Research Background

There is a global nursing shortage that has been consistently documented in critical care areas. In Ontario, government retention initiatives have targeted new graduate and late career nurses. Limited attention has been given to the mid-career group who comprise more than half of the current workforce.

The aim of this exploratory study was to explore the perceptions of frontline mid-career critical care nurses regarding effective, actionable strategies that would support their retention in their current workplace.

Q-methodology was used to identify innovative strategies and provide an understanding of existing viewpoints. Forty ICU nurses at an Ontario teaching hospital completed a 45-item Q-sort.

A Q-Method Study of Effective Retention Strategies for Mid-Career Critical Care Nurses

Findings of this study suggest the following strategies are perceived to be the most effective retention approaches:

Support
- Adequate nurse-patient ratios to meet patient care demands; Working in a workplace supported by a union; Effective strategies developed by management to support team building activities

Physical Environment
- More reliable/advanced equipment and less difficulty dealing with supplies required for patient care (i.e., medications and wound care supplies);
- Increased attention to ergonomics and the functionality of the unit (nursing station design, chairs, podiums, etc.)

Recognition/Respect
- Financial compensation and opportunities for promotion based on committee involvement; Encouraging respect between team members (RT, MD, PT, RPN, and RNs);
- Higher pay scale for the advanced knowledge and skills of critical care nurses; Taking advantage of the value of their wisdom and experience by creating expanded, challenging and innovative roles (i.e., best practices coach, family advocate, research analyst);
- An option for self-scheduling

On-site Benefits
- An onsite fitness facility or access to wellness and prevention programs;
- Decreasing the price of monthly parking for staff;
- Better discounts (e.g., coffee shop, cafeteria, gift shop);
- Having a 24-hour coffee shop within the hospital;
- Individual lockers, showers and a staff lounge that has increased attention to décor and overall level of comfort.

Q-methodology allows for identification of unique viewpoints concerning effective retention strategies intended to facilitate the retention of mid-career critical care nurses.

Four Unique Perspectives (See Reverse)
Findings from this study demonstrate that mid-career critical care nurses within an Ontario teaching hospital have four different perspectives and priorities surrounding their retention. These viewpoints can be classified as follows:

- The Healthy Workplace and Respect Seekers
- The Flexibility and Reward Seekers
- The Professional Development and Teamwork Seekers
- The Lifestyle Seekers

Priorities within the four viewpoints include the nursing environment/equipment, respect, flexibility, rewards, team building, staffing, education and extraprofessional benefits. These target areas reflect both organizational and managerial focal areas for the development of effective strategies to retain mid-career critical care nurses. Strategies to address these priorities should be implemented at both levels.

**Viewpoints Defined**

**The healthy workplace and respect seeker** was 54.8% of the participants:

- These nurses had an average age of 37.8 years, with 14.8 years of nursing experience, and an average of 8.8 years in critical care.
- Nurses who define this factor feel strongly about their nursing work environment and the respect they receive. They are willing to relinquish extraprofessional benefits to better care for their patients in a respectful environment in which they have some sense of job security. In general, this group seemed to perceive their nursing work environment and the level of respect they received within it to be the most effective retention strategies.

**The flexibility and reward seeker** represented 19.4% of the participants:

- This group had the highest average age of 40.3 years, with an average of 18.5 years of nursing experience, and 14.2 years in critical care.
- These nurses believe retention efforts can be enhanced by providing staff with flexibility and rewards. Their focus on planning work around their life instead of the other way around seems not to interfere with the high standard of care they are determined to provide during working hours. These nurses seek adequate nurse-patient ratios, as well as recognition and remuneration for the committee work they are involved in.

**The professional development and teamwork seeker** comprised 12.9% of participants:

- These nurses have an average age of 32.5 years, with 9.8 years of nursing experience, and an average of 6.8 years in critical care.
- This group perceived that enhancing team dynamics within the ICU setting would be an effective way to increase retention of mid-career critical care nurses. With little regard for "luxuries" at work, they perceived critical care training to be important, as well as financial remuneration to recognize those extra skills.

**The lifestyle seeker** comprises the final 12.9% of participants:

- These nurses are the youngest group, average age of 31.3 years, 6.5 years of nursing experience, and 4 years in critical care.
- Incentives initiated by managers or the corporation would make these nurses feel appreciated and be effective in retaining them. This group was most concerned with lifestyle factors that would enhance their work experience while demonstrating less regard for variation or advancement in their work.

---

This research has been generously funded by a grant from the Government of Ontario. The views expressed are the views of the NHSRU and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Ontario.