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Educated and Underemployed:  
*The Paradox for Nursing Graduates*

Interim Report



Nursing Health Services Research Unit

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# **Educated and Underemployed:** ***The Paradox for Nursing Graduates***

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## Main Messages

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- Full-time employment is an issue for nursing graduands,\* particularly in the face of a nursing shortage. There is a significant *brain drain* to the United States and other regions. Given the shortage of nurses in Ontario and Canada, immediate intervention is required.
- Canada, like most developed countries, is facing a nursing shortage that is likely to increase in severity.
- Ontario nursing students that graduated between December 2003 and July 2004; 1851 graduands completed the survey.
- Graduands were from different regions: 27.2% Toronto, 18.1% East, 17.1% North, 12.4% South West, 10.4% Central South, 9.0% Central East, 5.9% Central West.
- At the time of survey (March-September 2004), 41.5% of the graduands had found employment: 40.9% part-time, 36.5% full-time, 20.3% casual, 1.2% multiple positions, 1.0% did not specify, 56.4% were actively seeking employment, and 1.4% were not seeking employment in nursing.
- The majority of graduands wanted full-time employment, 16.3% were seeking part-time employment, and 3.5 % desired casual employment or had no preference.
- Locations where graduands reported seeking employment: 61.9% in Ontario, 29.1% multiple locations, 4.7% only in the United States, 2.9% chose other locations, and 1.5% did not choose a location
- Most of the graduands employed in the United States were working full-time.
- The majority of graduands sought employment in the region where they attended school.
- 26% of the graduands surveyed would consider moving to the United States and 5.5% to other countries.
- Over 50% of the graduands in South West Ontario (Windsor, London) were considering employment in the United States.
- The graduands' perceptions of the opportunities were: there are plenty of jobs and a variety of nursing specialties in both Canada and the United States.
- The graduands' perceptions of the current challenges were: there are no full-time jobs, too much casual employment, and employment instability.

\*Graduands refers to recently graduated nursing students.

## 1.0 Background

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Canada, like most developed countries, is facing a nursing shortage that is likely to increase in severity. A report by the Canadian Nurses Association (CNA, 2002) projected a shortage of 78,000 nurses in 2011 and 113,000 nurses by 2016 unless immediate intervention is undertaken (CNA, 2002). Other countries that are also facing a nursing shortage, such as the United States (US), England, and Australia, have developed aggressive recruitment strategies in response. It is vital that nursing employers in Ontario recruit and retain graduands from nursing programs to augment the aging nursing workforce and replace retiring nurses.

Currently, there is little evidence about where nursing graduates in Ontario are seeking employment, what type of employment they are seeking (full-time, part-time, or casual), and what specialties they prefer. This data is essential to assist health care organizations to create employment opportunities attractive to nursing graduates and to provide policy makers such as the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care with accurate information on which to base decisions. The research project described in this report is intended to supply this information.

Two human resources issues have particular relevance to a study of nursing graduates: the difficulty that graduands experience in finding full-time work and the propensity of young Canadian nurses to migrate to the US. Although the ratio of full-time to part-time nurses improved after 1998, only 56.9% of nurses in Ontario were working full-time in 2002 (Canadian Institute for Health Information [CIHI], 2003).

### *1.1 Provincial Trends*

The Registered Nursing Association of British Columbia (RNABC; 2003) recently surveyed graduates from the nursing class of 2002, with a 45% response rate. The majority of graduates were between 20-29 years of age, had baccalaureate education, and were female. In total, 49.6% of the graduates had found regular full-time positions, down from 63.0% of the previous graduating class. The number of graduates employed in casual nursing positions (41.0%) was up from 2001 (17.5%). Seventy-seven percent of the sample felt satisfied with their current position, down from 86% previously. When asked about their career intentions over the next year, almost

13% of respondents said they intended to leave the province, down from 19% in 2001. Just over 10% of the graduates were living outside British Columbia in either another province or country. The most common reasons given for leaving were the perception of better career opportunities outside British Columbia (61%) and the inability to find a regular registered nursing position within the province (57%). Seventy-nine percent of the graduates that left were working in regular nursing positions. When asked what would motivate them to return, the most common responses were suitable employment opportunities (full-time positions), better staffing levels, and improved working conditions and educational opportunities. The RNABC report cites many recommendations for retaining new graduates, including “ensuring [that] new graduate registered nurses who want permanent, full-time positions are able to obtain them”.

A study of the 2004 graduating nursing class is currently underway in New Brunswick. Interim results show that 88.5% of the 104 graduates surveyed are employed (66% full-time, 21% part-time, and 11% casual). All unemployed graduands reported actively seeking a nursing position, and all but one preferred full-time work. When asked where they had found or were considering employment, 82.7% chose New Brunswick, 20.2% chose another province, 15% chose the US, and 3.8% chose another country; there were double responders among this particular question (Dr. Ann Rheame, personal communication, June 30, 2004). New Brunswick has a slightly higher full-time rate of employment than Ontario or British Columbia.

Eva Ryten (1997) recommended efforts be made to facilitate the entry of new graduates into nursing practice and that they should receive priority for employment. However, nursing unions feel that experienced nurses already working in the health care system should also have access to full-time jobs (Ontario Nurses Association [ONA], June 3, 2004). On June 3, 2004 the Ontario McGuinty Government announced \$50 million in funding for nurses; a portion of which is to retain nursing graduates through hiring and mentoring 1000 new graduands (The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, June 6, 2004).

### *1.2. US Migration*

According to Zhao, Drew, and Murray (2000), the number of nurses leaving Canada for the US increased steadily from 330 per year in the late 1980s to 825 in 1996 and 1997.

