RETENTION PRIORITIES FOR THE INTERGENERATIONAL NURSE WORKFORCE

A RESEARCH PAPER
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN PARTIAL FULLFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE
MASTERS OF SCIENCE
BY
GINA L. LUDLOW

DR. CYNTHIA THOMAS - ADVISOR

BALL STATE UNIVERSITY
MUNCIE, INDIANA
DECEMBER 2012
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TABLE OF CONTENTS</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background and Significance</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Framework</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Terms</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumptions</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Framework</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization of Literature</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature Review</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction and Problem</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABSTRACT

RESEARCH SUBJECT: Retention Priorities for the Intergenerational Nurse Workforce

STUDENT: Gina Ludlow, BSN, RN

DEGREE: Master of Science

COLLEGE: College of Applied Sciences and Technology

DATE: December, 2012

Retention among nurses has become a growing problem across the country. Until recently, limited research had been done in the nursing field regarding the impact of generational differences on retention. This study aims to assess work environment, job satisfaction, and desired characteristics of managers with a goal of improving nursing retention. The following instruments will be used to gather information: the Nurse Manager Desired Traits survey (Wieck et al., 2002), the Nursing Work Index- revised (Aiken & Patrician, 2000) and an on-line survey that reviews job satisfaction and safety. The sample population will be nurses from each generational cohort; Millennials (18-26 years old), Generation X (27-40 years old), and Baby Boomers (>40 years old). Understanding the needs of each cohort will allow the researcher to compare the needs and find common denominators across the cohorts. The results will hopefully allow for the creation of a plan that takes into account the cross-generational needs of the nursing population, in turn decreasing turnover.
Chapter I
Introduction

With an ever-increasing nursing shortage, more emphasis is being placed on the retention of nurses. Job satisfaction has been shown to be a significant predictor of nursing retention. Important components of job satisfaction vary between each generation of nurses. Each generation has a set of life experiences and events that have influenced their work ethics and value systems. The main generational cohorts that are present in our workforce are, Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964); Generation X (born 1965-1979); and Generation Y or Millennials (born 1980 and onwards) (Wilson, Squires, Widger, Cranley, & Tourangeau, 2008). Blending the cohorts in a common working environment can pose issues in patient care. Baby Boomers are referred to as idealistic and dedicated. Baby boomers value promotions, positions and titles. Generation X people often look to balance work with family and leisure. The cohort also tends to possess advanced technological skills, team oriented, realistic, and enjoys working independently. Generation Y is the youngest generational cohort to have entered into the work force, and viewed as dynamic, self-confident, opinionated and straightforward (Keepnews, Brewer, Kovner, & Shin, 2010). Generation Y is also known to stay close to their families and very technologically savvy. With differing attitudes toward work and the working environment, managers may have difficulty building an environment that meets the needs
and fosters the growth of each generation. As a result, job satisfaction and retention are issues that today’s leaders face daily.

**Background and Significance**

Nursing retention can be a challenge. The current work force is generationally diverse, with the majority of the nursing workforce representing the Baby Boomer Generation and Generation X (Huber, 2010). Each generational cohort has a different value system. As the next generation is now entering the work force, a new set of values is added to an already complicated mix. Each generation responds to different incentives, ways of teaching and leadership, further complicating retention. As a result of varying world views and volatile dynamics, the Baby Boomers and Generation Xers tend to experience more workplace friction, tension and dissatisfaction (Sudheimer, 2009). Bridging the gaps between generations may help to create the cohesive environment that nurses are looking for by improving communication and working relationships.

Recognizing a knowledge gap is present regarding generational differences in the work place. Wieck, Dols, and Northam (2010) completed research aiming to determine satisfaction with current employment incentives and potential managerial actions that might decrease or delay turnover among registered nurses. The nursing workforce today may be represented by as many as four generations working together. Each generation has different needs and expectations of the nurse manager. Wieck et al. (2010) noted similarities and differences among the Baby Boomers, Generation Xs, and Millennials. All three cohorts enjoy monetary incentives and feeling valued in the professional realm. The most effective incentives for Baby Boomers included paid time off, pension and retirement benefits. On the other hand, Millennials ranked overtime pay, paid time off
and premium pay as their top three choices. Generation Xs placed work environment and pay at the top of their list. While focus is currently on retaining the Baby Boomer generation, there is also an issue attracting and retaining new nurses. A study done by Bowles and Candela (2005) found that among nurses with less than 5 years of experience, “57% of respondents left their first job” (p. 16) by the end of their second year of employment. Interestingly, retention issues are present throughout all ages and value sets. Negative outcomes can result from high turnover among the nurse workforce. Increased turnover can impact patient care outcomes, staff morale, work productivity and costs associated with temporarily filling positions as well as hiring and orienting new nurses (Bowles & Candela, 2005).

