

THE WORKING LIFE OF A GROUP OF NURSES

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OPSOMMING

Hier word 'n oorsig gegee van die loopbane van die 139 geregistreerde verpleegkundiges wat 'n B.Soc.Sc. (Verpleegkunde) – graad aan die Universiteit van Natal behaal het. Van die potensiële 981 werkjare wat hierdie gegradueerdes sou kon gewerk het, is 551 jaar (56,2%) met verpleegwerk deurgebring, gedurende 372 (37,9%) jaar is daar nie gewerk nie en 58 (9,5%) jaar is op terreine buite verpleging deurgebring.

INTRODUCTION

A B. Soc. Sc. (Nursing) course has been offered since 1962 at the University of Natal, Durban. This is a four-year course, on successful completion of which students are eligible for registration as general nurses and midwives with the South African Nursing Council.

In spite of the fact that undergraduate nursing courses are now well-established at almost all South African universities, remarkably little information is available on the working-life and career pattern of the graduate nurse in South Africa. It is still common for members of the public to express surprise that students can obtain nursing qualifications through university-based programmes. Furthermore, surprise is again expressed that such students should continue in a nursing career on successful completion of a nursing degree.

For these reasons, it is of interest to review the careers of students who have passed through the University of Natal programme during the period 1962-77. The necessary information has been gathered over the years through frequent personal contact by members of staff of this department with their ex-students. The number of graduates is presently small enough for this to be possible.

Table 1 gives relevant information regarding student intake.

Over the sixteen year period, there has been a total intake of 270 students, of whom 151 (55,9%) have been successful in obtaining the B.Soc. Sc. (Nursing) degree. The major reason for withdrawal from the degree programme is failure of examinations in the first year. It is of great interest that 62 of the 119 students who withdrew from the university-based nursing course transferred to a hospital-based

TABLE 1 NUMBER OF STUDENTS WHO BECAME REGISTERED NURSES

Year of student intake	Total student intake	Persons who completed University Nursing degree course		Persons who transferred to Diploma Nursing course		Persons wasted to Nursing	
		Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
1962	10	6	(60,0)	1	(10)	3	(30,0)
1963	8	5	(62,5)	1	(12,5)	2	(25,0)
1964	11	4	(36,3)	2	(18,2)	5	(45,5)
1965	12	9	(75,0)	2	(16,7)	1	(8,3)
1966	8	6	(75,0)	1	(12,5)	1	(12,5)
1967	15	8	(46,6)	3	(20,0)	4	(26,7)
1968	13	10	(76,9)	3	(23,1)	0	(0,0)
1969	11	6	(54,9)	2	(18,2)	3	(27,3)
1970	25	16	(64,4)	3	(12,0)	6	(24,0)
1971	32	20	(62,5)	6	(18,8)	6	(18,8)
1972	20	9	(45,0)	6	(30,0)	5	(25,0)
1973	19	10	(52,6)	5	(26,3)	4	(21,1)
1974	21	8	(38,0)	10	(47,6)	3	(14,3)
1975	23	14	(60,8)	3	(13,0)	6	(26,1)
1976	19	8	(42,1)	7	(36,8)	4	(21,1)
1977	23	12	(52,1)	7	(30,4)	4	(17,4)
TOTAL	270	151	(55,9)	62	(22,9)	57	(21,1)

Diploma in Nursing course and subsequently achieved registration as nurses by this route.

Of the total student intake of 270 into the B. Soc. Sc. (Nursing) course therefore, 78,9% of the girls became registered nurses by one or another means. This is a surprisingly low wastage rate in comparison to British studies of student nurse wastage.¹

CAREERS AFTER GRADUATION

In sixteen years, what has become of the 151 students who were successful in obtaining a B. Soc. Sc. (Nursing) degree?

A partrage of the working lives of these nurses is given in Table 2. Of the 139 graduates, 102 (73,4%) are married and 64,7% of these young

TABLE 2 WORKING LIFE OF NURSES WHO COMPLETED B. SOC. SC. (NURSING) COURSE

YEAR OF INTAKE	NUMBER OF NURSING GRADUATES	NUMBER WHO ARE MARRIED	NUMBER WORKING WITHIN NURSING ON 31.12.80	NUMBER WORKING OUTSIDE NURSING ON 31.12.80	NUMBER NOT WORKING ON 13.12.80
1962	6	4	2	1	3
1963	5	4	1	—	4
1964	4	4	—	1	3
1965	9	8	1	3	5
1966	6	6	5	—	1
1967	8	8	1	—	7
1968	10	9	6	1	3
1969	6	6	1	—	5
1970	16	12	7	1	8
1971	20	14	6	3	11
1972	9	6	6	1	2
1973	10	4	7	2	1
1974	8	4	5	1	2
1975	14	10	10	2	2
1976	8	3	5	1	2
TOTAL	139	102	63	17	59

married women have children, both of which are circumstances likely to interrupt the working-life of the nurse in particular. At the end of December 1980, 63 (45,3%) of the nursing graduates were working as nurses (twelve were working outside South Africa), 59 (42,4%) were not working and 17 (12,2%) were not working as nurses.

