



## **2008 SURVEY OF NURSES 45 TO 60 YEARS OLD**



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# **2008 SURVEY OF NURSES 45 TO 60 YEARS OLD BASED ON 2007 DATA**

## **INTRODUCTION**

America's healthcare delivery system faces a number of significant challenges. Among them is the aging of the patient population. In 2011, the first wave of some 75 million baby boomers will begin turning 65. Florida, the oldest state in the union based on average population age, is a bellwether of the aging trend. The U.S. Census bureau projects that by 2030 the entire country will be as old, on average, as the population of Florida is now.

An older population uses healthcare services at a higher rate than a younger one, Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) statistics show. For every one visit a person 25 years old or younger makes to a physician, a person 65 years old or older makes three visits (HHS Bureau of Health Professions Ambulatory Care Survey).

The population of nurses in the United States is aging along with the general population. Fifty-five percent of nurses actively involved in patient care are 45 years old or older. Thirty-six percent are 50 years old or older.

The career plans, satisfaction levels, and professional concerns of older nurses are of considerable importance due in part to their sheer numbers. Should a significant number of experienced nurses opt to retire or otherwise alter their career paths in coming years, the effect on nurse staffing levels could be profound.

AMN Healthcare conducted its 2007 Survey of Nurses 45 to 60 years old to help gauge the future career plans and general satisfaction levels of nurses in this key age group. The survey seeks to provide a portrait of nurses in this group in order to better understand their professional concerns and plans. The survey also seeks to provide a gauge as to how older nurses assess nursing care and healthcare delivery in general now compared to when they entered the profession.

## **ABOUT AMN HEALTHCARE**

AMN Healthcare is the largest temporary healthcare staffing company in the United States. The company is the largest nationwide provider of travel nurse and allied staffing, locum tenens (temporary physician staffing) and physician permanent placement services. AMN Healthcare recruits healthcare professionals both nationally and internationally and places them on variable lengths of assignments and in permanent positions at acute-care hospitals, physician practice groups and other healthcare facilities throughout the United States. AMN Healthcare is the sole funding provider of the **Council on Physician and Nurse Supply**. Based at the University of Pennsylvania, the Council is a national group of healthcare leaders committed to bring the supply of nurses and physicians in line with the nation's needs.

## METHODOLOGY

AMN Healthcare's 2007 Survey of Nurses age 45 to 60 was mailed to 7,500 nurses, ranging in ages from 45 to 60. Nurses 45 to 50 years old, nurses 51 to 55 years old and nurses 56 to 60 years old each received an equal distribution of surveys (2,500 per age group). Participants were generated at random and provided to AMN Healthcare by a national healthcare professional database company. The survey was mailed in September 2007 to nurses located across all 50 states. AMN received 1,831 completed surveys by the October 2007 response deadline. Survey results were scanned by machine and checked manually for accuracy. The survey was completed and released in January 2008.