Until recently, limited amounts of information were available regarding generational differences related to job satisfaction. Job satisfaction is a significant predictor of nursing retention and turnover. In a study done by Wilson et al., job satisfaction and its components throughout the groups were explored (2008). Wilson et al. learned that leaders and recruiters would need to appeal to each population differently. Wilson et al. discussed that among Generation Y members, twenty percent of the new registered nurses were more likely to leave the nursing profession in the first three years post graduation. Self-scheduling appeals to Generation X and Generation Y, as well as supporting continuing education, professional development and recognition. The authors also discussed shared governance and giving the nurses the autonomy to make some of the departmental decisions that affect them. It seems that each generation responds to an increase in empowerment by the management teams.
Cordeniz (2002) outlined a strategy for retaining the Generation Xers. Cordeniz suggested that Generation X members seek the following things from leadership in order to improve upon morale and job satisfaction: talk with the staff to communicate good or bad information, work side by side with the staff nurses in times of need, back them up when needed, and help the staff nurses grow both professionally and individually. Those, among other things, will help build trust with the leadership team and reinforce the value of each nurse as a valued member of the staff.

Problem

Limited research has been done on the effect of generational differences on job satisfaction. The current literature points to the fact that one size fits all leadership does not create an environment that fosters growth, communication, and a cohesive atmosphere. Although nurse job satisfaction is an important indicator of the quality of patient care, current understanding of nurse job satisfaction and its effects is limited (Murrells, Robinson, & Griffiths, 2009). The problem lies in the different value systems that are held within different generations. Nurses in each generation view change, leadership and career goals in a differently. Baby Boomers often put work first with an increased level of dedication. On the other hand, Generation X nurses tend to focus on career advancement while maintaining a balance with family/home life. Each generation thinks, motivates, and behaves differently than the next. As a result, nursing managers cannot use the same leadership methods for all individuals. If this is done, unhappy nurses may result (Cordeniz, 2002). Unhappy nursing units breed turnover, creating environments with a high nurse to patient ratio, further decreasing nursing satisfaction, and further turnover. As stated previously, those in the X and Y cohorts will not hesitate
to look for another job that compensates better financially, lower stress, and offers the other qualities that they desire.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to assess the work environment, job satisfaction and the desired characteristics of managers in an effort to improve upon current nursing retention. This study will also review the generational differences in those areas between Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y.

**Research Questions**

1. What characteristics do nurses value in their managers?

2. What are the retention priorities of each generation in the hospital setting?

**Theoretical Framework**

The conceptual framework that will be used for this study is Ludwig von Bertalanffy’s General Systems Theory (1968). The General Systems Theory was created to study the interactions within a given system and focuses on three separate concepts: input, throughput, and output.

**Definition of Terms**

**Conceptual.** Conceptually, nurse manager characteristics are found to affect the overall job satisfaction of the staff nurses who work beside them. The characteristics that the nurse manager embodies are reflected in their overall management style and its effect on each generation of nurses. Essential nurse leadership traits are found to include communication, conflict resolution, creating a vision and motivating and inspiring nurses at all levels (Wieck et al., 2010).
**Operational.** For this study, nurse manager characteristics are the different traits valued and desired by the nurses who work with them. In this study, a list of the characteristics will be ranked in 1 to 10 order with 1 equaling the most desirable trait. The rankings by each generation will be compared in order to compare the priorities in each generation. The characteristics evaluated in this study include: dependable, team player, supportive, available, fair, professional, communication skills, trustworthy, clinically competent, and positive attitude (Wieck et al., 2010).

**Conceptual.** Generational cohorts are based on the year that one is born. Based on the cohort, each generation has been molded by the experiences that occurred during that timeframe. Baby Boomers are described as highly optimistic, workaholics, self-centered, value teamwork, work hard, expect involvement in work, and emphasize meetings. This cohort is said to have been born between 1946 and 1964.

Generation X was born between the years of 1965 and 1980. This generation is self-reliant, skeptical of older generations, technologically savvy, value informality in job relationships, outcome focused, and loyal to self and career goals—not to the institution. The youngest generation examined was born between 1981 and 2000. The Millennials are the most watched-over generation in history, they are not motivated by the promise of wealth or the threat of firing, expert multitaskers, expect a technology-rich environment, desiring a work/life balance, and work well in teams (Wieck et al., 2010). Baby Boomers, Generation X and the Millennials combined create the most diverse workforce in history, leading to one of the most difficult times for leadership.

**Operational.** The purpose of this study of generational cohorts will be studied individually and compared to other generations to identify ways to improve nurse
satisfaction and retention across the generations. The three generations identified throughout this study are Baby Boomers, Millennials, and Generation X. This is important work because Baby Boomers, the largest cohort in nursing, are nearing retirement age leaving the nursing shortage at its most severe. There is a great need to improve satisfaction of the Millennials and Generation X while attempting to retain the Baby Boomers and decrease the turnover rate of staff nurses (Wilson et al., 2008).

**Conceptual.** Evidence shows that job satisfaction is in direct correlation to nursing retention. Conceptually, job satisfaction is thought to include perception that the job fulfills personal needs and their feelings and attitude toward the job (Wilson et al., 2008).