They propose that the total outflow of nursing graduates in 1995 was equivalent to one quarter of the 3000 graduands for the year (Zhao et al., 2000).

The Canadian Council on Social Development (2000) reported that nearly one in ten nursing graduates from the class of 1995 went to the US between 1995 and 1997. This compares to 1.3% of graduates from other fields (Canadian Council on Social Development, 2000). Evidence suggests that up to 10% of new nursing graduands leave Canada in search of full-time work in the US and other countries (Canadian Council on Social Development, 2000). In 2001, the Registered Nurses Association of Ontario (RNAO) completed a study on the migration patterns of Ontario nurses to other provinces and countries. They found the majority of nurses that left Ontario went to the US. Their primary reason for leaving was the lack of job opportunities and their key motivation for returning was the availability of full-time work.

A recent study of nursing graduates from a university in Atlantic Canada revealed that 35% had worked in the US (Gillis, Jackson, & Beiswanger, 2004). At the Henry Ford Health System in Detroit, Michigan, 22% of the nursing staff and up to 50% of staff in some specialty areas are Canadian (Human Resources, Henry Ford Health System, personal communication, February 04, 2004). The migration of high numbers of young Canadian nurses to the US and elsewhere is cause for concern; it not only exacerbates the current nursing shortage but may have a devastating effect on the supply of nursing personnel and the delivery of health care services in the future.

## 2.0 Study Purpose and Objectives

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The purpose of this study is to gather demographic and employment information about nursing graduates in Ontario to inform decision and policy makers at the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care; the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities; professional associations such as the RNAO; and recruiters for health care organizations. The study has seven objectives:

1. Identify the demographic characteristics of Ontario nursing graduands who graduated between December 2003 and July 2004;
2. Describe preferences for full-time, part-time, and casual employment; specialty in nursing; and employment location;
3. Identify the proportion of nursing graduands who have employment offers and the proportions entering full-time, part-time, and casual employment;
4. Compare the employment characteristics of graduates from nursing degree and diploma programs;
5. Understand what nursing graduands in Ontario think are the opportunities and challenges they face in the current job market;
6. Understand what proportion of nursing graduates plan to continue education in the next year; and
7. Describe the mobility patterns of nursing graduates within Ontario, Canada, and internationally.

## 3.0 Methodology

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### *3.1 Research Design*

A mixed methodology design that included the concurrent collection of quantitative and qualitative data was used. A survey was developed that included multiple choice quantitative questions and open-ended qualitative questions. Two open-ended qualitative questions enabled participants to offer their thoughts and opinions on contemporary job opportunities, and provide information that would have been missed had the survey been limited to forced choice questions.

### *3.2 Sample*

The sample consisted of all schools of nursing in Ontario with graduating classes of diploma or degree prepared nurses. Data were collected at 29 nursing schools in Ontario. As three schools had multiple sites, a total of 34 sites were involved (see Appendix A for a complete list of the participating schools in each region of Ontario).

Based on the numbers of graduates identified by the schools, 3066 students were considered eligible to complete the survey. A total of 1957 surveys were returned. However, the responses of some of the students were omitted from the analysis completed for this report. One hundred and six respondents were excluded because they would not graduate until after summer 2004 or they did not provide a graduation date. The researchers felt that including these respondents might bias the findings by inflating the number of graduates that had not found work. Consequently, the total number of surveys included in this report was 1851.

### *3.3 Data Collection Process*

There were three methods of data collection used: on-site, online, and mail-out. Once contact was made with either the Director or Dean of the school, the research coordinator negotiated the method that would yield the highest response rate. A range of data collection strategies was utilized because programs at each school differ in terms of the amount of time students spend in clinical assignments and on campus, and because of differences in graduation dates. However, all the schools were willing to use at least one of the methods; some schools with different sites and

### *3.3.1 On-Site*

The ideal method of data collection was for a researcher or a delegate from the school to distribute the surveys in a large class or at a clinical site. At 14 sites a delegate from the school handed out the information sheet and administered and collected the surveys during a large class or during clinical. At five sites the research coordinator administered and collected the questionnaire, provided an explanation to the class, and distributed an information sheet.

### *3.3.2 Online*

The survey was offered online at schools where students had no classes on campus at the time of data collection. The Director or Dean of these schools or their delegate was sent an email with the online survey link attached. They then sent a private email to the individual students asking them to complete the online survey via the link. At least one reminder email was sent to the students two to four weeks after the initial email. If less than 50% of the students had completed the online survey after the reminder, a second email was sent out by the school liaison within two to four weeks. The online survey was hosted by [surveymonkey.com](http://surveymonkey.com), a user-friendly online survey provider.

### *3.3.3 Mail-Out*

Surveys were sent to schools from which students had graduated before the study started. Surveys were also sent to students that were not currently attending classes on campus and students not on email. The mail-out approach was used for nine sites. A modified Dillman procedure was used to maximize the response to the mail-out surveys (Dillman, 1978). A reminder postcard was mailed to all survey recipients two to six weeks after the original survey was sent. The cutoff date for receiving mailed surveys was September 01, 2004.

### *3.3.4 Instrument and Measurement*

A Graduating Nursing Employment Survey was created for this study using questions based on the College of Nurses of Ontario (CNO; 2002) annual registration form or developed by the research team (see Appendix B). The three-page survey includes questions on current and future nursing employment, preferred employment location, area and specialty of nursing education plans, and the benefits and challenges of the current nursing labour market.

The survey was pilot-tested on the McMaster University graduating nursing class (n=77); revisions were made as necessary and the final questionnaire was developed based on the pilot study.

