Would you recommend nursing as a career to men?

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Abstract

Objective: The principle objective of this study was to establish a profile and perception of men in nursing in Western Australia. This paper will discuss one sub-objective which sort to explore responses to the question: “Would you recommend a nursing as a career to males that you know?”

Design: Main study was a quantitative, descriptive survey design, however the question under review was significantly qualitative in nature and analysed as such.

Setting: The study took place across Western Australian public and private sector health care facilities, nurse education institutions and non-government providers across rural, remote and metropolitan locations.

Main outcome measures: Data was collected through responses to one question (within a larger survey) that related to recommending nursing as a career to males. An online survey instrument was used.

Results: 70.5% (n = 377) said they would recommend nursing to males. Of the respondents that selected “yes” 19.6% were male and 80.4% were female. Of the 29.5% (n = 158) respondents that selected “no” 24.7% were male and 75.3% female.

Qualitative data reported supports the perceptions in the current workforce.

Conclusion: Whilst the majority of respondents in the study would recommend a career in nursing to men, a quarter of respondents felt that a career in nursing was not suited to men. Reasons identified included; poor pay, a difficult job, men’s values were incompatible with care, or that they were using nursing as a spring board to other careers. Identifying the perceptions of men in nursing and if current nurses would promote nursing to males they knew assists in the potential recruitment of a much needed future workforce.

Introduction

Much of the literature about men in nursing asserts that nursing remains the dominion of women (White, 2014; Maiolo, 2014; Olson, 2014). However, within the media there is an acknowledgment that a change is taking place, as men are entering nursing in greater numbers and even taking a hand in the recruitment of other men into nursing (Olson, 2014). Within the United Kingdom (UK), United States of America (USA) and Australia evidence suggests that the percentage of men in nursing is increasing (Marsh, 2014; Pratt, 2014; Stanley, 2014; O’Lynn & Tranbarger 2007) and there are claims that nursing will have a more sustainable workforce if nurses are recruited from across the population spectrum (O’Lynn, 2013).
nurses in particular in films is generally a negative one, with men shown as being morally corrupt, effeminate or simply incompetent (Stanley, 2012). Portraying male nurses in this way has a serious impact on the recruitment to and retention of the current male nursing workforce. From a historical perspective men have had a long relationship with nursing, although this has been largely overlooked by historical texts that in the main focus on the achievements of women in nursing (Evans, 2004). Further examination by Brown (2009) indicates that even though the numbers of men in nursing are lower than females the numbers of men by year is growing as they manage to create careers and are promoted more than women, the level of achievement by men is growing as they manage to create a positive image of men in this profession (Evans, 2004). Further examination by Maude and Manias (2006) and Bartfay (2012) concludes, these are required if the male nurses/midwives in Western Australia. Respondents were invited to complete a survey via email at a single point in time to ensure reliability. This paper addresses responses to only one question that asked participants, “Would you recommend nursing as a career to males that you know?” (question 20). The question began with a “Yes” / “No” option before asking for comments on the choice. Setting: Western Australian health care environments within the public and private sector, nurse education institutions and non-government providers across rural, remote and metropolitan locations were included in the study catchment.

Survey Instrument: The self-reporting questionnaire consisted of 30 questions in seven sections for all participants, an additional section with 4 questions for men only and a final section for free text comments. The findings reported in this paper are from question 20 of the study, “Profile and Perception of Men in Nursing in Western Australia” (Stanley, et al., 2014) that considered the issue of “recommending nursing to men.” Validity of the instrument was confirmed as much as the public’s perception of men in nursing to ensure that it reflects gender equality.

Methodology

A quantitative non-experimental, comparative, descriptive research design was employed, using an on-line survey, with the survey questionnaire being distributed via email using SurveyMonkey to a convenience sample of registered, enrolled nurses and midwives in Western Australia. Respondents were invited to complete the survey at a single point in time to ensure reliability. From this, themes were identified, patterns confirmed and an integrated picture of the data content was created. In addition, detailed analysis of the qualitative data from question 20 took place with the aid of NVivo10 software program.

Table 1: Would you recommend nursing as a career to males that you know?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>613</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>756</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to the data obtained in Table 1, only 535 of the 1039 who ticked either “yes” or “no” offered comments. The majority of those who commented (n = 377 / 70.5%) said they would recommend nursing to males that they knew. Of the respondents who selected ‘yes’ 19.6% were male and 80.4% were female. Of the responses who selected ‘No’ (n= 158 / 29.5%) almost a quarter were men (24.7%) with the majority (75.3%) being female.