**Operational.** To evaluate job satisfaction and its effects, responses of cohorts will be compared and evaluated for significance. The categories evaluated are overall job satisfaction, pay and benefits, scheduling, co-workers, interaction opportunities, professional opportunities, praise and recognition, and control and responsibility (Wilson et al., 2008). The hope is that recommendations for increasing nurse satisfaction will be made for nurse leadership teams as a result of the study findings.

**Assumptions**

Nursing turnover is a growing concern. Focus has been shifted to retaining nurses from each generation and limited knowledge about the needs of each generation is available. An increasing nursing turnover rate causes increased job stress, decreased job satisfaction, and decreased job safety. Nurse leaders should be educated about the needs and wants of each generation to create an environment that promotes retention.
Limitations

Limitations of this study are the potential for greater participation from one generation than another in relation to intranet usage being the main source of attaining information. Another potential limitation is that information is gathered from one type of unit in one hospital system. Nurses not having adequate time while at work to complete the survey may also be a limiting factor.

Summary

A new challenge is facing the nursing work force today. The span of generations includes those from the Baby Boomers to the newest to join the force—Generation Y. Ramifications of this diverse work force are reflected in job dissatisfaction, adversity in the unit between peers, and turnover. Leadership is faced with the task of finding a middle ground, and understanding and recognizing the values and needs of each generation. This is no easy task when each generation is different from the preceding one. At the organizational level, nursing leaders should focus on generational differences and promote a positive environment for new nurses of all generations to grow, learn and showcase their abilities (Keepnews et al., 2010).

Leaders of today may need additional education related to generational difference, and foster growth and development in the staff (Keepnews et al., 2010). Discussing the needs of each generation can open lines of communication in the unit leading to what nurses seek, a cohesive environment. If nurse leadership is willing to adopt the knowledge about different cohorts, the leadership team may improve nurse responses to change. Furthermore, nurses should be afforded the autonomy to grow and question the
process, under the guidance of a strong leader. As with any cultural change, this will not occur overnight. However, discussing the changes and plans – and following through – will foster a relationship of trust and may lead to an increase in job satisfaction across the generational divide.
Chapter II

Literature Review

Introduction

In the coming years, the nurse workforce will suffer a big loss as the Baby Boomer generation begins to retire (Wieck et al., 2010). Nurse leadership may want to retain Baby Boomer nurses for as long as possible while supporting and nurturing Generation X and the Millennials. The key to success in improving and maintaining retention and nurse satisfaction is creating an environment where all generations can thrive and work well together (Wieck et al., 2010).

Current literature suggests several avenues for improving nurse satisfaction. Nurse leadership shoulders significant responsibility in this process. It is important to provide an environment that delivers opportunities each generation desires. Also, the environment should foster strong working relationships, not only among nurses but between other disciplines as well (Wieck et al., 2010).

Theoretical Framework

The conceptual framework that will be used for this study is Ludwig von Bertalanffy’s General Systems Theory. Von Bertalanffy advocated “perspectivism, and, ethically, he was humanist. His main concern was the fate of the human civilization and the new way of thinking necessary for the survival of mankind” (Hofkirchner, n.d.).
General Systems Theory was created to study the interactions within a given system and focuses on three separate concepts: input, throughput, and output.

Von Bertalanffy (1968) stated that issues arise when a problem of an organization is reviewed related to its individual parts. For an organization to fully understand dissatisfaction and turnover among the different generations of nursing, the entire system would need to be reviewed as a whole concept.

The General Systems Theory provides a strong organizational base for this study. The concepts are general enough that this framework can be applied to a multitude of studies. This framework demonstrates how the nurse characteristics, benefits and incentives, and organizational policies (input) directly affect job satisfaction (throughput) and how this relationship finally affects intent to stay (output) (Wieck, et al., 2010).

Organization of Literature

The literature review consists of studies related to nurse job satisfaction, turnover and retention based on differences between generational cohorts. As a result of those differences, each generation is impacted differently by the environment in which they work and the leadership styles present. Relationships between generational cohorts, leadership styles, and job satisfaction needs were examined in the literature.

Literature Review

At this time in history, several generational cohorts represent the nursing workforce. The three cohorts that are most prominent are Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y. Having multiple generations coexisting can create workplace conflict, which can lead to decreased job satisfaction and increased job turnover. This, coupled with the Baby Boomers nearing retirement age creates increasing concern for a
worsening nursing shortage. The goal of an organization should be to increase retention and decrease the rate of turnover, especially in the new workforce (Keepnews, et al., 2010).

Keepnews et al. (2010) investigated the generational differences among the new nursing workforce. A total of 4,105 eligible nurses responded to a survey on work experiences and job choices. Results indicated that not all nurses went through a formal education prior to their first work experiences. Baby Boomers were the least likely to have attended such a formal orientation and education program. Generation X reports the highest percentage of family-to-work conflict as a result of being more likely to have young children at home. This generation also believes that compensation is inadequate based on the job performed. Generation Y is commonly working the night shift, in critical care areas (Keepnews et al., 2010). Keepnews et al. also reported registered nurses that have utilized a mentor/mentee relationship feel the most support from other staff and management.