### *3.3.5 Analysis Procedure*

All data were entered into the computer software program SPSS 12.0 for personal computers. The file was edited and frequencies of all variables generated and presented in percentage form. Chi-square and t-tests were performed to determine the associations between demographic variables and responses pertaining to choice and specialty of employment. The open-ended questions were coded and analyzed; themes developed based upon groupings of similar responses.

In addition to the overall analysis results, data for each school were analyzed separately and the results disseminated to each school. Comparison of findings to relevant CNO data is planned for the future.

### *3.4 Data Quality and Limitations*

Several data quality issues may affect the collection of accurate information about graduating nursing students. There is no single source that records the total number of nursing graduates in Ontario. The College of Nurses of Ontario Membership Overview Statistics collects data on nurses who register with the CNO for the first time each year. However, these figures include nurses who have left the province to practice, graduates who took time off before registering, and new nursing graduates.

The quality of data collected by individual schools of nursing in Ontario varies. Many of the schools contacted were unable to provide accurate numbers of students in their current graduating class, and numbers provided by some nursing departments did not match those provided by the Office of the Registrar. Discrepancies in the collection of accurate information make it difficult to understand how many students are graduating and from which program. Furthermore, it prevents stakeholders, including policy makers and potential employers, from obtaining an accurate picture of graduating nurses in Ontario.

### *3.5 Study Limitations*

The results of this study apply to graduands from college or university nursing programs in Ontario. Therefore, caution should be exercised in generalizing these results to

the entire nursing population in Canada. In addition, the use of three different data collection methods may have affected the quality of the data. The researchers plan to compare the results from the three surveys methods to understand potential biases.

Administering the survey shortly before graduation gave the research team the best access to the students while ensuring that they had started their job search. However, graduation dates differed among the schools. A challenge for the researchers was to survey all the students within a specific timeframe. A possible bias was that some students were not near graduation at the time of the survey; these students may not have begun their job search. If all the students had graduated at the time of the survey, the percentage of employed would most likely have been higher.

## 4.0 Interim Results

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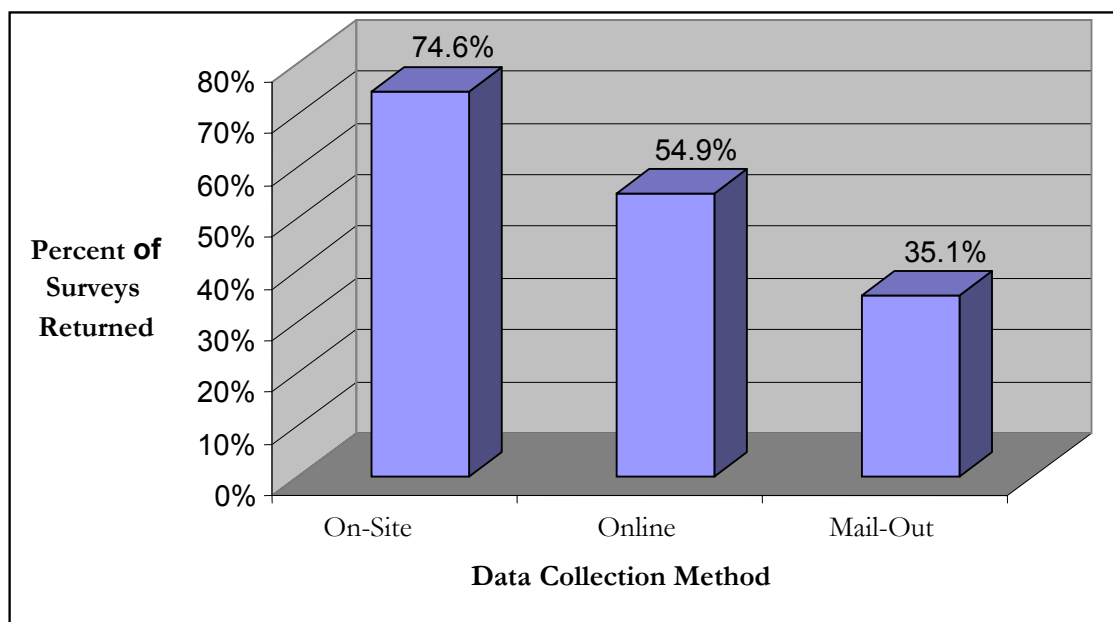
### 4.1 Response Rate

All surveys were completed in March-September 2004, 3066<sup>1</sup> graduands were eligible to participate. A total of 1957 surveys were received by September 01, 2004; a response rate of 63.8%. However, 106 surveys were excluded because the respondents were not graduating until after summer 2004. Therefore, 1851 surveys were included in the analysis for this report. Table 1 represents the number of surveys sent and returned for each data collection method and Figure 1 illustrates the response rate. On-site distribution had a significantly higher response rate than online or mail-out surveys.

Table 1. *Number of Surveys Sent and Returned per Method of Data Collection*

Survey Method	On-Site	Online	Mail-Out
Surveys Sent	1708	505	853
Surveys Returned	1275	277	299

