



## From the Editor

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# All Dressed Up and No Place to Go

**T**he United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (2017) predicts there will be more registered nurse jobs available through 2022 than any other profession in the United States. An estimated 1.1 million additional nurses are needed to avoid a further shortage, with employment opportunities projected to grow at a faster rate (16%) than all other occupations (United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017).

The nurse shortage is a complex issue. A key strategy used to address earlier nurse shortages was the initiation of an all-out campaign to recruit individuals to the nursing profession. Well, it worked. Qualified potential students are standing at the door, eager to enter and learn – and having the door slammed in their faces.

One of the saddest facts I read this week informed me that in 2017, nursing schools across the United States rejected 56,000 qualified applicants from undergraduate programs (Blitchok, 2018). Let me emphasize, these applicants were highly qualified. Despite a national nurse shortage, top students are finding it nearly impossible to pursue their dream of becoming a nurse.

A primary reason potential candidates are sent away is the lack of nurse faculty to teach them. Results of a survey of 662 schools of nursing reveal a faculty vacancy rate of 7.1% (American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2016). Various explanations are cited for this shortage. For example, some nurses choose to stay in clinical practice because the pay is significantly higher than what they would earn as instructors. Others like the greater flexibility offered by other employment opportunities.

But perhaps one of the most important issues behind the nurse faculty shortage is the number of nursing faculty members who are retiring. Filling these positions cannot happen overnight:

Preparation for most nurse faculty is a doctoral degree, and you can't just replace someone in that position. The trajectory of timeline to fill jobs that nurse faculty are retiring from is much longer (Cipriano, as cited in Grant, 2016).

Getting a graduate degree can be an expensive proposition. However, help is available. Since 2003, the United States Department of Health and Human Services has offered part-time and full-time students enrolled in the Educator Track of the Master of Science program or in the Doctor of Nursing Practice program the opportunity to participate in the Nurse Faculty Loan Program (NFLP) (Health Resources & Services Administration, 2017). Following graduation, 85% of the total NFLP loan is forgiven over a consecutive four-year period while loan recipients serve as full-time nurse faculty at a school of nursing (i.e., baccalaureate or higher degree, associated degree, or diploma schools of nursing).

Schools of nursing are also finding ways to respond to the nurse faculty shortage. Some schools offer mentoring programs for novice faculty, defined as a faculty member with five or less years of experience. The transition from the clinical setting to academia can be difficult. In an acute care setting, nurses are surrounded by other nurses and the healthcare team. Thus, resources and communication are accessible. In contrast, nurse educators are often alone in their offices or teaching in a classroom. Relationship building may become more of a challenge (Jeffers & Mariani, 2017). Further, novice nurse faculty may become frustrated learning a new role in an unfamiliar environment, without adequate support from formal or informal faculty mentors. Other schools are developing partnerships with hospitals that allow nursing staff to take on teaching responsibilities (Blitchok, 2018).

Although a variety of sectors are addressing the nurse shortage issue, the burden appears to rest squarely on the shoulders of schools of nursing. Schools must find a way to accommodate more students without having an impact on the quality of education. Because of its relationship to the nurse shortage, the failure to solve the nurse faculty shortage can lead to inadequate care for millions of Americans and shattered dreams for those eager to enter the nursing profession.

Solve this challenge we must. Otherwise, we have left those individuals we encouraged to join our profession all dressed up with no place to go. ■

## References

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