Orientation and relationship building should be regarded as extremely important for adaptation into the nursing workforce. Depending on the age entering the workforce, the need for a strong orientation could decrease based on readiness to work and professional maturity. Orientation, however, is the ideal place for all nurses to receive information about conflict management among peers of varying generations. As a result of growing up in a technologically advanced era, Generations X and Y tend to have an easier time implementing new technologies and often work in critical care environments (Keepnews et al., 2010).
Nurse managers should expect to work with multiple generations. They should be willing to identify, learn from and understand each nurse’s goals, abilities, and needs. Fostering an environment where nurses feel they are as important as providing safe quality care to patients should be a priority.

Improving job satisfaction is an issue faced by all nursing leadership. Satisfaction directly impacts nurse performance and retention rates. As a result, it is important to study this component of our growing nursing shortage. Nurse turnover is especially high in the first few years of a nurse’s career when the demands and stress of the job may easily outweigh the benefits. Dissatisfaction among nurses ultimately leads to a decline in quality of care.

Murrels, et al. (2009) aimed to develop a job satisfaction instrument to explore potential links between quality of care and retention. Surveys were sent to all qualifiers in England and 3,962 registered nurses were eligible to participate. The participants completed the surveys at 6 months, 18 months and 3 years. Factor analysis was used to explore and test the stability of job satisfaction components over time in branches of nursing.

This study identified seven traits of job satisfaction including: client care, staffing, development, relationships, education, work-life interface, and resources. These factors were consistent across the four generations of nurses identified. The identification of traits effecting job satisfaction and retention across all branches of nursing allows for a better understanding of the needs of nurses. Results showed that this instrument was successful and can be used for further studies, staff surveys, and helping to further understand retention.
The growing shortage of registered nurses has thrust the spotlight on recruitment and retention issues. Research shows that hospitals have high turnover rates among registered nurses (Wilson, et al., 2008). Studies related to effective strategies for retention focus on job satisfaction. As the workforce changes, healthcare agencies are faced with increasing difficulty retaining registered nurses.

The purpose of Wilson et al.’s (2008) study was to explore the generational differences in job satisfaction. A survey was used to evaluate a sample of registered nurses from the Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Millennial cohorts. Components of job satisfaction evaluated included: extrinsic rewards, scheduling, balance of family and work, interactions with co-workers, other interaction opportunities, professional opportunities, praise and recognition, and control and responsibility.

The Ontario Nurse Survey was mailed to 13,100 registered nurses who worked at 75 community and teaching hospitals in medical, surgical, and critical care areas. There were 6,541 participants representing the three generational cohorts that met inclusion criteria for the study. The results were measured using the 31 item McCloskey Mueller Satisfaction Likert Scale (MMSS) (Mueller & McCloskey, 1990).

Results indicated significant differences between the cohorts in five out of seven job satisfaction components including: pay and benefits, scheduling, professional opportunities, praise and recognition and satisfaction with control and responsibility. Baby Boomers were more satisfied overall than Generation X and Millennials. Younger generations are less satisfied with pay and benefits, as well as scheduling constraints and vacation guidelines. Among the five components, the highest variation was found
between the Baby Boomers and Generation X. In relation to overall job satisfaction, Generation X and Millennials showed no significant difference.

Nurse managers face the challenge of engaging and improving job satisfaction across the generational divide, starting with the willingness for change. Implementing self-scheduling potentially improves perceived control over hours worked and time spent with family. Supporting and guiding continuing education, shared governance, and creating an environment of autonomy are all avenues that may be used to improve overall job satisfaction among registered nurses, in turn improving retention.

Previously, registered nurse recruiters focused on making nursing a desirable career option. Today, the focus has shifted to include retention of the baby boomer population. Baby Boomers nearing retirement and poor nurse retention may result in a larger registered nurse shortage. In terms of retention, nurse leadership may benefit from researching the needs and wants of Baby Boomers.

Wieck, et al. (2010) conducted an assessment of job satisfaction, work environment, and desired characteristics of managers to improve registered nurse retention rates. As the generational make-up changed, it became more apparent that a single retention strategy did not satisfy all cohorts. Wieck et al.’s (2010) study reviewed the responses of the Millennials, Generation X and Baby Boomers to identify priorities for job satisfaction and retention.

An online survey was conducted to gather data for the study. The study was driven by two research questions: What characteristics do nurses value in their managers? What are the retentions priorities of each generation in the hospital setting? The Nurse Manager Desired Traits (Wieck et al., 2002) survey and The Nursing work Index—
Revised (Aiken & Patrician, 2000) were included in the study. The survey was distributed to registered nurses at 22 hospitals, there were 1,773 usable surveys evaluated.

Findings indicated that all generations wanted to work for someone that they could depend on. Generation Xers desired a manager who values their work on a team, while the Baby Boomers focused on respect from managers, while Millennials viewed the quality of the manager to be key. Each unit and each hospital had different value sets. It was important to have an open dialog with the nursing staff to keep challenges and priorities in the open. Shared governance is an important step to improve nurse autonomy. Improved staff recognition and staffing may create a more positive environment. Lastly, identifying nurses with promising leadership skills and creating strong managers early on may result in strengthened management and improved loyalty to a hospital or unit.