Figure 1. *Percent of returned surveys per method of data collection.*

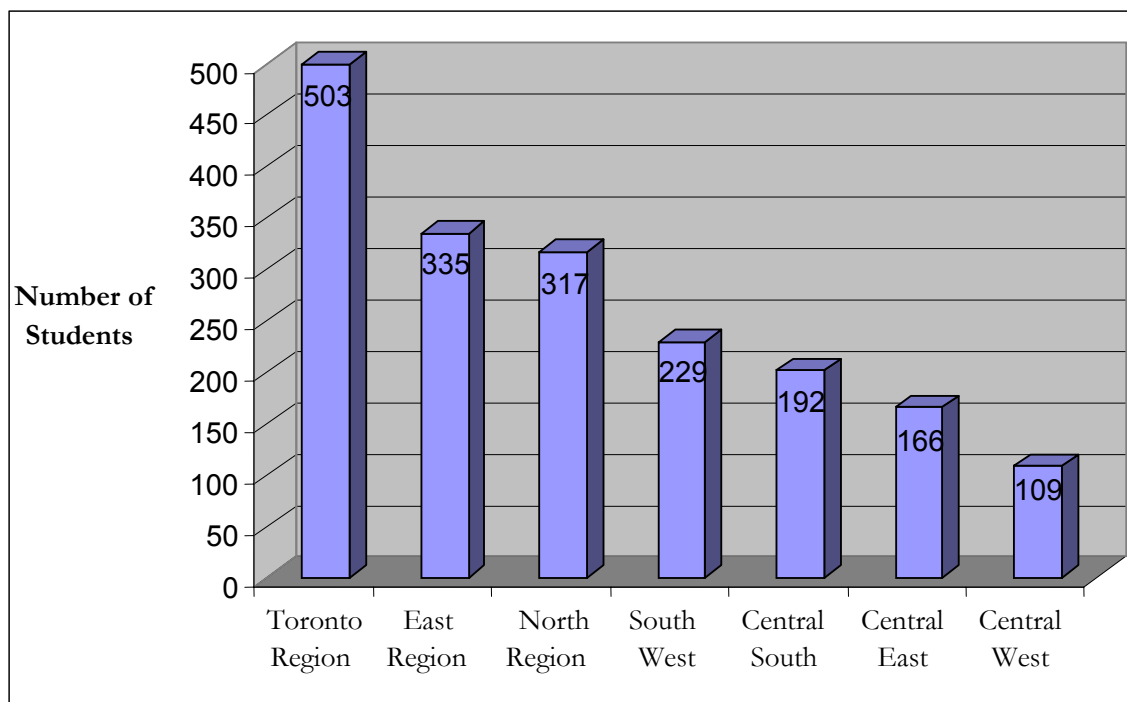


<sup>1</sup>This number is based on the figure provided by the individual schools of nursing.

#### 4.2 Demographic Characteristics

Sixty-six percent (1221)<sup>2</sup> of the graduands were from three-year diploma programs, the remaining 34% (630) were from four-year university programs. Ninety-two percent (1698) were female and 8% (151) were male; two individuals did not state their gender. The average year of birth was 1974, with a range of 1940-1984. Most of the respondents (80.8%; 1495) expected to graduate during spring 2004, with the remaining graduating in winter 2003 (6.6%; 122), fall 2003 (1.7%; 32), spring 2003 (1.2%; 22), and summer 2004 (9.7%; 180). Graduands were clustered according to regions within Ontario (see Appendix C). A higher proportion of students were graduating from programs in Toronto, Eastern Ontario, and Northern Ontario than from programs in other regions. Figure 2 presents the number of students per region in Ontario (see Appendix A for a complete list of participating schools per region).

Figure 2. Number of graduating nursing students completing survey per region in Ontario.



<sup>2</sup>Wherever possible both the percentages and number of students are provided.

### 4.3 Current Employment and Preferences

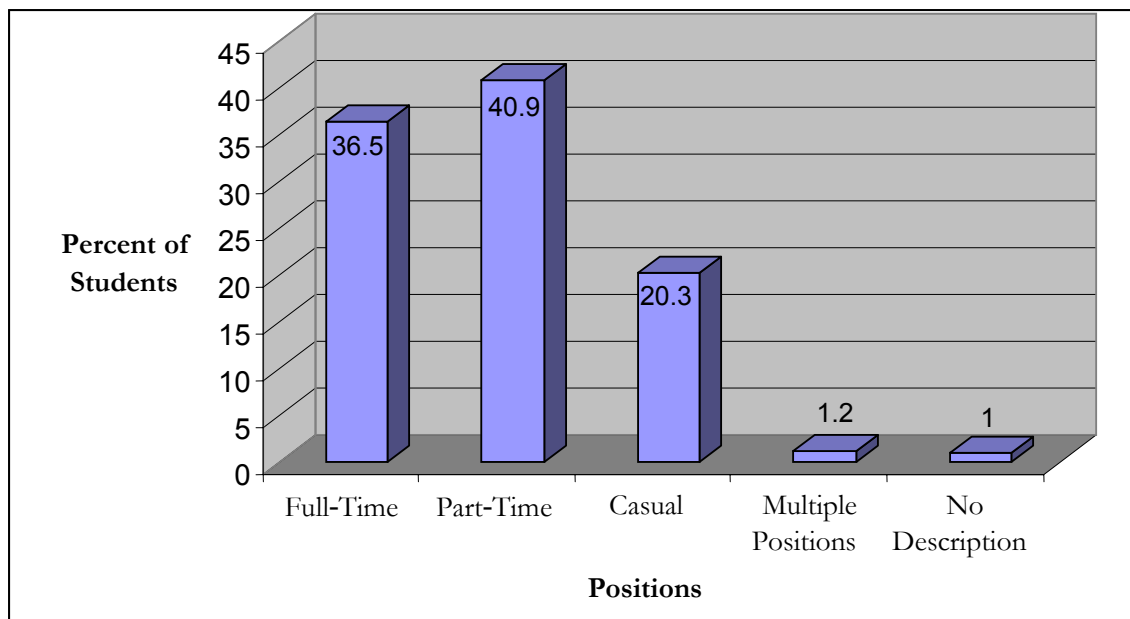
A total of 41.5% (767) graduands had found employment in nursing, 56.4% (1044) were actively seeking employment, and approximately 2% (40) were not looking for nursing employment or did not answer. The majority (79.3%; 1467) indicated they preferred full-time employment, 16.3% (301) preferred part-time, 1.7% (32) preferred casual employment, and 2.8% (51) had no preference. Almost half of the respondents (48.1%; 891) foresaw working in more than one nursing position in the next year; 58.7% (523) anticipated working multiple positions out of necessity, 39.6% (353) by choice, and .8% (7) out of necessity and choice. Nine percent (8) did not provide a response.