## RESULTS SUMMARY

Total surveys mailed: 7,500

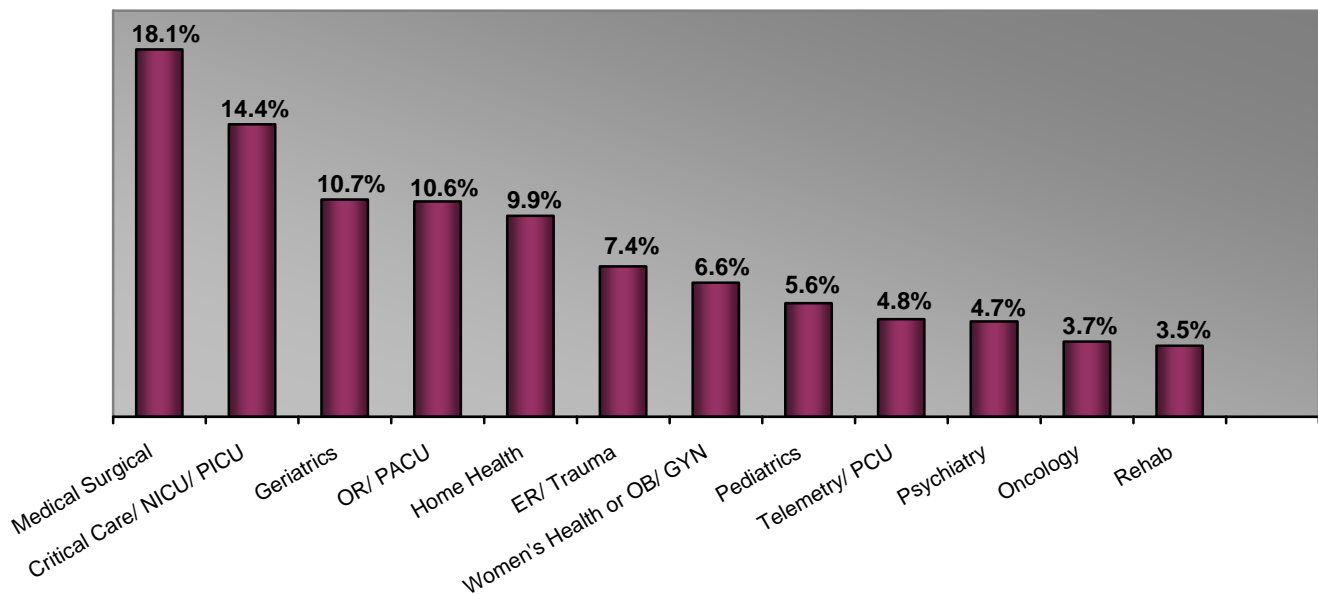
Completed surveys: 1,831

Response rate: 24.4%

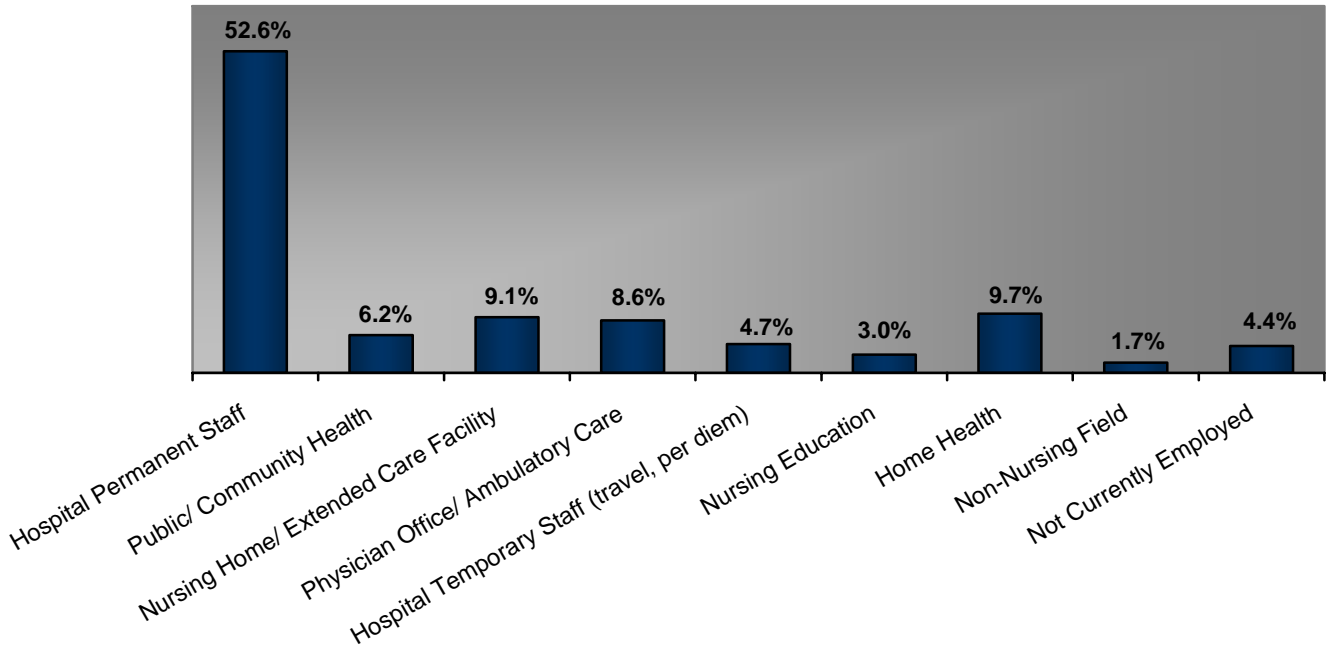
## REVIEW OF SURVEY QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

### PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

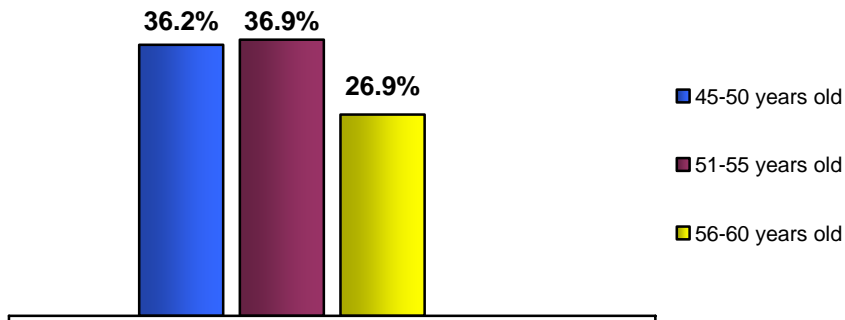
#### 1. What is your primary nursing specialty?



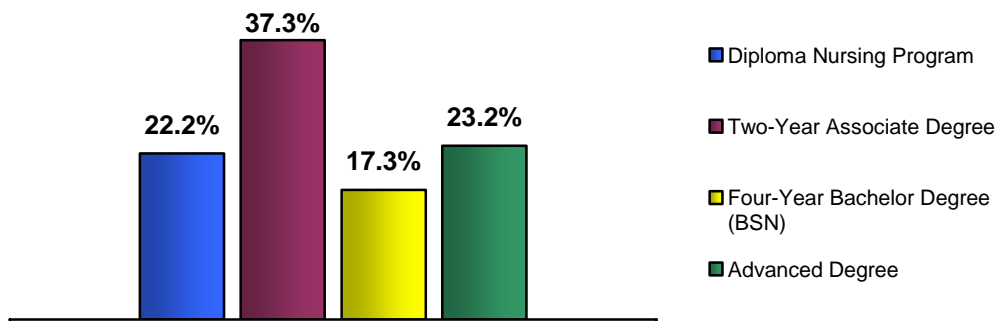
2. What is your current employment setting?