Each generation is unique. Baby Boomers are career focused and value hard work. Generation X demands a balance between work and life, and tends to focus on themselves and personal goals. The Millennials also require a balance between work and lifestyle while valuing teamwork. These differences create challenges for nurse managers in terms of job satisfaction and retention.

Creating a work environment where multiple generations can thrive and work together is a challenge for nurse managers. Nurse satisfaction is affected by work environment, managerial traits and employment incentives and may vary within each generation. Wieck et al. (2010) studied potential managerial actions which might decrease or delay turnover by registered nurses. A correlational design was used in the study to evaluate the relationship between variables. Variables evaluated were perceived
stress, work related factors, incentives/disincentives, floating, and intent to stay in the organization.

The framework was based on Ludwig von Bentalanffy’s General Systems Theory (1968). Von Bentalanffy demonstrated a way to think about interactions within a system. For this study, nursing characteristics, such as benefits and incentives, and organization policies (input) lead to potential job satisfaction (throughput), which impacts an RN’s intent to stay at a current facility (output).

The ramifications of turnover are impacted by an increased nursing shortage, financial cost of replacing the employee, and decreased staff morale. The increasing patient load per nurse may lead to further job dissatisfaction, and poor patient outcomes. Nurses in these scenarios are more likely to face burnout. It is also important to review retention in terms of incentive to stay at an organization. The multigenerational workforce varies in opinion related to pay and scheduling, two areas for opportunity with retention. Identifying the needs and desires of each generation may aid in creating a retention plan to suit the needs of each nurse. Nurse leaders should be prepared to build a cohesive environment that promotes job satisfaction and retention.

Nursing has never before been comprised of such a diverse generational mix. Each generation has values, beliefs, satisfiers and work ethics. As diversity increases, nurse managers are tasked with retaining nurses from all cohorts. Little research has been completed linking turnover to each generational profile.

Lavoie-Tremblay, et al. (2010) investigated the relationship between turnover and generational profile using the Likert-style Psychological Climate Questionnaire (Gagnon, Paquet, Courcy & Parker, 2009). A further inquiry was done related to turnover intention.
The questionnaire is based on a framework related to the climate of the job, role, leader, work group, and organization. Of the 1,376 surveys returned, 1,324 were usable.

Overall, the three generational cohorts viewed each work climate area as positive or negative. For example, Generation Y and Baby Boomers valued working in a supportive environment. Generation Y, however, had a stronger positive correlation between intent to stay at the organization and supportive environment. Generation Y nurses have demonstrated the highest intention to leave an organization, followed by Generation X and Baby Boomers (Lavoie-Tremblay, et al., 2010). Career advancement and development was among the top reasons for leaving an organization for Generation X and Y, however Baby Boomers cited retirement issues. Generation Y also had greater turnover rates resulting from increased stress and conflict, and a lack of “goal emphasis.” Generation Y needs rules, outlined goals, and measurable outcomes. Conversely, previous nursing experience allows Baby Boomers and Generation Xs to be more confident in procedures and work flow. Generation Y members are also concerned about the nursing shortage. Nurses are now expected to graduate and shoulder greater responsibility and workload sooner than Generation X and Baby Boomers (Lavoie-Tremblay et al., 2010). This led to dissatisfaction and an increase in turnover among this Generation Y nurses.

Based on research, retention strategies might include clearly stated goals, improving opportunities for advancement, decreasing areas of conflict, and creating a positive environment. With an improved work climate focused on characteristics of each generation, turnover should decrease.
The aging population will increase the need for health care workers in the years to come. As a result, recruitment and retention of future and current nurses needs to be approached with a sense of urgency (Leiter, Jackson, & Shaugnessy, 2009).

Leiter, et al. investigated the differences among nurses in relation to core values regarding their work and the influence it had on job satisfaction. Surveys were sent to acute care nurses from the Baby boomer and Generation X groups. There were six hundred and sixty-seven usable surveys returned. The Maslach Burnout Inventory – General Scale (Schaufeli, Leiter, Maslach, & Jackson, 1996) was used as the survey instrument. This instrument measures dimensions of the burnout—engagement continuum: exhaustion—energy, cynicism—involvement and inefficacy—efficacy. A Likert Scale was used to evaluate turnover intention.

Based on the results, Baby Boomers showed a longer tenure than the Generation Xs. Baby Boomers responded more positively to burnout, turnover intention, work life and personal knowledge sharing, showing a greater satisfaction in their employment and role overall. The study reported Generation Xs are more likely to experience job burnout and to change jobs or leave the nursing profession all together than the Baby Boomer generation. Reduced staffing levels and exhaustion leading to patient/nurse safety issues was a large area of dissatisfaction, (Leiter et al., 2009).

