

Transition to Practice Programs for Newly Licensed RNs

The Hospital Nurse Staffing Survey (HNSS) assesses the size and effects of the nursing shortage in hospitals, Texas’ largest employer of nurses. During the spring of 2012, the TCNWS administered the HNSS to 603 Texas hospitals. These included for-profit, non-profit, public, and Texas Department of State Health Services-operated hospitals, as well as hospitals linked to academic institutions; military hospitals were not surveyed. The facilities surveyed were general acute care, psychiatric, special, and rehabilitation hospitals. 373 (61.9%) hospitals responded to the survey. The hospitals that completed the 2012 HNSS were representative of all Texas hospitals by region and bed size.

This report on transition to practice programs for newly licensed Registered Nurses (RNs) responds to the nursing community’s need to understand the challenges new nurses face and develop a means of easing their transition into nursing. Hiring practices of newly licensed nurses, hospitals’ efforts to help them acclimate to practice, and the benefits of doing so are presented herein.

Institute of Medicine’s *The Future of Nursing*¹

In 2011, the Institute of Medicine (IOM) published *The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health*. This report recommended a series of concrete policy and administrative changes that would allow the American healthcare professions to deal with our country’s healthcare workforce needs. As a means of partially addressing the country’s shortage of highly-qualified practicing nurses, the IOM report notes exceptionally high turnover rates among first-year nurses. It recommends that employers of newly licensed RNs seek to ease the transition by implementing transition to practice (residency) programs. Such programs have thus far proven economically prudent with returns on investment as high as 884%, while also leading to increased first-year nurse satisfaction and improved quality of patient care.

The Texas Center for Nursing Workforce Studies included several questions regarding transition to practice programs into the 2012 HNSS. These programs may include additional didactic learning, extended orientations, prolonged preceptorships, and formal residency programs. The 2012 data responses to these questions will provide a baseline for tracking future program changes in response to this recommendation.

Transition to Practice Programs in Texas

Table 1. Percentage of Responding Hospitals with and without Transition to Practice Programs by Region

| | | Region 1 Panhandle | Region 2 North Texas | Region 3 East Texas | Region 4 Gulf Coast | Region 5 Central Texas | Region 6 South Texas | Region 7 Rio Grande Valley | Region 8 West Texas | Total |
|---|---|-----------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------|-------|
| Hospitals with Transition Programs | # | 15 | 63 | 21 | 35 | 26 | 19 | 10 | 23 | 212 |
| | % | 44.1% | 63.0% | 63.6% | 59.3% | 70.3% | 50.0% | 83.3% | 65.7% | 60.9% |
| Hospitals without Transition Programs | # | 19 | 37 | 12 | 24 | 11 | 19 | 2 | 12 | 136 |
| | % | 55.9% | 37.0% | 36.4% | 40.7% | 29.7% | 50.0% | 16.7% | 34.3% | 39.1% |

Table 1 provides data showing the percentage of hospitals in each region reporting whether or not they had a transition to practice program for newly licensed RNs.

- In Texas, 60.9% of responding hospitals offer a transition to practice program for newly licensed RNs.
- Fifty percent or less of hospitals in Regions 1 (Panhandle) and 6 (South Texas) reported having a transition to practice program.
- Region 7 (Rio Grande Valley) reported the highest proportion of hospitals with such a program, followed by Region 5 (Central Texas) and Region 8 (West Texas).

Source: ¹ Institute of Medicine, Committee on the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Initiative on the Future of Nursing. (2011). *The future of nursing: Leading change, advancing health*. Retrieved from The National Academies Press website: http://books.nap.edu/openbook.php?record_id=12956

Transition to Practice Programs in Texas (continued)

Table 2. Percentage of Hospitals with and without Transition to Practice Programs by Geographic Designation

| | | Metro Border | Metro Non-Border | Non-Metro Border | Non-Metro Non-Border |
|--|---|--------------|------------------|------------------|----------------------|
| Hospitals with Transition Programs | # | 14 | 139 | 5 | 54 |
| | % | 73.7% | 62.2% | 62.5% | 53.5% |
| Hospitals without Transition Programs | # | 5 | 81 | 3 | 47 |
| | % | 26.3% | 27.8% | 27.5% | 46.5% |

Table 2 shows the percentage of hospitals with and without transition to practice programs by geographic designation.

- The highest percentage of hospitals with transition to practice programs were in metropolitan border counties (73.7%)
- Hospitals in metropolitan non-border and non-metropolitan border counties both had higher percentages with transition to practice programs than Texas at-large.
- Just 53.5% of non-metropolitan non-border hospitals reported offering transition programs for newly licensed RNs.

Description of Transition to Practice Programs

Of the 212 hospitals that reported having a transition to practice program in place, 194 of them provided responses when asked to describe their programs. An analysis of these submissions revealed the following:

- 138 hospitals (71.1%) reported using established practicing RN preceptors or mentors to guide newly licensed RNs.
- 62 hospitals (32.0%) used orientations to acclimate newly licensed RNs to their responsibilities.
- 58 hospitals (29.9%) provided classroom/didactic instruction to newly licensed RNs.
- 42 hospitals (21.6%) utilized a formal residency program, the majority of which (27) are modeled on an external, privately developed curriculum.
- 41 hospitals (21.1%) offered internships to newly licensed RN graduates.
- 4 hospitals (2.1%) used relationships developed with local colleges and universities to prepare newly licensed RN graduates.

Traits of Transition to Practice Programs In Texas

Employment vs. Non-employment Models

As part of understanding hospitals' transition to practice programs, each was asked whether their program paid transitioning nurses (the employment model) or whether their program was unpaid (the non-employment model), perhaps through participation with a nursing school or as an individual internship.