### 4.4 Characteristics of Employed Nursing Graduands

Few employed graduands were working full time. Most were employed on a part-time or casual basis with some taking on multiple positions (see Figure 3).

Figure 3.

Type of employment of graduands.



#### 4.5 Location of Employment and Employment Seeking

Graduands were asked to describe where they were seeking or had found nursing employment; many respondents chose multiple locations (see Table 2). However, with one class of students (n=91) that was graduating later than the other classes surveyed the researchers divided the original question into two parts. These respondents were not included in the following analysis.

The following results are formulated from a sample of 1760 nursing graduands and are presented in terms of single responses and multiple responses by location. The multiple responses will not be discussed as the data is difficult to understand and interpret.

Table 2  
*Single and Multiple Responses by Location*

Options	N (% of Total)
Single Responses	
Ontario	1090 (61.9)
Other Province	44 (2.5)
United States	82 (4.7)
Other Country	7 (.4)
Multiple Responses	511 (29.1)
No Location Chosen	26 (1.5)
Total	1760 (100)

##### 4.5.1 Single Location Respondents

A total of 1223 (66.1%) graduands identified only one location for employment or employment seeking. As indicated in Table 2, the greatest proportion of graduates chose Ontario, followed by the US, other province, and other country.

##### 4.5.2 Single Location Respondents - Job Status

As noted in Table 2, the majority of graduands were either employed or seeking employment in Ontario only. Less than half (44.7%) had found employment (see Table 3); 31.5% were employed full-time, 46.3% were employed part-time, 20.5% were employed casually, and 1.7%

worked multiple positions. When asked whether they would have to work multiple nursing positions during the next year, over half of the graduates (50.2%) thought it was possible.

Eighty-two graduands chose the US as their prime location of employment or employment seeking. A very high proportion of this group was employed full-time (81.8%), with the remainder (18.2%) working in either a part-time or casual capacity. Only 19.5% foresaw working multiple positions within the next year.

Few graduates reported seeking or finding employment in other Canadian provinces. Of those that had found employment (52.3%), less than half (47.8%) were working full-time. Unique to this group was the large proportion (34.8%) of graduands occupying casual positions, with the remainder (17.4%) working part-time.

Three of the seven graduands seeking employment outside Canada or the US were employed (two full-time and one part-time). Three graduands foresaw working multiple positions within the next year.

Table 3  
*Employment and Job Status by Location*

N (%)	Ontario Only	Other Province	United States	Other Country*
Location of Job Search	1090 (61.9)	44 (2.5)	82 (4.7)	7 (.4)
Employed	486 (44.7)	23 (52.3)	55 (67.1)	3 (42.9)
F/T	151 (31.5)	11 (47.8)	45 (81.8)	2 (66.7)
P/T	222 (46.3)	4 (17.4)	6 (10.9)	1 (33.3)
Casual	98 (20.5)	8 (34.8)	4 (7.3)	-
Multiple Positions	8 (1.7)	-	-	-
Multiple Jobs - Yes	539 (50.2)	13 (31.0)	16 (19.5)	3 (42.9)

\* Reported percentages may be skewed due to the small number of students; therefore, caution should be exercised when comparing them with other locations.

#### 4.6 Mobility

The number of graduands not planning on seeking employment in the region where they were educated was similar across the province. The proportion ranged from 22.0% to 27.1%, except in the North where only 12.3% of students intended to seek employment elsewhere.

The migration of Ontario-educated nursing graduates to the US or other countries was also examined. Only 5.5% of the graduands were considering work outside of Canada and the US, compared to 26% who had found or were seeking employment in the US only.

The migration of graduates to the US was further analyzed in terms of what region they received their education in; the analysis was conducted regardless of whether they chose multiple locations or not. Over half (55.5%) of the graduands in South West Ontario had found or were considering employment in the US. Proportionately fewer graduands in the remaining regions had found employment or were considering working in the US: Central East (28.3%); East (27.8); Toronto (23.8); Central West (19.3%); Central South (19.3%); North (18.6%). This dataset also allowed for the analysis of potential mobility to the US by College or University. The schools with greater than 30% of their graduands considering employment in the US are listed in Table 4. The University of Windsor and St. Clair College have the highest number of graduands in this category. The results suggest that nurses educated in regions on or near the US/Canada border are more likely to consider employment in the US.

Table 4.

*Schools with Greater than 30% of Graduands Considering Working in US*

School	Percent of Students
Confederation College	30.6
Algonquin College	31.0
York University	31.6
Laurentian University	32.4
Loyalist College	33.3
Lakehead University	38.3
Seneca College	38.5
Queens University	39.1
Sir Sanford Fleming College	48.0
St. Clair College	63.7
University of Windsor	75.5

#### 4.7 Area of Employment and Specialty

When asked in what area of nursing they had found or were seeking employment, the majority of graduands (88.7%) identified general hospitals. Other responses included public/community health (20.2%), community health centre (13.6%), nursing home (14.1%), psychiatric hospital (11.7%), and rehabilitation hospital (10.4%). A complete list of responses is provided in Appendix D.

When asked what specialty of nursing they were entering, the majority of graduands indicated medical/surgical nursing (54.0%), critical care (22.0%), emergency care (23.3), maternal/newborn (22.3%), pediatrics (19.4%), and long-term care (15.2%). A complete list of responses is provided in Appendix E.

