The current state of nursing

Nursing is currently one of the most in-demand careers available, despite the struggling economy. According to the U.S. Department of Labor’s Bureau of Labor Statistics, employment of RNs is expected to grow 23% between 2006 and 2016, which is much faster than the average rate of growth for all occupations.\(^i\) The nursing industry is growing so fast that “581,500 new jobs will result…from the need to replace experienced nurses who leave the occupation.”\(^ii\)

Baby boomers are continuing to age, and as they retire, they will leave gaping holes in the nursing community. This is in addition to the shortages that the industry was already experiencing. “For the first time the rate of increase of the United States population has surpassed that of the RN workforce. In 2000…36% [of nurses] were at least 60 years old and an additional 23 percent were between the ages of 50 years and 59 years.”\(^iii\) This 59% is quickly nearing retirement, and the industry is lacking the numbers to make up for it.

Because of the poor economy in recent years, many retired nurses are coming back to work to help supplement their household incomes, and other nurses who were planning on retiring are holding on to their positions. However, this still isn’t enough to cover the growing shortage.

Another major roadblock for nursing is the fact that many nursing colleges are forced to turn away applicants.

Despite the renewed interest [in nursing], it has been reported that applications to RN programs have fallen; the drop is believed to be the result of widespread awareness of the difficulty of gaining entry to nursing school, fueled by the continuing shortage of nurse faculty. By all indications,
if unmet demand for placement persists, with 88,000 qualified applications—one in three of all applications submitted—will be denied. Baccalaureate degree programs turned away 20 percent of its applicants, while associate degree programs turned away 32.7 percent.iv

In the case of nursing, supply and demand do not seem to be following each other as willingly as usual. Many schools have had to cut faculty positions recently, creating hundreds of vacancies across the United States.

There are many reasons nurses should consider earning their Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN). Nursing is an incredibly diverse profession that offers a variety of job opportunities throughout the healthcare industry. There are many different levels of nursing certification including CNA, LPN/LVN, RN, BSN, and MSN. Nurses should consider obtaining a BSN at a minimum for several reasons.

Competencies obtained through the baccalaureate education

When nurses work to earn a BSN, they take courses that help them gain a better understanding of the business and legal sides of the healthcare industry. According to the American Association of Colleges of Nursing position statement (updated December 2000):

As healthcare shifts from hospital-centered, inpatient care to more primary and preventive care throughout the community, the health system requires registered nurses who not only can practice across multiple settings—both within and beyond hospitals—but can function with more independence in clinical decision making, case management, provision of direct bedside care, supervision of unlicensed aides and other support personnel, guiding patients through the maze of health care resources and
The support for BSN-educated nurses is growing steadily, with both private and public entities speaking out in favor. The American Association of Colleges of Nursing wrote a fact sheet on the impact of education on nursing practice and named several groups that have spoken out.

- “BSN-in-10” proposals in New York and New Jersey have been introduced by state nursing associations to require the baccalaureate degree for all registered nurses within 10 years of graduation from an entry-level RN program. Other states are considering similar proposals in the interest of ensuring a better educated workforce.

- In the interest of providing the best patient care and leadership by its nurse corps officers, the U.S. Army, U.S. Navy, and U.S. Air Force all require the baccalaureate degree to practice as an active duty registered nurse. Commissioned officers within the U.S. Public Health Service must also be baccalaureate-prepared.

- The Veteran’s Administration (VA), the nation’s largest employer of registered nurses, has established the baccalaureate degree as the minimum preparation its nurses must have for promotion beyond entry-level positions. The VA has also committed $50 million over a five-year period to help VA nurses obtain baccalaureate or higher nursing degrees.

- Based on a nationwide Harris Poll conducted in June of 1999, an overwhelming percentage of the public—76%—believes that nurses should educating patients on treatment regimens and adoption of healthy lifestyles.
have four years of education or more past high school to perform their duties.

Baccalaureate programs offer all the same benefits as associate degree programs, but they are able to go more in-depth, thereby giving nursing students a more well-rounded development.

**Correlation of education to clinical outcomes and mortality rates**

When it comes to lower instances of death in patients, a BSN nurse has a significant advantage over nurses with less formal training. There is also indication of fewer medication errors and happier patients. Ann E. Tourangeau of the University of Toronto stated, “findings indicated that a 10% increase in proportion of baccalaureate prepared nurses was associated with 9 fewer deaths for every 1000 discharged patients.” Additionally, Linda H. Aiken of the *Journal of American Medical Association* found that “a 10% increase in the proportion of hospital staff nurses with baccalaureate degrees is associated with a 5% decline in mortality following common surgical procedures.” These statistics are beginning to be noticed by hospitals, and the Magnet Recognition Program is evidence.