The study reiterated the importance of recruitment and retention of younger generations. It is likely that Millennials will find even less satisfaction within the workforce than previous groups related to work value differences. Leadership needs to define and implement a plan to aid in continuity of work values and departmental or corporate values in order to retain the young workforce.
The American Nurses Association declared nurse staffing in the United States to be a public health crisis (Bowles & Candela, 2005). This is a result of the growing registered nurse shortage that is expected to worsen over the next several years. Several possibilities for the growing turnover rate included: aging workforce, increasing career choices for women, pay, and stress. Hospitals have had greater difficulty attracting new nurses to their facilities as a result of increasing competition between organizations. Previous research indicates that while recruitment to the profession is an issue, registered nurse retention may have a greater impact on the current nurse shortage (Bowles & Candela, 2005).

Bowles and Candela (2005) evaluated perceptions of new nurses on their first job and the impact of the nurse’s perceptions on turnover period. A survey was mailed to 3,077 nurses that had graduated from nursing school within the last five years. The survey was designed to identify the first position held, perception of that position, and lastly their demographic information and current position. There were 352 usable surveys returned.

A majority of nurse participants were under the age of 35 years old, placing them in Generations X and Y. The study results indicated that one third of new registered nurses entered the medical-surgical practice area. Half of the nurses left their first position within two years of their start date. Recently registered nurses believed that the work environment was stressful, professional education was not financially supported, and administration did not listen to concerns regarding patient safety. However, new RNs also believed that employees worked well together and that professional education was encouraged. The research indicated that the unit size also had an effect on job
perception. The larger the unit, the more negatively the RN viewed the first job experience.

Orientation and mentoring played a significant role in improving a nurse’s sense of support and belonging on a unit. An environment of autonomy would provide an avenue for voicing concerns and creating nurse driven change. Overall, having ownership of their unit and their decisions, may be the key to reducing turnover in this important group of RNs.

As a result of the nursing shortage, qualified programs are accepting more qualified students into nursing programs than before. (Lavoie-Tremblay et al., 2008). Once in the program, it is equally important that the students graduate, find a job and become an integral part of the registered nurse workforce. As a result of a decline in working conditions; it is becoming harder to retain new nurses. By 2020, the registered nurse shortage is expected to reach 808,400 nurses, a 29% increase (Lavoie-Tremblay et al., 2008). Action needs to be taken to combat this nurse turnover.

The aim of Lavoie-Tremblay et al.’s (2008) study was to evaluate the psychosocial work environment in relationship to nursing turnover. A survey was sent to registered nurses under the age of 24. Of the 1002 surveys mailed, 309 were returned. The survey evaluated the following categories: psychosocial work environment, social support, and effort/reward imbalance.

Lavoie-Tremblay et al.’s (2008) study found that 61.5% of nurses planned to move from one nursing job to another nursing job. Researchers are concerned that this may lead to a decrease in competency and hamper skill development (Lavoie-Tremblay et al., 2008). Generation Y feels there is a large effort/reward imbalance and do not
believe they are compensated appropriately for the work that they complete, which can lead to an increase in turnover (Lavoie-Tremblay et al., 2008). Nurses in the Y generation value relationships and do not believe they are provided adequate social support, feedback and praise in real time. When paired with the issues that face all generations—need for growth, furthering education, feeling valued, elevated stress levels—the younger nurses often feel unsatisfied and change positions. Lavoie-Tremblay et al. (2008) found 12.5% of all nurses actually leave the nursing profession entirely.

Nurse leadership needs to remain cognizant of the young nurse’s ideals and needs. Opportunities for growth and advancement should be offered. Outlines of expected raise patterns and opportunity for feedback should be clearly defined. Lastly, improving social support through mentor/mentee relationships may be yet another key to retaining young nurses today.

Nurse leaders are challenged with recruiting and retaining staff from several different generational cohorts. Communication and interactions with staff nurses is a key component to job satisfaction. “The direct contact between nurses and their nurse managers, specifically first-line managers, plays an instrumental role in creating a positive work climate and retaining nurses,” (Farag, Tullai-Mcguiness, & Anthony, 2009, p. 27).

Farag et al. (2009) evaluated generational needs using a descriptive study. Surveys were sent to four hundred and seventy five nurses that had at least three months of experience with their current manager. Bass and Avolio’s (1997) Multifactorial Leadership Questionnaire evaluated the staff nurse’s perception of the current leadership style. Three leadership styles evaluated, include transformational, transactional and
passive avoidant. In addition to the Multifactorial Leadership Questionnaire, staff nurses were given the Organizational Climate Questionnaire (Litwin & Stringer, 1968) to evaluate the climate of the unit.

Findings revealed no significant difference in perception of leadership style. Both Baby Boomers and Generation X nurses believed the current management style to be transformation or transactional, having little experience with passive avoidant (Farag et al., 2009). The most significant difference between Baby Boomer and Generation X nurses was noted in the perceptions of unit climate. The Baby Boomer cohort believed the climate to be more favorable, having a sense of belonging and administrative support. Generation X nurses, who tend to be more independent, reported not being part of a climate favoring teamwork and often felt unsupported (Farag et al., 2009).