The ‘Yes’ responses

A plethora of reasons were offered in support of recommending nursing to men, with many respondents providing more than one reason. Analysis of the comments resulted in the identification of seven key themes. The themes are as follows:

1. A Good Choice: Nursing is a good career choice for a man.

This instrument was designed and validated the research theme with a number of respondents commenting on why they saw nursing as a good career choice. One respondent suggested that, “Due to the public’s perception get to look after and care for people which is interesting.” Female. Another commented that nursing offered a “good way to keep in shape and build fitness and health which allows job stability, also would really suit some caring males and we could do with their skills and role modelling” (Female). Another respondent suggested that nursing was, “a good career with many rewards” (Male).

2. A Good Career for Men: Nursing is a career men do particularly well in.

This was also a strong theme, with a number of respondents suggesting that nursing was a career that men did well in. One respondent said, “we have patients with different cultural backgrounds and having male nurses will assist with providing healthcare” (Female). Another said, “the men that I know in the profession have done very well - in terms of career progression and opportunities in different areas” (Female). A number of respondents suggested that men can make a positive contribution. One respondent said, “I have always enjoyed my professional relationships with the male nurses/midwives I have worked with” (Female). Another respondent supported this theme by suggesting that nursing offered, “a solid career (with) management opportunities if desired” (Male).

3. A Positive Contribution: Men do make (can make) a positive contribution to the profession of nursing or midwifery.

Nursing were also recommend because, “they are interested in helping people” (Female). One respondent suggested that, “I have found working with male midwives, helps they have their ‘rhythm’ down and that, men bring a completely different perspective and often break up the ‘oestrogen’ fuelled work environment (in a positive way)” (Female). The ‘only’ other respondent suggested that, “male nurses can be caring and also calm under pressure” (Female), and that in a “female dominated workplace, an interesting and male team members in allowing the nursing population to be more reflective of society and adds value to the nursing cohort” (Female). Another said, “I have worked with a number of male nurses and midwives over the span of my career as a nurse/midwife I have seen a positive influence to the team and when it becomes very hectic” (Female).

4. Suitable for Both: Nursing is a career suited to both men and women.

It was also clear that respondents saw nursing as suited to both men and women. One respondent said, “men can make a positive contribution” that, “gender makes no difference when it comes down to sincerely caring” (Male). Another added that it was a “good career choice for both genders” (Female). One respondent added, “regardless of sex anyone with a passion for nursing, team work and the desire of healthcare has something to offer the profession” (Female).

5. Caring Males: Men can make a positive contribution to the community.

While not a strong theme, a number of respondents suggested that they would recommend nursing to men because it was a career focused on helping others. One respondent said, “I want to do something that makes me feel that men within this profession have a lot to offer the women they work with and the patients they care for. I have always enjoyed my professional relationships with the male nurses/midwives I have worked with” (Female). Another added, nursing is a “very satisfying career that fulfills the caring nature for which I am most sociable career! Great if you love working with people” (Male).

6. Only the Right Man: While they would recommend nursing to men they knew, they would only do so to the ‘right’ man.

A strong theme was that nurses would recommend nursing to men they knew if the were the “right” men for the job or “if they are interested” (Female). Another, said, “nursing is a physically and mentally active job that they might be interested in thinking about” (Male). The following view parallelled this opinion, “I would only recommend nursing to the ‘right’ man or women, if they are interested in doing different from the ‘normal’ role” (Female). added, “I have someone with an affinity and ability to deal with people in vulnerable situations and if they were interested in ‘caring’ for people as opposed to ‘caring’ for people (in a positive way)” (Female). Another said, “I have worked with a number of male nurses and midwives over the span of my career as a nurse/midwife I have seen a positive influence to the team and when it becomes very hectic” (Female).
much more readily accepted now than in previous times. They see things from a male perspective which is valuable when offering holistic care” (Female). Another said, “I do think if more men came into the profession it would change” (Female), and that “I studied with a male midwifery student and was provided care by a male midwife with my third baby. I feel they have a great empathy and provide excellent care” (Female). Lastly, one respondent said, “I always encouraged men to look at nursing as I have always felt that this is what is missing in the nursing profession” (Female).

