

Information for
Senate Interim Committee on Health Care
June 1, 2020

The Oregon Center for Nursing (OCN) is the state's nursing workforce research center, established in 2002 to address issues affecting Oregon's nursing workforce. OCN's mission is to facilitate research and collaboration for Oregon's nursing workforce to support informed, well-prepared, diverse and exceptional nursing professionals.

In March 2020, OCN began conducting weekly gatherings of nursing workforce leaders and stakeholders throughout Oregon to offer timely updates and share key insights about the impact of COVID-19 on the nursing workforce. The following themes emerged from these conversations:

- **NURSE LAYOFFS DESPITE NURSING SHORTAGES:** Facilities, especially in the rural areas of the state, experienced low census numbers due to cancelled non-essential procedures caused layoffs and furloughed staff. At the same time, facilities developed plans to retrain nursing staff for deployment in critical care and intensive care units in response to a surge of COVID-19 cases.
- **NEW GRADUATE HIRING UNCERTAIN:** Hospitals in the Portland Metro area are cancelling or delaying their new nurse graduate transition-to-practice programs due to staffing shortages. Rural hospitals plan to continue operating their transition-to-practice programs. Some nursing programs' new graduates report challenges finding their first job.
- **LACK OF PPE AFFECTING NURSES IN ALL SETTINGS:** All settings where nurses practice – hospitals, long term care, nursing education, school-based nurses – report acquiring personal protective equipment (PPE) a continual challenge.
- **MENTAL HEALTH AND RESILIENCE CONCERNS FOR NURSES:** Organizations across the country are concerned about lasting mental health effects on the healthcare workforce in relation to COVID-19. This may impact workforce retention.
- **K-12 REOPENING SHOULD INCLUDE SCHOOL NURSE INPUT:** School nurses are concerned health protocols for K-12 education are being modified without including nursing evidence-based best practices.
- **DECREASED IN-PERSON CLINICAL EXPERIENCE AND MORE SIMULATED NURSE EDUCATION AN UNTESTED EDUCATION MODEL:** Nursing education programs report a shortage of sites for clinical placements due to staffing constraints at healthcare facilities. To adjust, these programs have shifted to online didactic coursework and have begun offering virtual simulation to replace in-person clinical placement experiences ("internships"). Nursing students are concerned about the effect of decreased clinical placements on their future employability.
- **LACK OF GUIDANCE TO REOPEN NURSING EDUCATION:** Many nursing programs are making plans for fall classes, but are awaiting official guidelines from OHA.

While some individuals in Oregon view the pandemic as subsiding, nursing leaders and stakeholders continue to view this as an active situation. It has impacted every level of the workforce from nursing student to bedside nurse to nurse administrator, from nurses on the frontlines to nurses who were sidelined. OCN plans to study the impact of this pandemic on our healthcare workforce for years to come.

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