3. What is your age?

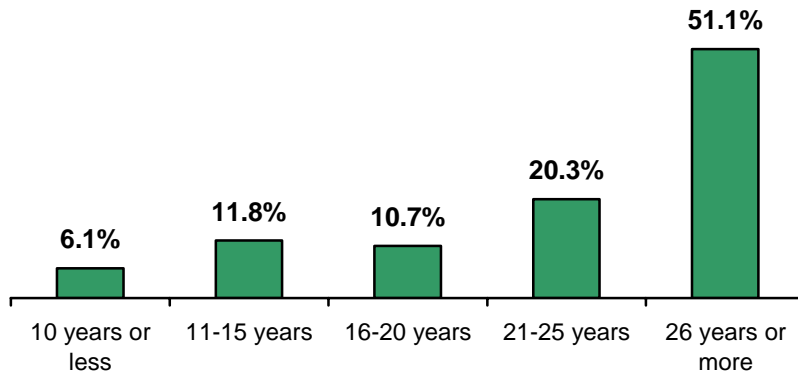


4. What is your highest nursing education level?

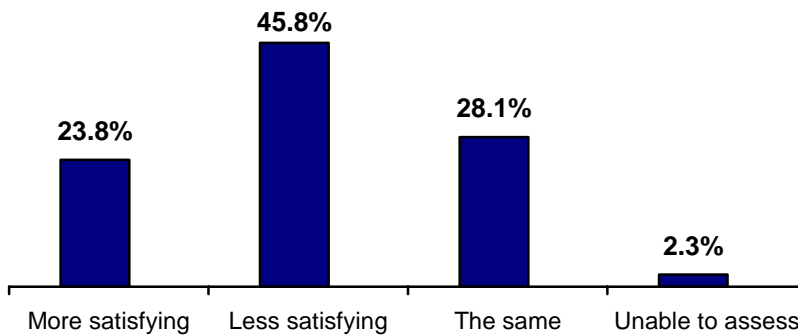


	45-50	51-55	56-60
Diploma Nursing Program	15.9%	22.1%	30.4%
Two-Year Associate Degree	39.7%	37.0%	34.4%
Four-Year Bachelor Degree (BSN)	18.7%	18.0%	14.7%
Advanced Degree	25.7%	22.9%	20.5%

5. How many years have you practiced as a nurse?

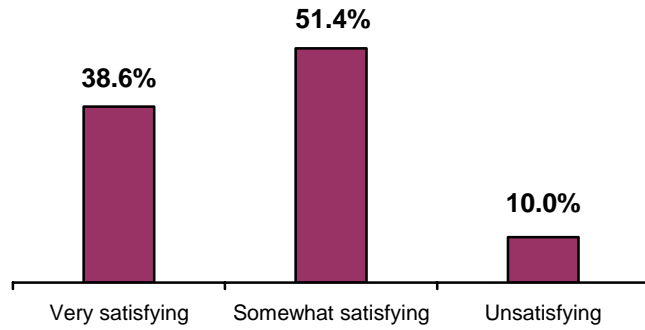


6. Over the last five years, has working as a nurse become more satisfying, less satisfying, or has your satisfaction level remained the same?



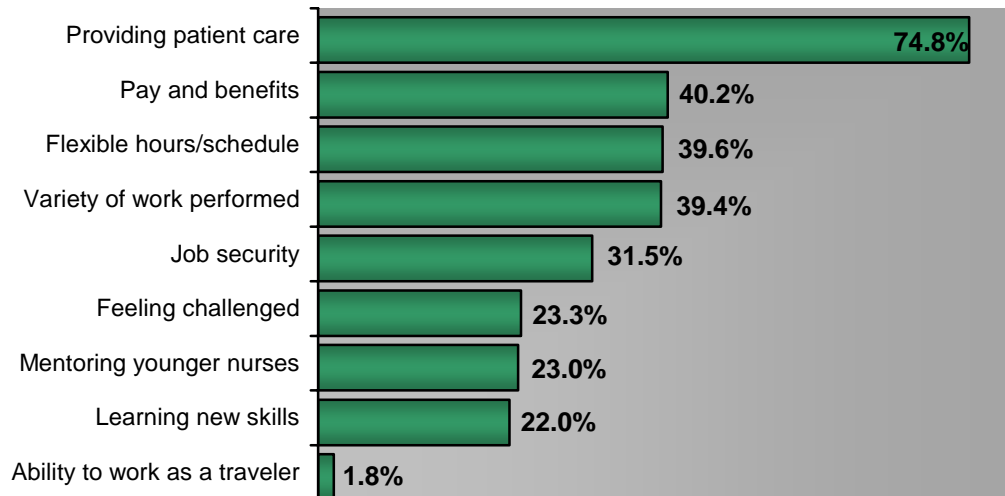
	45-50	51-55	56-60
More satisfying	26.3%	21.3%	23.8%
Less satisfying	42.9%	46.8%	48.0%
The same	28.6%	29.8%	25.7%
Unable to assess	2.2%	2.1%	2.5%