The ‘No’ responses

Twenty four percent of all respondents would not recommend nursing to a male they knew. Many reasons were offered in support of their decisions and many respondents offered more than one reason. During the analysis, six key themes were identified, these were:

1. Not Anyone: Nursing is not a suitable job for anyone, not just men.

Some respondents felt nursing was not suitable for men or women. One respondent said, “I would not recommend the profession to either males or females. For the level of education required if there is inadequate financial recompense in comparison to other fields” (Female). Another, said, “nursing is no longer the profession it used to be. Hospitals are run like a business where it is all about stats and not patients” (Female). Another respondent added, “It is full of an unfortunately high percentage of toxic middle aged women who perpetuate the stereotype of being overworked, marginalised and handmaiden” (Male).

2. Not Suitable for Men: Nursing is not a suitable job/career/profession for men.

Some respondents felt nursing was not suited to men, with views such, “males by nature are not nurturers” (Female), or “most male nurses I have worked with are lazy and appear to have the misconception that female nurses are their ‘lackeys’ (Female). Another added men are not, “suited for the caring role. OK with management or physical hard work, not suited for the caring role” (Male).

3. A Poor Option: Nursing is not suitable for men because of poor pay and work conditions.

Respondents felt nursing offered poorly paid work with comments such as “poor earning capacity” (Female), “allied health positions are afforded better recognition and do not have the same stress levels or workloads levels, most other professionals have a higher level of autonomy, ability to set up business or work privately” (Male). Another said, “in a female dominated profession pay is lower, promotional positions once SRN are very limited and often require a move away from patient care. Another respondent said, ‘males in Mental Health are quite often seen as security officer/fully boys to deal with aggressive clients’ (Male).

Discussion

While the larger study aimed to establish a profile and perceptions of men in nursing in Western Australia, this paper has focused on the question within the study that sought to explore respondent’s answers to the question: “Would you recommend nursing as a career for men and women?” The respondents said they would (75.6%), with slightly more women than men answering “yes” (76.8% / 71.7%). About one quarter would not, although most of the male respondents indicated that they would say “no” (28.2%), compared with the female respondents (23.1).

Analysis of the comments indicate that respondents suggested that they would not recommend nursing as a career to men they knew because it was a good career choice, it was a good career for men and that men could, and do make a positive contribution to the nursing profession. Comments also supported the notion that while nursing was suited to both men and women, respondents hoped the right people, focused on helping others and who added something different or an additional value to nursing could be encouraged. The results suggested it was evident that “men are very welcome in nursing” (Female) and should be sought or encouraged.

In other parts of the larger study it was noticeable that for men, a desire to help people, the desire to have a stable career and a secure employment with career variety, all rated highly as motivating forces for choosing a career in nursing (Stanley et al., 2014). This apparently lower degree of enthusiasm may also be found in the responses to other questions in the study. In one other question of the larger study (Stanley et al., 2014), 7.2% of male respondents, compared with only 2.7% of female respondents, indicated that they had intentions of leaving nursing, or related fields, within the next five years. This was consistent with Hodes Research (2005) study, in which 7% of male respondents indicated an intention to leave nursing and related industries completely.

In addition, in another question within the larger study, almost twice as many men (21.4% males / 11.7% female) suggested that they would not recommend nursing as a career to men they knew because it is a good career choice, it was a good career for men and that men could, and do make a positive contribution to the health care of others and as long as the man is, ‘the right man’ and focused on helping others or adding something of value to nursing they would be welcome” and encouraged to join the profession. About a quarter of respondents felt a nursing career was not suitable for everyone and in particular, men. As well, the pay was poor, the job too hard, that men had inappropriate values or that men were using a nursing career as a spring board to other careers would not recommend a career in nursing to men they knew. However, it is worth noting, as one person commented, “regardless of sex anyone with a passion for nursing, team work and the delivery of healthcare has something to offer the profession” (Female).

Recommendations

Western Australia Nurses Memorial
Charitable Trust, WA Department of Health, Chief Nurse and Midwives Office

• The message that nursing is a suitable career for both men and women needs to be reinforced.
• Further study is needed to discover if men who are nurses have generally lower morale, and if this is the case, why.
• Further study is required to explore the issue of why about a quarter of nurses (male or female) in WA would not recommend nursing as a career to others.
• Further study is required to gain a better understanding of the experience of male nurses across Australia.

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