#### 4.8 Continuing Education

Twenty-eight percent of the graduands planned on returning to school for continuing education in the fall; 61% were planning to enter a Bachelor of Nursing program, 7.7% a Master of Nursing program, and 31.7% other education. Most graduands in the other education category were considering certificate programs at the college level for critical care nursing, emergency room nursing, or operating room nursing.

#### 4.9 Differences between Diploma and Baccalaureate Nursing Graduates

Sixty-six percent (1221) of the graduands were from diploma nursing programs, the remaining 34% were from baccalaureate programs (see Table 5). More diploma graduates than baccalaureate graduates were employed at the time of survey, but significantly fewer were employed full-time. More diploma graduates foresaw working multiple positions within the next year, as compared to baccalaureate graduates. However, a higher percentage of baccalaureate graduates were considering employment in the US.

Table 5

*Selected Employment Characteristics (%)*

Program	Program	Female	Employed	Full-time	Part-time	Casual	Multiple Positions	Considering United States
Diploma	66	91.4	45.7	33.8	45.5	19.1	54.5	24.8
Baccalaureate	34	92.7	33.4	45.0	30.6	24.4	38.0	33.2

#### 4.10 Opportunities and Challenges for Nursing Graduates

Graduands were asked to freely comment on their perceptions of the opportunities and challenges in the current job market. The responses varied widely and there were more than double the comments for challenges than opportunities.

##### 4.10.1 Opportunities

Based on their responses, the graduands believed there were jobs available in both Ontario and the US. The most frequent response was there were “*plenty of jobs in Ontario*”, followed by there were “*plenty of jobs in the United States*”. Other frequent responses included: there were many “*choices*” in the nursing profession, there was “*availability of mobility or travel*”, and there were a “*variety of nursing specialties*”. Graduands’ comments on the prospects available to them included:

Opportunities are endless! Baby boomers are retiring, bigger hospitals offering sign on bonuses, and the government says they’re allocating more funds towards hiring more nurses.

Nursing shortages everywhere give excellent and broad opportunities to choose from.

There are a lot of job opportunities around if you are willing to move to where they are.

Lots of positions – part-time and casual.

There are plenty of opportunities for new graduates to work in the US. Positions are full-time and often available in unit of choice.

There are many opportunities in nursing today, it is very open if you are able to commute, travel or relocate.

##### 4.10.2 Challenges

The most frequent comment regarding the challenges faced by graduating nurses was that there were “*no full-time jobs*” (44%). The next most frequent comments were: there was only “*casual employment*” and “*employment instability*”, there was a “*lack of experience (required) for positions*”, there were “*no jobs in specific regions of Ontario*”, and having to “*work two or more jobs*”.

Highlighted below are some of the graduands’ perceptions of the challenges they face as a new nurse in Ontario:

I think that right now there are a lot of employment opportunities but not full-time. I am hoping that I will be able to find full-time employment in Canada. If I cannot find full-time employment, I will work for up to six months with an agency [and] then try seeking [employment] in the [United] States.

It is well known that there is a nursing shortage not only in Ontario but all of Canada. Hospitals and communities are desperate for nurses, yet finding a full-time job is very difficult. We often find ourselves juggling two to three positions in order to make full-time wages.

Full-time work isn't available in one site. I have to work in two or more sites in order to support myself and my family. If there is such a demand for nurses I cannot understand why full-time employment is not available. If I were to go to the [United] States I would be guaranteed full-time employment. I really am a Canadian but it is very tempting to go somewhere where you can get full-time employment, plus, plus.

Very little full-time positions. Employers are hiring more part-time and casual staff.

The evidence suggests that graduands recognize there is a nursing shortage and that many part-time and casual nursing jobs are available in Ontario. However, jobs are not available in all regions and newly qualified nurses may have to travel to obtain them. It is therefore likely that graduands who are not tied to one location may perceive numerous employment opportunities while those who cannot travel perceive fewer prospects. Where more mobile nurses see opportunities, particularly for full-time work in the US, less mobile nurses feel frustrated by the lack of full-time employment in Ontario.

## 5.0 Discussion and Conclusion

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This study is intended to provide information on the characteristics of nursing graduates in Ontario. The use of multiple methods permitted a greater number of graduates to participate and allowed the researchers to capture the maximum amount of data. A large sample size was achieved (n=1957; response rate 63.8%) comprised of graduands from all regions and schools with a graduating nursing class. Therefore, it is anticipated to be reflective of the entire graduate nursing population in Ontario. However, the demographic characteristics must be read cautiously as they reflect a point-in-time snapshot of graduating nursing students. Most of the graduands completed the survey from March to May 2004 which may have been too early to detect the true percentage of graduands employed.

For the most part, nursing graduates were from three-year diploma programs, female, and a variety of ages (20-64 years of age). The majority of graduates convoked in the spring of 2004, with a small percentage graduating in fall/winter 2003 and summer 2004. Study participants were from across the province and comprised the current class of graduating nursing students in Ontario. There were similar numbers of graduating students from the regions of Toronto, Northern Ontario, Eastern Ontario, and Central Southern Ontario, with Toronto and Eastern Ontario having a higher proportion. There were comparatively fewer participants from South Western Ontario and Central Eastern Ontario.

Few graduands were employed at the time of survey and most of the remaining graduands were looking for employment. No more than 40% of those employed were working full-time. However, regardless of whether they were employed or actively seeking employment, the majority desired full-time work. Most of the graduands that found employment were working in Ontario within the regions of Toronto and Eastern Ontario, a small percentage also found employment in the US. Over one-quarter of the graduands reported that they were considering employment in the US.

