Global Study: Nursing Shortages Require Workforce Policy Solutions, Not Recruitment Campaigns Alone

Why people choose nursing, and why they leave

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> *ICN CEO Howard Catton*

The global nursing shortage cannot be solved simply by encouraging more people to enter the profession, according to a new evidence brief from the Global Nursing Workforce Centre (GNWC), a joint initiative of the International Council of Nurses (ICN) and TruMerit®.

Drawing on research from 42 countries, the brief, The Attractiveness of Nursing for Prospective and Current Nursing Students, finds that the factors influencing people to choose nursing are often the same ones that determine whether they stay. Working conditions, compensation, professional respect, career development opportunities, workplace experiences and the ability to provide quality care all shape nursing attractiveness to current nurses as well as potential recruits. The findings suggest that countries seeking to strengthen their nursing workforce must focus not only on recruitment, but on making nursing a career people can realistically choose, enter, develop in and remain in over the long term.

"Around the world, demographic shifts, displacement, climate-related challenges, geopolitical instability, and digital transformation are reshaping workforce needs," said Peter Preziosi, PhD, RN, CAE, FAAN, TruMerit President and Chief Executive Officer. "Nursing is no exception. This evidence brief offers actionable insights into what attracts people to nursing and what inspires them to stay. The message for policymakers is clear: evidence-informed workforce policies that support nurses' professional growth, well-being, and ability to deliver quality care are essential to building the resilient health systems our future depends on."

ICN CEO Howard Catton said: “A sense of vocation may bring people into nursing, but it does not put food on the table, and it cannot protect nurses from burnout. The profession is being squeezed at both ends: younger generations rightly expect fair reward, flexibility and

opportunities to progress, while experienced nurses are being driven out by intolerable pressures. As a predominantly female profession, nursing must also provide decent work and genuine opportunities for women. Governments have relied on nurses' sense of vocation for too long; this evidence shows why policymakers must look seriously at what makes nursing a sustainable career."

The findings underscore a critical workforce policy challenge for governments, healthcare employers, educators, and workforce planners: attracting more people into nursing will have limited impact if health systems do not also address the conditions that cause nurses to leave. The brief has been developed in line with GNWC's mission to transform global nursing workforce research into practical, evidence-based insights that support workforce planning, policy development, and sustainable health systems.

What the Evidence Shows

- Purpose remains nursing's greatest draw. Helping others continues to be the strongest motivation for choosing the profession.
- Working conditions shape both recruitment and retention. Burnout, staffing shortages, workload pressures and workplace stress discourage people from entering nursing and drive others to leave.
- Professional value matters. Compensation, professional respect and public perceptions of nursing significantly influence career decisions.
- A new generation has new expectations. Flexibility, work-life balance and opportunities for career growth are increasingly important factors when choosing and staying in nursing.

About the Global Nursing Workforce Centre

The Global Nursing Workforce Centre (GNWC) is a joint initiative of the International Council of Nurses (ICN) and TruMerit® that serves as a catalyst for evidence-based workforce policy. By transforming global nursing workforce research into actionable insights, the Centre supports policymakers, employers, educators and healthcare leaders in developing sustainable workforce solutions and stronger health systems worldwide.

About TruMerit®

TruMerit® advances trusted healthcare workforce mobility through credential evaluation, competency assessment, workforce intelligence and professional development. By helping qualified healthcare professionals navigate career pathways across borders and throughout their careers, TruMerit strengthens healthcare systems and expands access to quality care worldwide.

About the International Council of Nurses

The International Council of Nurses (ICN) is a federation of more than 140 national nurses associations representing millions of nurses worldwide. Operated by nurses and leading nursing internationally, ICN works to ensure quality care for all and sound health policies globally. Visit www.icn.ch.

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