7. Do you now find working as a nurse to be very satisfying, somewhat satisfying, or unsatisfying?

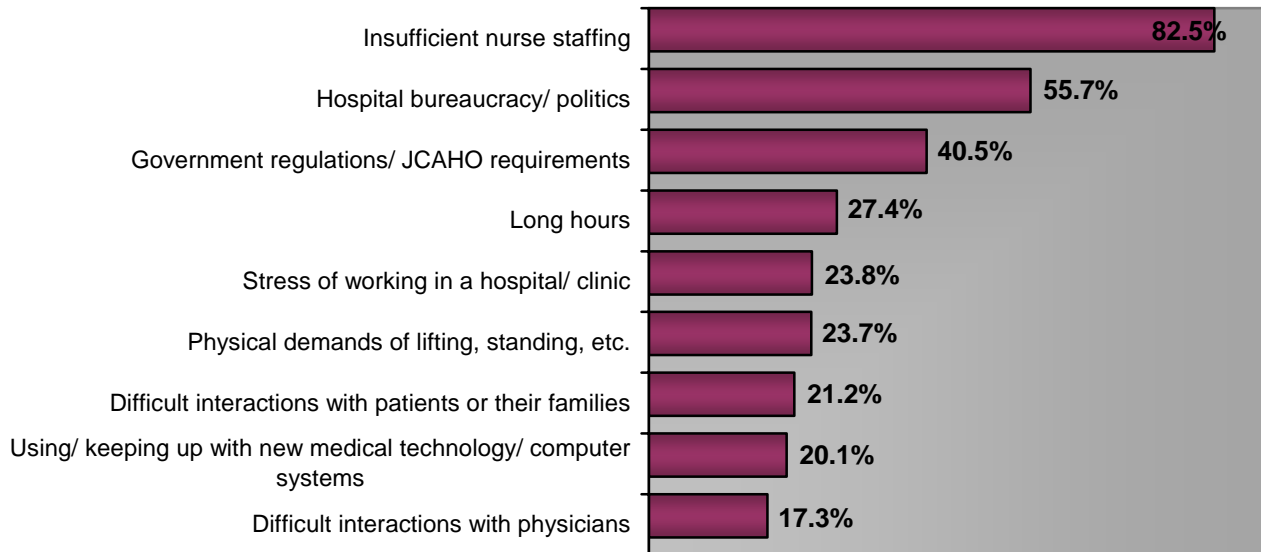


	45-50	51-55	56-60
Very satisfying	39.1%	38.1%	38.9%
Somewhat satisfying	52.4%	52.0%	49.5%
Unsatisfying	8.5%	9.9%	11.6%

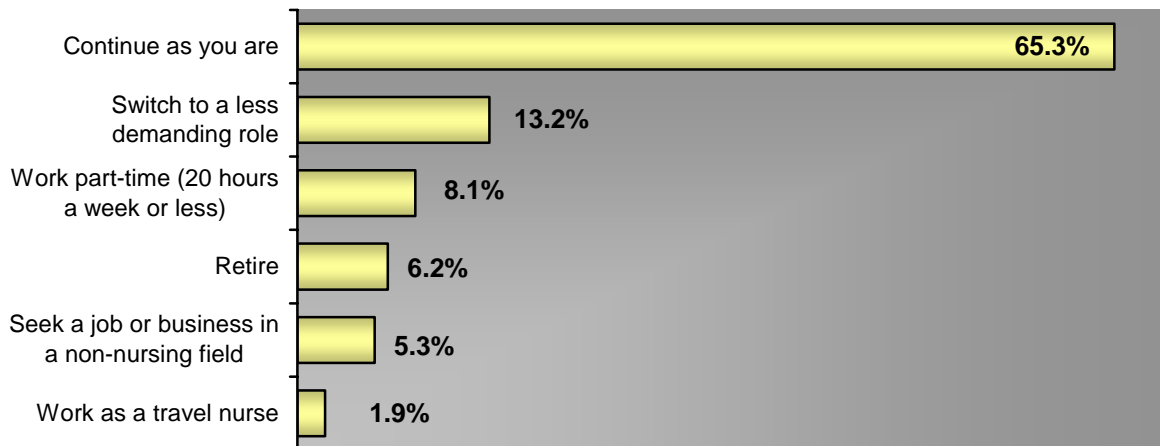
8. Please identify your top three sources of job satisfaction.



9. Please identify your top three sources of professional frustration.

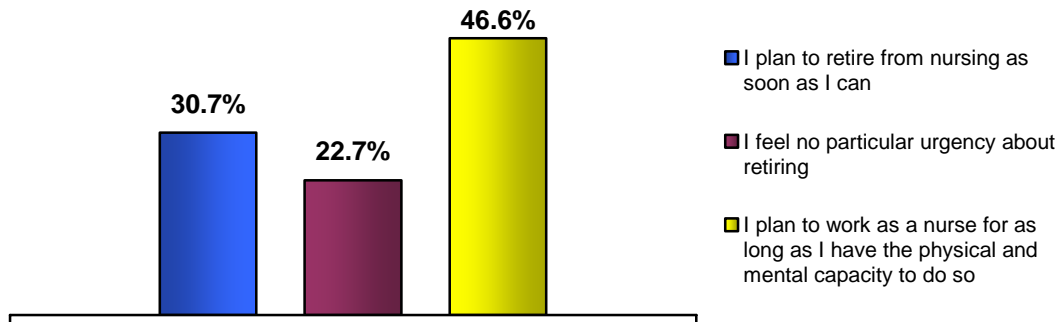


10. In the next one to three years, do you plan to:



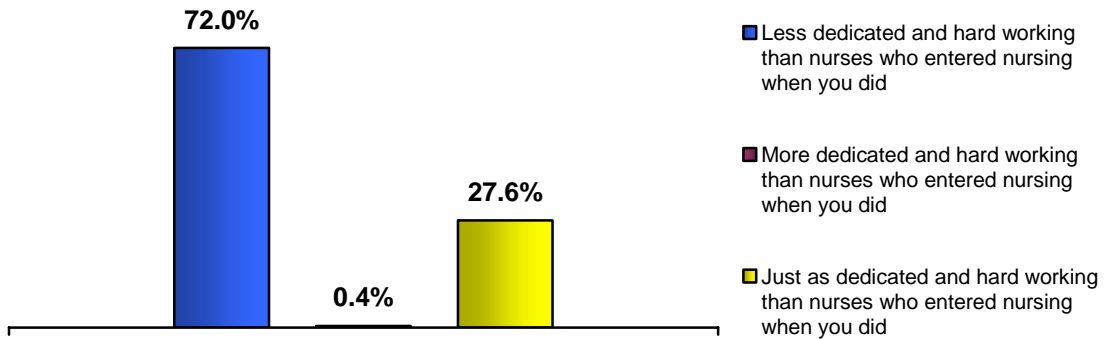
	45-50	51-55	56-60
Continue as you are	70.3%	66.1%	57.8%
Switch to a less demanding role	14.1%	13.4%	11.6%
Work part-time (20 hours a week or less)	5.7%	9.3%	10.5%
Retire	2.5%	4.6%	12.8%
Seek a job or business in a non-nursing field	5.8%	5.1%	4.6%
Work as a travel nurse	1.6%	1.5%	2.7%