These figures are much higher than other reports on the migration of Canadian-educated nursing students to the US. A report by the Canadian Council on Social Development (2000) states approximately 10% of nursing graduates migrate to the US for employment. However, the figures are similar to those from a study in Nova Scotia where 35.2% of the nursing graduates reported working in the US since graduation (Gillis, Jackson, & Beiswanger, 2004).

Almost half of the graduates in the current study anticipated working concurrently in more than one nursing position in the next year. For the majority of graduands that wanted a full-time position and who stated in the open-ended questions that finding and being offered full-time employment was a priority, this is not an ideal prospect. It has been speculated that graduands may consider moving to other areas, such as the US, where they perceive more opportunities for full-time employment. The RNABC (2003) found that the majority of nursing graduates had left British Columbia for other provinces, the US, and other countries because of the “perception that better career opportunities existed outside of British Columbia.”

Many of the graduates in the current study who reported seeking or obtaining employment in the US also reported looking for work in Ontario. If these graduands are offered full-time positions, it is possible that many will stay in the province. The need for Ontario to develop attractive recruitment strategies was highlighted in the open-ended questions. Respondents stated that a major opportunity for nursing graduates in Ontario was employment in the US, and a major challenge was the lack of full-time positions in the province. In the report *Earning Their Return: When & Why Ontario RNs Left Canada, and What Will Bring Them Back*, the RNAO (2001) emphasized that the majority of nurses left Ontario due to the paucity of employment opportunities and full-time positions; however, they would return if full-time positions were available.

Nursing graduates living on or near the US border are more likely to seek or accept employment in the US than those who do not. The region of South Western Ontario, which includes London and Windsor, has significantly more graduands looking for and accepting employment in the US. This finding is important for policy planners in deciding on how and where to focus retention strategies for nursing graduates. If certain regions account for the majority of the loss of new graduates to the US, then retention strategies must target these regions.

The lack of full-time employment is definitely implicated in the exodus of new graduates to the US. The recent initiative by the Ontario McGuinty Government to invest a portion of \$50 million dollars in creating opportunities for new nursing graduates demonstrates their recognition of this problem. However, further initiatives are needed to increase the ratio of full-time to part-time positions for nurses throughout the health care system.

## 6.0 Recommendations

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In making these recommendations, the research team is envisaging a co-operative endeavour in which governments, professional associations, nursing employers, and educational institutions work together in the creation of a supportive environment conducive to the employment of new graduates.

### *Government*

- Provide financial support to employers to alleviate the part-time and casual positions in Ontario.
- Work with different Ministries (Labour, Health, and Education) to increase the uptake of new graduates into the workforce.

### *Professional Associations*

- Provide professional career counseling to new graduates focusing on access to employment issues.
- Improve the interface between professional associations and new graduates.
- Develop a cross country survey to determine how each professional association engages and supports new graduates.

### *Nursing Employers*

- Increase the time of uptake of new graduates from education programs in Ontario.
- Convert casual positions into full-time.
- Decrease the number of advertised casual positions.
- Actively recruit nurses at an institutional level by using a variety of strategies.
- Approach educational institutions actively seeking their graduating classes.

### *Educational Institutions*

- Create a uniform database across educational institutions in Ontario that tracks the employment figures of new graduates.
- Work with the Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing (CASN) to move towards consistency in reporting.

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## Appendix A

### *List of Participating Schools per Region in Ontario*

Region	Schools
Central East	Durham College
	Trent University
	Georgian College
	Sir Sanford Fleming College
Central West	McMaster University
	Mohawk College
	Conestoga College
East Region	Algonquin College
	La Cite College
	University of Ottawa
	Queen's University
	St. Lawrence College
	Loyalist College
North Region	Laurentian University
	Northern College
	Lakehead University
	Confederation College
	Canadore College
South-West	University of Western Ontario
	University of Windsor
	Lambton College
	St. Clair College
Toronto Region	University of Toronto
	Ryerson University
	Seneca College
	Centennial College
	George Brown College
	York University
	Humber College



## Appendix B

### Nursing Employment Survey 2004

Please help improve nursing employment opportunities for graduating nurses. Completing this survey on your current and potential employment in nursing will provide the government with accurate data to make positive policy changes.

1. Your gender. (Please check the appropriate box)

<sub>1</sub> Male      <sub>2</sub> Female

2. Your year of birth? \_\_\_\_\_

3. Your expected date of graduation from the nursing program?

<sub>1</sub> Spring 2004    <sub>2</sub> Fall 2004    <sub>3</sub> Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

4. Have you already found nursing employment?

<sub>1</sub> Yes, Where? (e.g. Hamilton Health Sciences) \_\_\_\_\_

<sub>2</sub> No

4.b. If **Yes**, will you be working,

<sub>1</sub> Full-time    <sub>2</sub> Part-time    <sub>3</sub> Casual

4.c. If **No**, are you planning to seek nursing employment upon graduation?

<sub>1</sub> Yes    <sub>2</sub> No

5. Is your preference to work:

<sub>1</sub> Full-time    <sub>2</sub> Part-time    <sub>3</sub> Casual

6. Do you intend to work in two or more positions concurrently in the next year?

<sub>1</sub> Yes    <sub>2</sub> No

6.b. If **Yes**, will you be working in multiple positions by

<sub>1</sub> Choice    <sub>2</sub> Necessity

7. If you are planning to seek nursing employment, where are you applying? Or if you have found nursing employment where? Check all that apply.

<sub>1</sub> Ontario

<sub>2</sub> Outside Ontario, in Canada

<sub>3</sub> United States

<sub>4</sub> Other Country (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

8. If you are planning to seek nursing employment in Ontario, specify where you will be willing to apply for jobs? If you have found nursing employment, where? Check all that apply.