For nurse leaders it may be imperative to cater to each generation in different areas to improve perceptions of unit climate and leadership. Generation X nurses need more frequent and real time feedback and reward. This cohort also does not tend to appreciate the current chain of command and may benefit from a true environment of shared governance where their opinions would be expressed and heard. Having different generations represented when working on policies or unit based issues may help to improve the flexibility of the department overall, in turn creating a positive climate change.

As the generational make up of the workforce changes, more emphasis is placed on leadership to understand needs of the workforce. The nursing shortage is worsening and will continue to do so as the baby boomer generation begins to retire. Leadership should be cognizant of this issue and work to retain as many nurses as possible. If not
recognized, the shortage could become costly to the organization. Unit managers may be faced with hiring agency nurses, working short staffed, or closing entire floors of a hospital. Patient care may ultimately suffer, (Stanley, 2010).

Stanley (2010) addressed the educational needs of leadership surrounding a multigenerational workforce. Some of the differences between generations are to a lesser degree than once thought. Some examples of generational similarities are opportunity for advancement, good work/life balance, better benefits, respect and recognition, and access to opportunities for learning and development (Stanley, 2010). Also, noteworthy is that people may or may not have traits consistent with their age assigned cohort, making it imperative to not assume values or ideas based on age.

Stanley (2010) suggested modeling Congruent Leadership where the leader’s actions mirror the values that are presented. Staff members that hold the same or similar values surrounding health care and nursing may follow this type of leader and potentially remain more loyal to their unit.

Lastly, Stanley’s (2010) study discussed the importance of treating everyone respectfully and equally. Creating a healthy workplace paves the way for healthy interactions between peers and with the leadership team. For leadership, focusing on similarities instead of differences may be the key to merging and growing a multigenerational workforce.

Recruitment and retention are an imperative aspect of the nursing workforce. Of the two, retention has been found to be more important. Nurse retention decreases the efforts of recruitment and the cost of continually training new employees (Carver & Candela, 2008).
Carver and Candela (2008) reviewed organizational commitment as a “concept that contributes to the goals of increased job satisfaction, increased retention, increased productivity and decreased turnover,” p. 985. Organizational commitment is not only the act of staying in a current job role, but being engaged and invested in the career. The biggest challenge of attaining organizational commitment is creating an environment that fosters growth in a multigenerational workforce. Each cohort has different needs. Baby Boomers are process oriented, would like to work shorter shifts or part time, and prefer tangible rewards that represent their value to the organization. Generation X tends to be outcome oriented, enjoys the flexibility of self scheduling, and works best alone allowing for challenge and growth. The Millennial generation works best in groups, may need a longer orientation to be comfortable in their environment and thrives on frequent, constructive feedback from others (Carver & Candela, 2008).

Nurse leadership should pay close attention to the generational mix of their unit and organization. Also, asking questions during the hiring process and orientation about the learning needs and expectations of the employee may help to ensure a great fit.

Summary

Throughout research, authors have agreed that retention in the next decade is going to be crucial because the Baby Boomer generation will be retiring, accounting for one third of our nursing population. This information makes it increasingly important for retention of the Generation X and Generation Y cohorts. Studies have shown that Generation X and Generation Y thrive in situations where managers and leaders are more accessible and part of the “team”. In general, the younger generations need a more
support and guidance than the Baby Boomers have required in order to improve job satisfaction and retention.

Retention of all generations is the result of multiple factors. The variables included job satisfaction, incentives/disincentives, and perceptions of the current working environment, desired management traits, retention rates and intent to tenure. While the significance of each of these varies between the generations, it is important to note that these are common themes between all cohorts.

Overall, making changes such as switching to self scheduling, implementing shared governance, promoting autonomy, as well as revamping incentive programs for all generations will be important to retaining the workforce across generations. Each generation has some specific needs, however, a common thread in improving satisfaction is promoting a cohesive work environment where nurses feel valued and heard by management/leadership.
Chapter III
Methodology

Introduction and Problem

As nursing retention has become a workplace priority, a knowledge gap has been identified with the role manager/staff interactions play in creating a satisfying work environment across the different generations. It has become apparent that the current registered nurse retention programs do not take into consideration the priorities and expectations of each generation present in today’s healthcare organizations (Wieck et al., 2010). This study is a replication of Wieck et al.’s (2010) examination of the priorities for retaining the intergenerational nurse workforce.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to assess job satisfaction, work environment, and desired characteristics of managers across different generations in order to improve nurse retention.

Research Questions

1. What characteristics do nurses value in their managers?

2. What are the retention priorities of each generation in the hospital setting?

Population and Sample
Registered nurses with an Indiana active registered nurse licensure and currently employed at one of the seven St. Vincent Hospitals will be invited to participate in the study. The researcher will seek approval by the Ball State University Institutional Review Board and from each hospital’s Institutional Review Board prior to the start of this study. The study will be presented by me in shift report on each unit for one week, ensuring awareness by all registered nurse staff. The information regarding the study and instructions for the online survey will be posted for two months in the department newsletter, in the shift report room, restrooms and break rooms. The data will be collected by questionnaires being placed within each hospital’s intranet system. Participants will complete the on-line survey and submit via the link provided. The survey will consist of a demographic questionnaire, the Nurse Manager Desired Traits survey (Wieck et al., 2002), and the Nursing Work Index—Revised (Aiken & Patrician, 2000). Invitation will be extended to approximately 500 registered nurses with an anticipated final sample of 200.