11. Which of the following statements is most true?



	45-50	51-55	56-60
I plan to retire from nursing as soon as I can	28.7%	29.9%	33.5%
I feel no particular urgency about retiring	20.0%	23.1%	26.4%
I plan to work as a nurse for as long as I have the physical and mental capacity to do so	51.3%	47.0%	40.1%

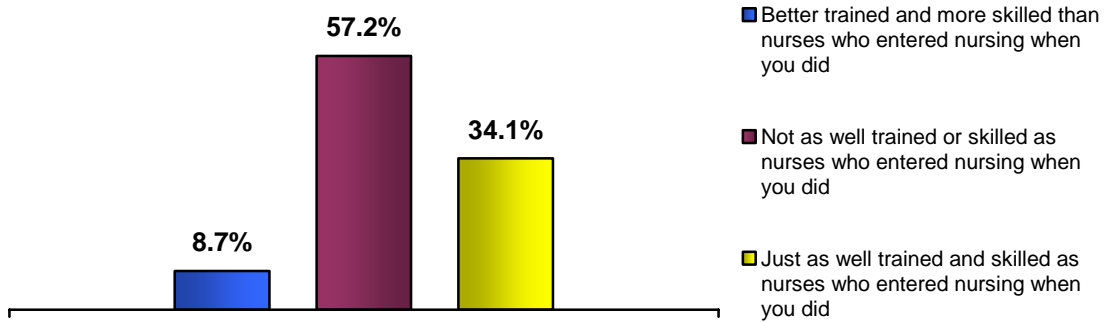
12. Consider the work ethic of nurses coming out of school today. Are nurses being educated today:



	45-50	51-55	56-60
Less dedicated and hard working	71.6%	71.0%	74.2%
More dedicated and hard working	0.3%	0.3%	0.6%
Just as dedicated and hard working	28.1%	28.7%	25.2%

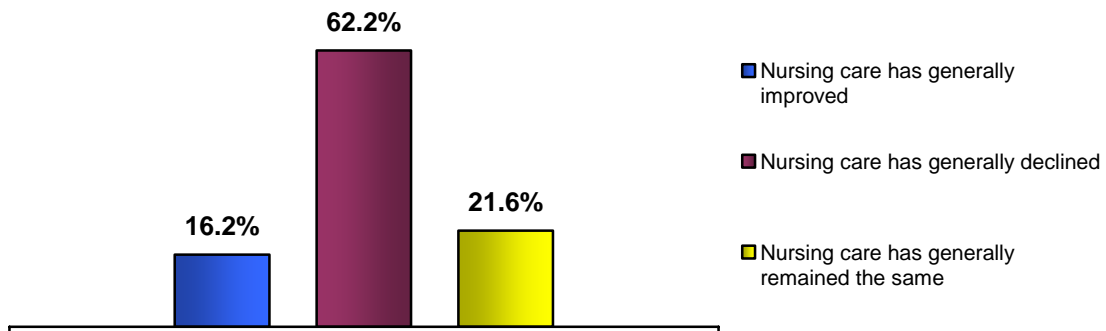


13. Consider the training and skill level of nurses coming out of school today. Are nurses being educated today:

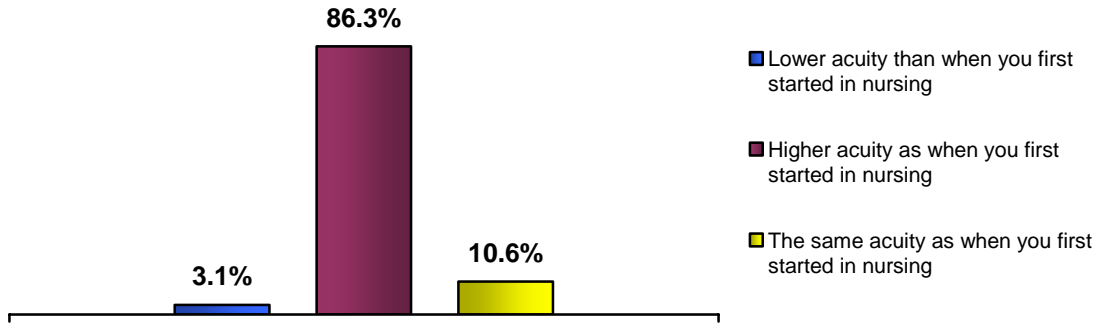


	45-50	51-55	56-60
Better trained	7.7%	9.8%	8.6%
Not as well trained	55.6%	57.6%	59.4%
Just as well trained	36.7%	32.6%	32.0%

14. How do you view the quality of care nurses provide compared to the quality of care they provided when you first began as a nurse?

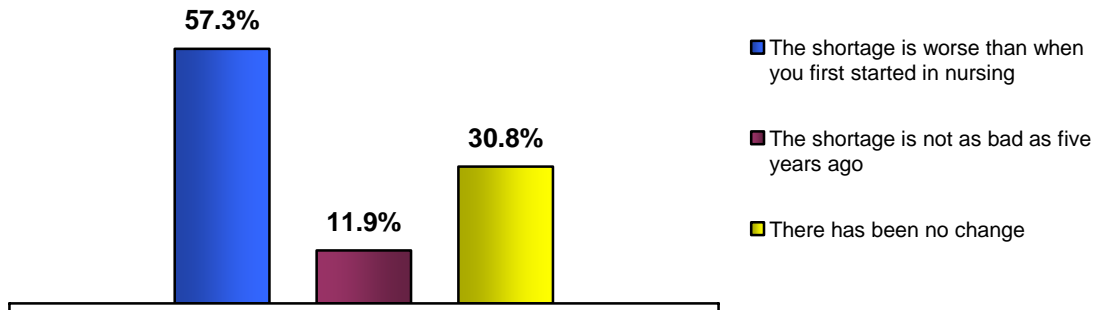


15. Consider the acuity level of patients you see today compared to when you first started practicing as a nurse. Do patients today have:

