a high level of nursing skills as critical care, emergency department and cardiac care unit.

These results enforced the emerging image of the Saudi nurse graduates as determined career women.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings of this study, the results obtained will contribute significantly to the CON quality improvement. It would also allow sharing its expertise related to preparing sustainable national nursing workforce along with peer academic institutions and concerned policy makers within the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The findings also acknowledged the emerging image of career oriented female nurses who are dedicated towards building credible and sustainable workforce.

Therefore, we recommend establishing a nationwide data that track and analyze the healthcare workforce mobility, whereby reports generated from such data are made available for academic and service institutions so it will guide, based on evidence, proper preparation and management of nursing workforce.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest that may bias the outcomes of this study

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