**Protecting Subjects**

The Ball State University Institutional Review Board, each of the St. Vincent Hospital Institutional Review Boards, Chief Nursing Officers and Information Technology Directors will be contacted to acquire permission for the survey to be placed on the intranet and completed on campus. Each critical care unit’s director will be contacted in regards to the study. I will be responsible for dispersion of study information during daily shift report and for all postings. Information regarding the study will also be placed in each registered nurses mailbox and posted in the shift report room, break room, restroom, and submitted to the newsletter by the study’s facilitator.
Information given to the registered nurses will explain the scope and purpose of the study, as well as give information about the process for participation. The registered nurses will have the opportunity to respond to the survey voluntarily and anonymously. Data will be reviewed by the researchers and the statisticians associated with this study. Unit directors and administrators will be given only the general findings, not a breakdown of results by unit to further protect the identities of those who responded. By completing the survey via the hospital intranet, each participant is giving consent for participation. The survey can be completed from any computer containing the St. Vincent Hospital system’s intranet. Computers at these facilities do not require staff members to log onto a computer to access the intranet, therefore, participants are not required to log onto the intranet to take this survey which aids in ensuring confidentiality.

**Procedures and Instruments**

The survey will consist of three sections. Demographic information including age, gender, ethnicity, support, education, and turnover intent will be the focus of the first section.

Section two will consist of the Nurse Manager Desired Traits survey (Wieck et al., 2002). This survey is a Likert scale and allows each nurse to rank a list of traits 1 through 10 with number 1 being the most desirable. The traits to be ranked include: dependable, team player, supportive, available, fair, professional, communication skills, trustworthy, clinically competent, and positive attitude.

The third and final section of the survey will utilize the Nursing Work Index—Revised (Aiken & Patrician, 2000). This instrument measures nurses’ satisfaction with how they perceive the work environment and safety of the hospital. Nurses will be asked
several questions and will respond with answers ranging from highly satisfied to highly
dissatisfied. This is a Likert type scale with the numbers 1 through 4 being assigned to
the responses. The score of 4 represents the answer of highly satisfied. The four
questions asked in this section are: (a) Do you feel physically able to meet the demands
of your job? (b) How often are you put in the position of lifting or moving a patient
where you feel you or other nurses are at risk for a back injury? (c) How often are you
put in a position of lifting or moving a patient where you feel the patient might be at risk
for injury? and (d) What percentage of the time are you unable to meet your patients’
needs?

**Research Design**

The data for this study will be collected over a two month time frame.

Descriptive statistics will be used to interpret the results of the Nurse Manager Desired
Traits Survey (Wieck et al., 2002). For the Nursing Work Index—Revised (Aiken &
Patrician, 2000), a Likert scale is used. The Likert scale uses responses that are assigned a
quantity. A high score of 4 is attached to the response of highly satisfied and the low
score of 1 is attached to the response of highly dissatisfied.

**Data Analysis**

For the evaluation of desired manager traits, each generation ranked 10 specific
traits from most to least important based on their personal beliefs. The traits selected by
the facilitator for ranking are: dependable, team player, supportive, available, fair,
professional, communication skills, trustworthy, clinically competent, and positive
attitude. Descriptive analysis was used to compare and contrast the rankings of
managerial traits from each generation.
The Nurse Work Index —Revised (Aiken & Patrician, 2000) that will be used to measure the nurse’s satisfaction with certain traits of the hospital environment by posing four questions related to environment and safety. Participants will respond to a Likert scale ranging from 1-4, highly satisfied to highly dissatisfied. Historically, the Nurse Work Index—Revised reported a Cronbach’s alpha reliability level of 0.96 on the entire instrument, and subscale reliabilities of 0.84 – 0.91 (Wieck et al., 2010). For this study the Cronbach’s alpha was 0.97. The subscale reliabilities ranged from 0.82-0.97.

Pearson’s product-moment correlation coefficient (bivariate correlation) was used in the data analysis. This method is used because it allows for comparison within generations and with other generations.

Summary

Replicating Wieck, et al.’s (2010) study will hopefully give further insight into what registered nurses are seeking in their work environment and leadership team. Wieck et al’s study results indicated that hospitals will be faced with replacing a third of the nursing workforce within this decade alone. The nurse manager’s role may need to be more developed to lead more and manage less. Younger generations need more support and attention than the more senior generations (Wieck et al., 2010). Wieck et al made five recommendations for optimal retention of staff: (a). create model managers: (b) empower staff nurse councils: (c) stabilize staffing, (d) revamp incentives, and (e) focus on safety. Overall, managers are responsible for creating the environment that nurses of all generations respond to.