Magnet hospitals have similar, and very desirable, characteristics. They are known in the community for quality patient care; lower mortality rates in Medicare patients; lower-than-average nurse turnover and vacancy rates; autonomy and accountability for professional nurses; and strong, supportive, visible, and accessible nurse managers. In order to be eligible for Magnet status, organizations must meet the following requirements: 75% of nurse managers must possess at least a baccalaureate
degree in nursing by January 1, 2011; 100% of nurse managers must possess at least a baccalaureate degree in nursing by January 1, 2013; 48% of nurses must hold a BSN or higher versus the national average of 34%. Several employers, many of them magnet hospitals, currently require a BSN in order to advance into management positions.

A common argument between nurses with varying levels of education is that experience is more important than education when it comes to patient benefits. The *Journal of the American Medical Association* did a study on “Educational Levels of Hospital Nurses and Surgical Patient Mortality”. In their comment section, they had this to say:

> When the proportions of RNs with hospital diplomas and associate degrees as their highest educational credentials were examined separately, the particular type of educational credential for nurses with less than a bachelor’s degree was not a factor in patient outcomes. Furthermore, mean years of experience did not independently predict mortality or failure to rescue, nor did it alter the association between educational background or of staffing and either patient outcome. These findings suggest that the conventional wisdom that nurses’ experience is more important than educational preparation may be incorrect.\textsuperscript{ix}

**Diversity of career choices**

Advanced education comes with a wider range of career possibilities. Nurses with bachelor’s degrees are highly sought after in various health institutions including hospitals, school corporations, doctor’s offices, extended care facilities, and hospice centers. BSN nurses are also able to more easily advance to specific areas of care such as nurse anesthetist, nurse manager, or nurse teacher.
Legislative efforts

Many states are also proposing that all nurses obtain BSN degrees by specific dates in the very near future. The “BSN-in-10” proposals in New York and New Jersey are two examples. Additionally, The National Advisory Council on Nurse Education and Practice, a group that advises congress and the secretary for health and human services about nursing, recommended that at least 66% of nurses hold a BSN or higher by the end of the year 2010.\textsuperscript{x} By the end of 2008, approximately half of nurses in the United States held a BSN or higher.\textsuperscript{xi}

Economic advantages of higher level education

In a time when many people are struggling due to a rebounding economy, it is tough to decide whether taking out student loans is financially beneficial. However, with the shortage of nurses throughout the United States, the nursing profession has not been as affected by the downed economy. Despite the national unemployment rate reaching just over 10% in February of 2010,\textsuperscript{xii} the nursing unemployment rate came in at just 5.6% in the same month.\textsuperscript{xiii} The most obvious benefit—besides job security—is the potential for salary increases. Many healthcare organizations may even be willing to reimburse tuition for nurses who want to advance their education.

“On March 6, 2009, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) reported that the healthcare sector of the economy is continuing to grow, despite significant job losses in nearly all major industries. Hospitals, long-term care facilities, and other ambulatory settings added 27,000 new jobs in February of 2009, a month when 681,000 jobs were eliminated across the country.”\textsuperscript{xiv}
The CEOs of two of the largest healthcare systems in the nation (Tenet Healthcare and HCS, Inc.) made a bold statement in February of 2009, saying, “Anyone with a nursing degree in this country does not have to worry about having a job.”

Connection between education and professional advancement opportunities

A BSN opens up opportunities in specialized areas such as pediatrics, obstetrics/gynecology, surgery, psychiatry and many others. A BSN is also helpful if a nurse decides he or she wants to leave bedside nursing because of its physical nature. Because of their training and education, nurses holding a BSN have the option to move into business-type roles such as managing insurance or pharmaceutical companies. Many times a BSN also makes nurses more appealing to employers who may want to hire someone with advanced education.

Moving beyond a BSN to other advanced degrees

A BSN is a prerequisite for nurses who want to earn their master’s in nursing (MSN) or become nurse practitioners.

Nurse educators who work in academic settings must hold a master's degree in nursing. In order to be promoted to the upper academic ranks (e.g., associate professor and professor) and to be granted tenure, academic faculty typically must hold an earned doctoral degree. Nurse educators who work in clinical settings must hold the minimum of a bachelor's degree in nursing, but many institutions are requiring the master's degree for such appointments.
The Health Resources and Services Administration, in an article published by *The Online Journal of Issues in Nursing* in September of 2008, noted that, “nurses entering the profession with a baccalaureate degree are four times more likely to pursue a graduate degree in nursing than other entry-level clinicians.” xvii This is important because of the critical need for nursing educators who are required to hold at least an MSN.

**Conclusion**

Nursing is a profession that requires a lot of heart and dedication. It’s no surprise that in 2008, “nursing enjoyed the top spot on Gallup’s Annual Honesty and Ethics poll— for the seventh straight year. Eighty-four percent of Americans call nurses’ honesty and ethical standards either ‘high’ or ‘very high.’” xviii

Nurses are in high demand at most certification levels, but the advantages of earning a BSN are clear. With an increase in competency attributed to education, career advancement opportunities, and legislative efforts to encourage higher education, earning a BSN should be an easy decision.

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http://www.onlinenursingprograms.net/top-10-reasons-to-complete-an-online-nursing-program/


ix Ibid. Page 1621-1622.


xv Ibid. Page 2