- 201 of the 212 hospitals reporting a transition to practice program responded to a question about whether their program was an employment or non-employment model.
- The vast majority of hospitals (96.5%) reported using an employment model.

Length of Transition to Practice (in Weeks)

Figure 1. Average Length in Weeks of Transition to Practice Programs by Region

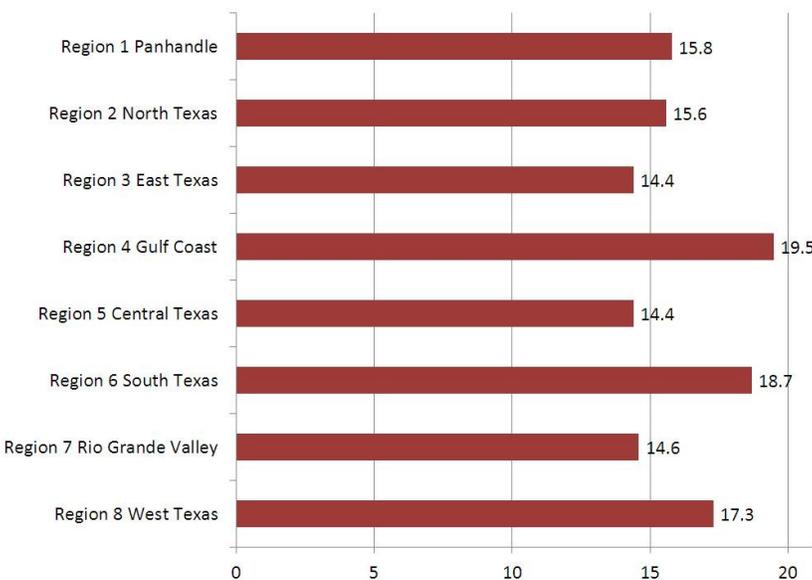


Figure 1 shows the average length in weeks of transition to practice programs in each region.

- Regions 4 and 6 had the longest average program length.
- Programs in Regions 3 and 5 had the shortest average lengths.

Traits of Transition to Practice Programs In Texas (continued)

Table 4. Average Length in Weeks of Transition to Practice Programs by Geographic Designation

| | Metro Border | Metro Non-Border | Non-Metro Border | Non-Metro Non-Border | Total |
|------|--------------|------------------|------------------|----------------------|-------|
| # | 14 | 130 | 5 | 47 | 196 |
| mean | 15.9 | 17.9 | 13.2 | 12.6 | 16.3 |

Table 4 represents the mean length of transition to practice programs in hospitals by geographic designation.

- Metropolitan hospitals had longer programs than non-metropolitan hospitals.

Note: # = number of hospitals in Texas reporting transition to practice lengths

Reported Benefits of Transition to Practice Programs

The same 212 hospitals with transition to practice programs were asked to indicate outcomes resulting from these programs.

- A majority of hospitals reported the following clinical benefits to these programs:
 - Improved clinical competence in patient care among first-year nurses (79.2%)
 - Improved clinical decision-making abilities among nurses in the first year of employment (54.7%).
 - Decreased turnover of newly licensed RNs in their first year of employment (51.4%)
- Additionally, hospitals listed the following as other benefits of transition to practice programs:
 - Increased number of new graduates applying for RN positions (35.4%)
 - Improved organization and prioritizing skills in clinical practice among first-year nurses (31.6%).
 - Improved ability of first-year nurses to communicate with physicians, other health professionals, staff, patients, and patients' families (28.8%).
 - Improved ability to incorporate research-based evidence in clinical practice among first-year nurses (11.3%).

Hiring of Newly Licensed RNs

Table 3 displays the number of newly licensed RNs hired as a percentage of the total number of RN FTE positions (defined as the sum of occupied and vacant positions during the week of 1/22/2012 through 1/28/2012), by degree type and whether hospitals reported a transition to practice program.

Table 3. Percentage of RN FTEs Filled by Newly Licensed RNs by Degree Type and Transition to Practice Status

| | Hospitals with Transition to Practice Programs | Hospitals without Transition to Practice Programs |
|----------------------|--|---|
| Diploma | 4.7% | 8.6% |
| ADN | 4.1% | 8.5% |
| BSN | 4.7% | 4.7% |
| MSN– Alternate Entry | 0.4% | <.1% |

- Hospitals without transition to practice programs rely on greater proportions of diploma (8.6%) and Associate Degree in Nursing (ADN) hires (8.5%) than do hospitals with transition to practice programs (4.7% and 4.1%, respectively).
- The presence of a transition to practice program does not seem to affect the proportion of newly licensed nurses with a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) or Master of Science in Nursing (MSN) on a hospital's staff.

New Employment by Transition to Practice Programs

Table 4. Number of Hospitals Reporting Transition to Practice Hires and the Number of Hires by Region

| | Region 1 Panhandle | Region 2 North Texas | Region 3 East Texas | Region 4 Gulf Coast | Region 5 Central Texas | Region 6 South Texas | Region 7 Rio Grande Valley | Region 8 West Texas | Total |
|---|--------------------|----------------------|---------------------|---------------------|------------------------|----------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|-------|
| Number of Hospitals Reporting Transition to Practice Hires | 12 | 52 | 14 | 28 | 18 | 14 | 9 | 13 | 160 |
| Number of Nursing Graduates Accepted into Transition to Practice Programs | 210 | 1,143 | 363 | 1,179 | 510 | 383 | 133 | 378 | 4,299 |

Table 4 provides information on the number of hospitals that reported hiring nurses into their transition to practice programs and the number of total hires by region.