- 1 Central South (e.g. Niagara, Hamilton)
- 2 Toronto
- 3 Central West (e.g. Burlington, Kitchener, Mississauga)
- 4 Central East (e.g. Barrie, Oshawa, Peterborough, Richmond Hill)
- 5 East (e.g. Ottawa, Belleville, Kingston)
- 6 South West (e.g. London, Windsor)
- 7 North (e.g. Thunder Bay, North Bay)

9. Do you currently have/ or plan to seek nursing employment in any of the following. Check all that apply.

- |                                               |                                                          |                                                                      |
|-----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1 General Hospital   | <input type="checkbox"/> 9 Public/ Community Health Unit | <input type="checkbox"/> 17 Nursing Station (Outpost)                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2 Rehab Hospital     | <input type="checkbox"/> 10 Community Health Centre      | <input type="checkbox"/> 18 Physician's Office/ Family Practice Unit |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 3 Psychiatric Hosp   | <input type="checkbox"/> 11 Community Care Access Centre | <input type="checkbox"/> 19 Employment Agency/ Private Duty          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 4 Chronic Care Hosp  | <input type="checkbox"/> 12 Community Agency             | <input type="checkbox"/> 20 Self-Employed/ Independent Practice      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 5 Other Type of Hosp | <input type="checkbox"/> 13 Educational Institution      | <input type="checkbox"/> 21 Other _____                              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 6 Nursing Home       | <input type="checkbox"/> 14 Mental Health Centre         |                                                                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 7 Home for the Aged  | <input type="checkbox"/> 15 Government Association       |                                                                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 8 Retirement Home    | <input type="checkbox"/> 16 Business/Industry            |                                                                      |

10. What is/are the primary area(s) of practice you will be entering? Check all that apply.

- |                                                                  |                                                            |                                                       |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1 Ambulatory Care                       | <input type="checkbox"/> 9 Chronic Care                    | <input type="checkbox"/> 17 Community Health          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2 Emergency Care                        | <input type="checkbox"/> 10 Critical Care (ICU, CCU, etc.) | <input type="checkbox"/> 18 Gerontology               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 3 Health Promotion                      | <input type="checkbox"/> 11 Home Care                      | <input type="checkbox"/> 19 Infection Control         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 4 Long-Term Care                        | <input type="checkbox"/> 12 Maternal/Newborn               | <input type="checkbox"/> 20 Medical/Surgical          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 5 Occupational Health                   | <input type="checkbox"/> 13 Nursing Education Program      | <input type="checkbox"/> 21 Oncology                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 6 Operating Room                        | <input type="checkbox"/> 14 Paediatrics                    | <input type="checkbox"/> 22 Palliative Care           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 7 Public Health                         | <input type="checkbox"/> 15 Patient/Client Education       | <input type="checkbox"/> 23 Psychiatric/Mental Health |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 8 Rehabilitation                        | <input type="checkbox"/> 16 Several Clinical Areas         | <input type="checkbox"/> 24 Telehealth                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 25 Other Nursing (please specify) _____ |                                                            |                                                       |

11. Are you intending to return to school in the fall? <sub>1</sub> Yes <sub>2</sub> No

12. If yes, in what program will you be registering?

<sub>1</sub> BScN or BN <sub>2</sub> MSc(N) or MN <sub>3</sub> Other: \_\_\_\_\_

13. In the space below, please comment on your perception of opportunities and challenges faced by graduating nursing students in the current job market.

Opportunities:

Challenges:

If you would like to be entered in a draw for \$100 at your institution and receive the certificate of participation please provide an email address or contact information.

Can we contact you at this email address to take part in a brief follow up survey about your nursing employment?

<sub>1</sub> Yes <sub>2</sub> No

Thank you for providing this information. Your contribution will help decision-makers provide better employment options for nurses.

## Appendix C

### *Description of Regions in Ontario*

Region	Major Cities in Region
Central East	Barrie
	Oshawa
	Peterborough
	Richmond Hill
Central South	Brantford
	Hamilton
	Niagara
Central West	Mississauga
	Kitchener
	Burlington
East Region	Ottawa
	Kingston
	Belleville
North Region	Thunder Bay
	North Bay
	Sudbury
South-West	London
	Windsor
	Sarnia
Toronto Region	Toronto
	York

## Appendix D

### *Area of Employment and Employment Seeking*

Area of Employment	% of Students
General Hospital	88.7
Public/Community Health	20.2
Nursing Home	14.1
Community Health Centre	13.6
Psychiatric Hospital	11.7
Community Agency	11.0
Rehabilitation Hospital	10.4
Mental Health Centre	9.7
Physician's Office	9.5
Chronic Care Hospital	9.3
Community Care Access Centre	8.8
Home for the Aged	7.3
Educational Institution	6.0
Government Association	5.9
Retirement Home	5.1
Nursing Station (Outpost)	4.3
Employment Agency/Private Duty	3.9
Other Type of Hospital	3.8
Business/Industry	3.2
Other Employment	2.2
Self Employed	1.7

## Appendix E

### *Primary Area(s) of Practice Indicated by Graduates*

Area of Specialty	% of Students
Medical/Surgical	54.0
Emergency Care	23.3
Maternal/Newborn	22.3
Critical Care	22.0
Pediatrics	19.4
Long-Term Care	15.2
Public Health	13.8
Community Health	13.3
Psychiatric/Mental Health	13.0
Palliative Care	12.8
Health Promotion	12.4
Chronic Care	12.3
Oncology	11.2
Operating Room	10.8
Rehabilitation	9.0
Gerontology	9.0
Ambulatory Care	8.6
Home Care	7.8
Several Clinical Areas	6.9
Occupational Health	4.2
Pt/Client Education	3.8
Nursing Education Program	3.8
Infection Control	3.5
Telehealth	2.0