Reference to Table 3 indicates the actual amount of time in years that the nurses have worked.

Between them, the 139 graduate nurses could potentially have worked, a total of 981 years had there been no interruptions. In fact, a total of 609 years has been worked, 62,07% of the total possible number of working years. This work record is gratifying in view of the fact that the young women in question are representatives of an affluent White society, much given (if not marrying during their student years or immediately after completion of their degree) to travel and trying their wings in all sorts of directions.

THE TYPE OF WORK UNDERTAKEN AFTER GRADUATION

An important factor is the manner in which the 609 working-years have been occupied. Nursing work has filled 551 working-years (90,6% of total time worked); work outside nursing accounts for 58 working-years (9,5% of total years worked). Reference to Table 4 shows the careers followed by the seventeen graduates who were employed outside nursing on 31 December 1980.

Sixty-three (45,3%) of the total number of graduates were employed within nursing on the same date. Table 5 accounts for the nursing fields in which they were occupied.

POST-GRADUATE QUALIFICATIONS

The number of post-graduate qualifications obtained by a relatively small group of nurses would seem to denote, at least, a great deal of hard work and motivation. Since obtaining their basic degree, 65 (46,7%) of the 139 graduates have successfully completed some form of study related to nursing.

Table 6 shows the professional qualifications obtained by the graduates and Table 7 the academic qualifications obtained. It must be

YEAR OF INTAKE INTO COURSE	NUMBER OF NURSING GRADUATES	POTENTIAL NUMBER OF WORKING YEARS OF ONE GRADUATE	TOTAL POSSIBLE NUMBER OF WORKING-YEARS OF GROUP	ACTUAL NUMBER OF YEARS WORKED BY GROUP	PERCENTAGE OF YEARS WORKED IN NURSING	TOTAL YEARS WORKED OUTSIDE NURSING
1962	6	15	90	42	46,6	6
1963	5	14	70	35	50,0	-
1964	4	13	52	11	21,15	9
1965	9	12	108	36	33,33	23
1966	6	11	66	56	84,84	-
1967	8	10	80	45	43,75	-
1968	10	9	90	60	66,66	1
1969	6	8	48	20	41,66	-
1970	16	7	112	66	58,92	5
1971	20	6	120	75	62,50	5
1972	9	5	45	39	86,66	-
1973	10	4	40	33	82,5	5
1974	8	3	24	15	62,5	1
1975	14	2	28	23	82,14	2
1976	8	1	8	5	62,5	1
TOTAL	139		981	551		58

explained that an academic qualification is often combined with a professional one. For example, various graduates have obtained an Honours degree which allows registration with the S.A. Nursing Council as a community health nurse. Several graduates have obtained more than one professional qualification. It must be noted that only students entering the course offered by the University of Natal after 1966 have been eligible for the dual registration with the S.A. Nursing Council as both general nurses and midwives. Prior to this date, students were only registered as general nurses. Thirty graduates, therefore, did not emerge as registered midwives on completion of their degree, of whom fifteen subsequently completed the one-year Diploma in Midwifery.

DISCUSSION

Information relating to the career-development of graduate nurses is vital for manpower planning in the health sector. In view of the publicity during the last year in regard to nurses' salaries, job satisfaction and terms of employment, the finding that 90,6% of the study group's working-years has been spent within nursing; that levels of motivation have been high enough to achieve a very respectable rate of post-graduate work and even that more than half the careers followed outside nursing are careers in related fields, is rather more encouraging for the future than might have been anticipated.

REFERENCE

1. Macquire J.M. *Threshold to Nursing*. (Occasional Papers of Social Administration) Bell, London, 1969.

TYPE OF EMPLOYMENT	NUMBER
Medical practitioners	2
Medical student	1
Social worker	1
Commerce	7
University lecturers in social science	2
Full-time Church workers	4
TOTAL	17

FIELD OF NURSING	NUMBER
General medical and surgical nursing	17
Community nursing	12
Nurse teaching	9
Intensive care nursing	7
Midwifery	6
Psychiatric nursing	5
Paediatric nursing	3
Operating theatre nursing	2
Nursing administration	2
TOTAL	63

QUALIFICATION	NUMBER
Psychiatric nursing	10
Intensive care nursing	8
Community health nursing	8
Nursing education	7
Paediatric nursing	6
Operating theatre technique	4
Nursing administration	4
Midwifery	15
TOTAL	62

DEGREE	NUMBER
Honours degrees	12
Master's degrees	3
Ph.D.	1
TOTAL	16