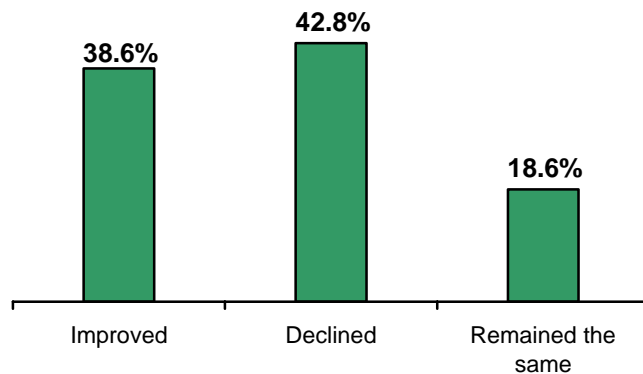


	45-50	51-55	56-60
Lower acuity	2.8%	2.9%	3.8%
Higher acuity	86.6%	84.9%	87.7%
The same acuity	10.6%	12.2%	8.5%

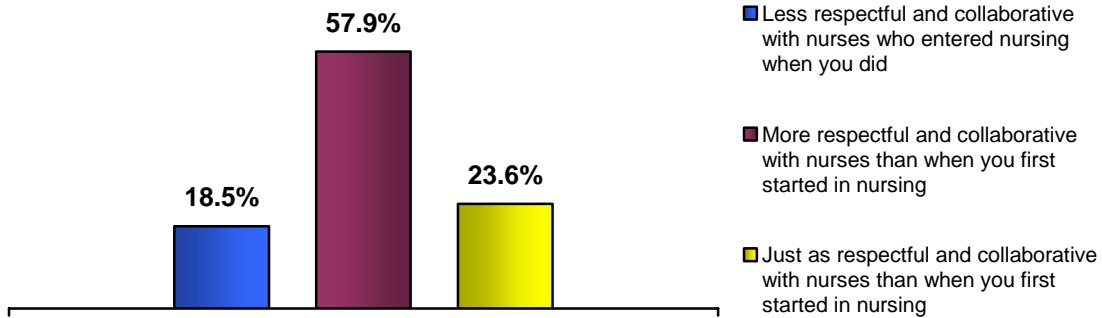
16. Compared to five years ago, how would you assess the nurse shortage today?



17. How do you view the overall quality of medical care provided to patients today compared to when you first began as a nurse? Has the overall quality of medical care generally improved, declined, or remained the same?

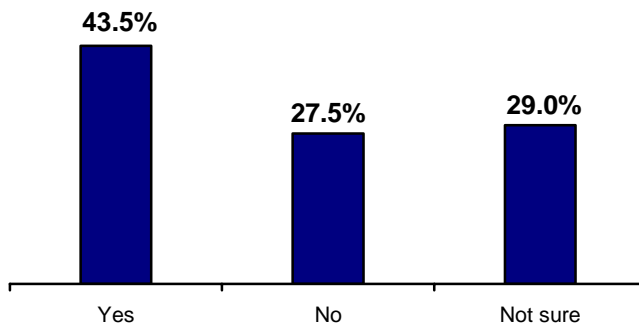


18. Consider doctors coming out of training today compared to those coming out of training when you first started practicing as a nurse. Are young doctors today:

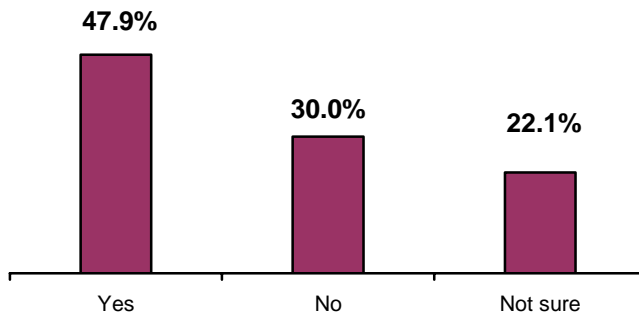


	45-50	51-55	56-60
Less respectful	19.7%	18.7%	16.8%
More respectful	57.6%	57.2%	59.1%
Just as respectful	22.7%	24.1%	24.1%

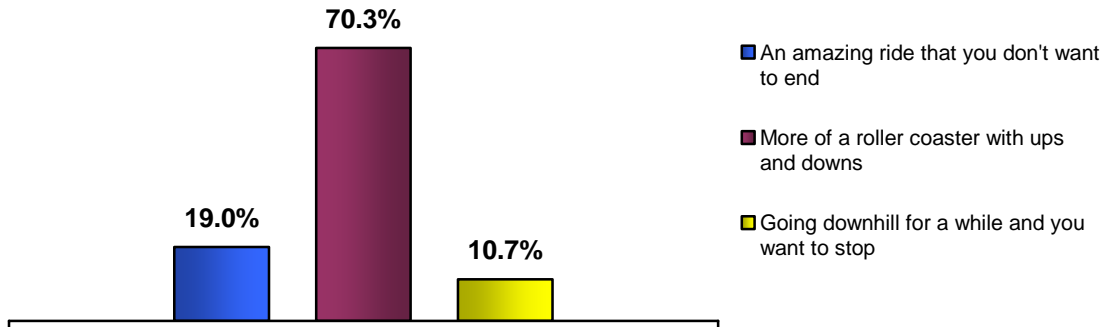
19. If you were starting out today, would you choose nursing as your career?



20. Would you encourage your children or other young people to choose nursing as a career today?

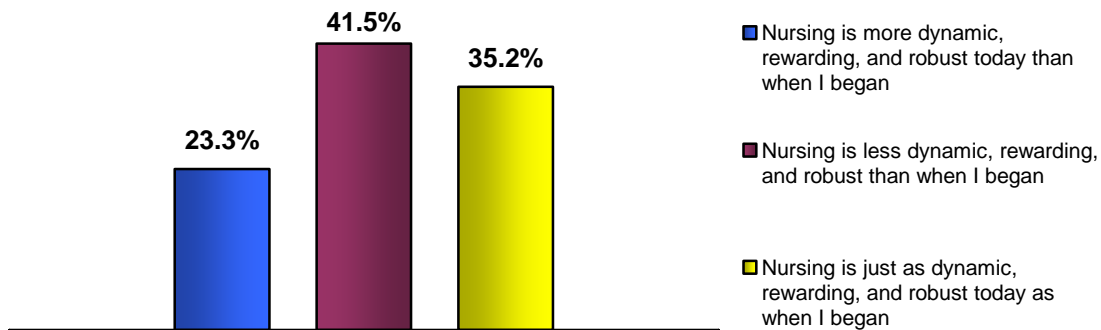


21. Which of the following best describes your opinion of your nursing career?



	45-50	51-55	56-60
An amazing ride that you don't want to end	16.6%	20.4%	20.1%
More of a roller coaster with ups and downs	73.9%	68.6%	68.2%
Going downhill for a while and you want to stop	9.5%	11.0%	11.7%

22. Overall, how do you view the nursing profession today compared to when you began as a nurse?



## **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS**

According to the Health Resources and Services Administration's National Sample Survey of Registered Nurses, the majority of nurses in the United States are 45 years old or older. How satisfied are these nurses in their jobs? What aspects of nursing do they find most rewarding, and what aspects of nursing do they find most frustrating? What do these experienced nurses, who in many cases make up the core of hospital medical staffs, plan to do professionally in the next one to three years? And how do nurses, many of whom have been in the profession for years, if not decades, view the current state of nursing and healthcare in general?

AMN Healthcare's 2007 Survey of Nurses 45 to 60 provides answers to these questions while drawing a portrait of older nurses that shows them to be generally satisfied with their careers but deeply critical of the way nursing and healthcare delivery have evolved since they entered the profession.

### **CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS**

Nurses responding to the survey represent a range of nursing specialties. Over 18% of respondents identified medical/surgical as their primary nurse specialty. Critical Care/NICU/PICU, OR, ER and a number of other nursing specialties also are represented.

The majority of nurses surveyed (52.6%) work on the hospital permanent staff, while 4.7% work as hospital temporary staff, either as travelers or as per diem nurses. Close to 10% of nurses surveyed work in home health settings, while 9.1% work in nursing homes and 8.6% work in physician offices. A variety of other work settings also are represented.

Over one-third of nurses surveyed (36.9%) fall into the 51-55 age group, 36.2% are 45-50, while 27% are 56-60 years old. The majority (59.5%) have either two- or three-year nurse degrees, while 40.5% have four-year degrees or higher.

A majority of nurses surveyed (51.1%) have 26 or more years of nursing experience, while over 82% have at least 16 years of nursing experience. Most of the nurses surveyed therefore have a long-term perspective regarding the current state of nursing and how the profession has evolved over the years.

### **JOB SATISFACTION/JOB FRUSTRATION**

The survey suggests that the majority of experienced nurses find their jobs to be at least somewhat satisfying. Nurses surveyed who find nursing to be "very satisfying" (38.6%) outnumbered those who find nursing to be "unsatisfying" (10%) by close to a four to one margin. However, the majority of nurses surveyed (51.4%) fall somewhere in between and find nursing to be "somewhat satisfying."

Many nurses said that working as a nurse is not as rewarding as it was five years ago. Close to 46% of nurses surveyed indicated that working as a nurse has become "less satisfying" in the last five years, compared to about 24% of nurses who said working as a nurse has become "more satisfying." About 28% of nurses said their level of job satisfaction has remained the same, while about 2% were unable to make an assessment.

Nurses were asked to identify their top three sources of professional satisfaction. About 75% of nurses listed “providing patient care” as being among their top three sources of professional satisfaction. “Providing patient care” trumped all other sources of satisfaction. “Pay and benefits” was a distant second choice selected by 40.2% of nurses surveyed, followed by “flexible hours/schedule” (39.6%), “variety of work performed” (39.4%), and “job security” (31.5%) among several others.

Nurses were also close to unanimous in identifying their primary source for job dissatisfaction. Over 82% of nurses listed “insufficient nurse staffing” as among their top three complaints, with “hospital bureaucracy/politics” a distant second at 55.7%. Insufficient staffing may give rise to unfavorable work conditions such as longer hours and increase risks to patients (*see Hospital Nurse Staffing and Patient Mortality, Nurse Burnout, and Job Dissatisfaction. Linda Aiken, Ph.D., et al, JAMA, 2002; 288; 1987-1993.*)

Like physicians and other health professionals, nurses often are frustrated by the regulatory environment in healthcare. “Government regulations/JCAHO requirements” was identified as a top source of professional frustration by 40.5% of nurses, followed by other complaints, including “long hours,” (27.4%), “stress of working in a hospital/clinic” (23.8%), and “physical demands of lifting/standing, etc.” (23.7%)

Though friction between nurses and physicians does occur in the workplace, only 17.3% of nurses identified “difficult interactions with physicians” to be among their top three sources of professional frustration.

## **CHANGING COURSE?**

Nurses were asked about their professional plans in the next one to three years. The majority (65.3%) said that they planned to continue as they are. However, a significant number said they plan to make changes that would either take them out of nursing altogether or reduce the amount of patient care they provide.

Over 6% of nurses said they plan to retire in the next one to three years, while another 5.3% said they plan to seek a job in a non-nursing field. Approximately 1,127,000 practicing nurses in the United States are between 45 and 60 years old, according to the Health Resources and Services Administration. Should 11% of these nurses retire or find non-nursing jobs in the next one to three years, some 124,000 nurses would be removed from the clinical workforce.

Just over 8% of nurses said they plan to work part-time in the next one to three years, working 20 hours a week or less. Should 8% of nurses in the 45 to 60 age group (approximately 90,000 nurses) choose to work part-time in the next one to three years, the overall nurse workforce would be reduced by an additional 45,000 full time equivalents (FTEs.)

Over 13% of nurses said they would “take on a less demanding role” in the next one to three years. A “less demanding role” is difficult to quantify but implies some type of reduction in hours or duties. Should 13% of nurses in the 45 to 60 age group (approximately 146,000 nurses) adopt a less demanding role in the next one to three years it would likely result in a further reduction of nurse FTEs.

About 2% of nurses said they would “work as a travel nurse” in the next one to three years. Working as a travel nurse on temporary work assignments is one way for experienced nurses to continue to use their skills while experiencing a variety of work locations. Should 2% of nurses 45 to 60 (approximately 22,540 nurses) choose to work as travel nurses in the next one to three years, rather than retiring or leaving nursing altogether, it would likely keep thousands of nurses in the workforce who might otherwise have retired or sought non-clinical jobs.

## **THAT WAS THEN**

Nurses were asked to compare nurses coming out of school today to nurses who entered the workforce when they and their contemporaries did.

About three quarters of nurses (72%) said that nurses being trained today are “*less dedicated* and hard working” than nurses who entered the profession when they did. Fewer than one percent of nurses said that nurses today are “*more dedicated* and hard working” than previous generations of nurses. The remaining 27.6% said nurses being trained today are “*just as dedicated* and hard working” as previously trained nurses.

The majority of nurses surveyed also indicated that the skill level of nurses being trained today is not as high as it once was. Over 57% said nurses coming out of school today are “*not* as well trained and skilled” as nurses who entered the profession when they did. Over 34% said nurses coming out of school today are “*just as* well trained and skilled” as previous generations of nurses, while only 8.7% said nurses today are “*better* trained and skilled” as previously trained nurses.

For the most part, nurses were generally critical about the quality of care provided by nursing today compared to the quality of care provided by nurses when they entered the profession. Over 62% said quality of nursing care “has generally *declined*” compared to when they first began as a nurse. Over 21% said quality of nursing care “has generally *remained the same*” while only 16.2% said quality of nursing care “has generally *improved*.”

Nurses also were asked to compare physicians coming out of training today to those who came out when they entered the workforce. In contrast to their comments regarding today’s nurses, nurses responding to the survey were generally approving of today’s physicians. The majority (57.9%) said that physicians coming out of training today are “*more respectful* and collaborative” than physicians were when they entered the workforce. About 24% said that physicians today are “*just as* respectful and collaborative” as previous generations of physicians. Only 18.5% said that physicians today are “*less respectful* and collaborative” than previously trained physicians.

Nurses surveyed indicated that while patient acuity levels have risen since they entered the profession, the number of nurses needed to handle rising patient acuity has not kept pace. Over 86% of nurses said that patient acuity levels have risen since they became nurses. The majority (57.3%) also said that the nurse shortage is worse now than it was five years ago.

## MIXED FEELINGS

The survey suggests that experienced nurses have mixed feelings about their choice of a career. Over 56% said either they would not choose nursing if they had their careers to do over or were not sure if they would choose nursing. Only some 43% said that they would choose nursing as a career if they were starting over.

Nurses had similarly mixed feelings about whether they would recommend nursing as a career. Only 47.9% of nurses said they would recommend nursing as a career to their children or other young people, while the majority said either they would not or were not sure if they would.

When looking back on their careers, nurses also expressed ambivalence. The majority (70.3%) described nursing as “a roller coast with ups and downs.” Over 10% characterized their nursing careers as “going downhill for while,” while 19% called nursing “an amazing ride” that they don’t want to end.

## CONCLUSION

AMN Healthcare’s 2007 Survey of Nurses 45 to 60 suggests that most older nurses are either satisfied or somewhat satisfied with their careers, even though many are not sure they would choose nursing if they had their careers to do over. In general, experienced nurses feel that nursing care has declined over the years, as has the quality of nurse training. On a positive note, many feel that physicians have become more respectful of nurses and more willing to collaborate with them.

Based on the survey results, many older nurses plan to make changes in their careers over the next one to three years that would reduce the overall number of nurses in the workforce. Given ongoing nurse shortages, the retention of experienced nurses should be considered a priority for the healthcare industry. Moreover, the nurse shortage is not only a result of older nurses exiting the profession, but may be a contributing cause as well. The most frequently cited cause of job dissatisfaction-- by far-- among older nurses surveyed-- was “insufficient nurse staffing.” In addition, insufficient nurse staffing may contribute to other areas of job dissatisfaction cited in the survey, including “long hours” and the “stress of working in a hospital or clinic.” Nurse shortages thereby become part of a self-perpetuating cycle, as they help create conditions that cause nurses to leave the profession.

Ensuring the retention of older nurses is therefore tied to the larger issue of nurse supply. The current self-sustaining cycle of nurse shortages can only be broken through a national effort to train more new nurses to both fill vacancies and to address those conditions that are causing older nurses to leave the profession.

For additional information about this survey or other information pertaining to nurse staffing trends, contact:



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