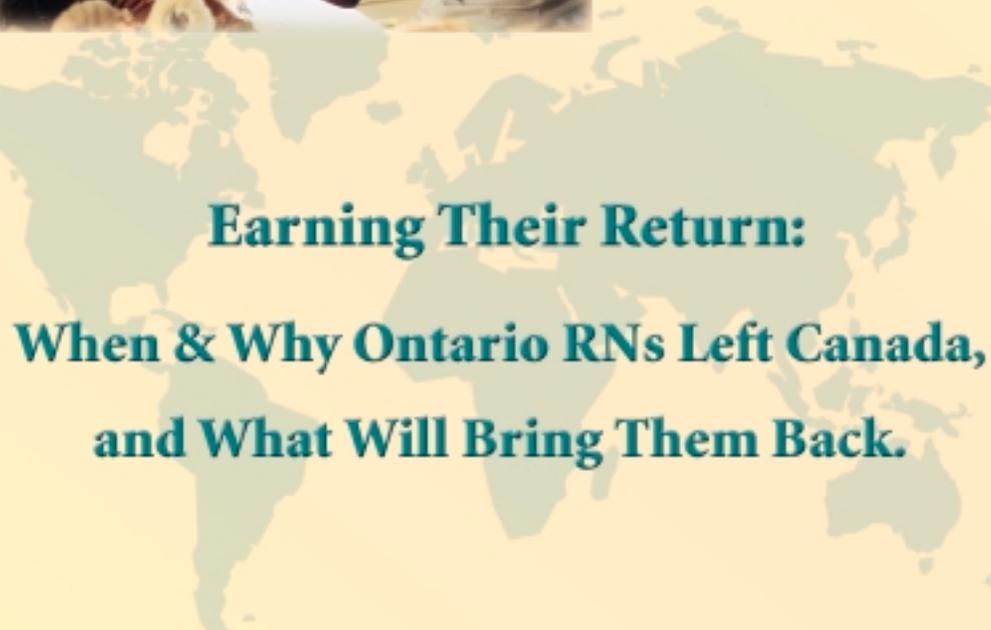




RNAO

*Registered Nurses Association
of Ontario*

*L'Association des infirmières
et infirmiers autorisés de
l'Ontario*



**Earning Their Return:
When & Why Ontario RNs Left Canada,
and What Will Bring Them Back.**

Registered Nurses Association of Ontario

February 23, 2001

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I INTRODUCTION

The past decade has been extremely challenging for Ontario's registered nurses. Dramatic fluctuations in employment opportunities, driven by funding cuts and short-sighted policy initiatives¹, led many RNs to leave the province, the country and even the profession. By 1998, Ontario ranked last in the country in the ratio of nurses per population.

In 1999, the Ontario government committed to funding 12,000 new, permanent nursing positions (registered nurse and registered practical nurse) before the end of 2000. This commitment followed recommendations made by the nursing community in the report *Good Nursing Good Health*.² The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC) funded several initiatives, including: targeted monies to health-care organizations to hire nurses (RNs and RPNs) to new, permanent, full-time and part-time positions³; career days/job fairs; educational opportunities; career counselling; marketing campaigns to enhance the desirability of nursing as a career choice; and more.

These initiatives have served to improve the situation. College of Nurses of Ontario (CNO) data for the year 2000 indicates that employment in the province has risen by 4,600 RN positions and 980 RPN positions over 1999⁴. At this point, we remain short by approximately 6,420 nursing positions.

The Registered Nurses Association of Ontario (RNAO) is unwavering in its commitment to work with all stakeholders to find solutions to the nursing human resource problems. To this end, we are leading many important initiatives to retain and recruit nurses into the profession.

This report represents a proactive approach to bringing Ontario's registered nurses back home. In December of 2000, RNAO mailed a survey to 3,272 registered nurses who currently reside outside of Canada and who have maintained their Ontario registration with the College of Nurses of Ontario. Our assumption is that these registered nurses are more likely to consider returning to Ontario.

The results of this survey are encouraging. The 32.9% response rate from RNs from across the world (36.6% from the US) shows the active interest of these nurses. Their answers to the survey reinforce previous recommendations made in the *Good Nursing, Good Health*⁵ and *Ensuring the Care Will Be There* reports.⁶ Their answers also reveal the key factors that influenced their departure, and what would encourage them to return. One critical finding of this survey is the **unequivocal** desire of respondents to attain full-time, stable employment. Without it, these RNs tell us, they will not return.

We must act immediately to address the issues so powerfully identified in these results. We must do it to retain nurses currently practicing in Ontario, and to attract registered nurses working abroad. We must do it to ensure the care will be there for all Ontario residents.

¹ For a more detailed discussion of these policy initiatives, see. RNAO/RPNAO. *Ensuring the Care Will Be There: Report on Nursing Recruitment and Retention in Ontario*. March 2000.

² *Good Nursing, Good Health: An Investment for the 21st Century. Report of the Nursing Task Force*. January, 1999.

³ A March 19, 1999 News Release from the Office of the Premier. "Premier Mike Harris today announced that his government will fund 12,000 new nursing positions by the end of next year... nearly 10,000 of the new nursing jobs will be created in 1999."

⁴ College of Nurses of Ontario. 2000.

⁵ *Report of the Nursing Task Force*. Op. cit.

⁶ RNAO/RPNAO. *Ensuring the Care Will Be There*. Op. cit.

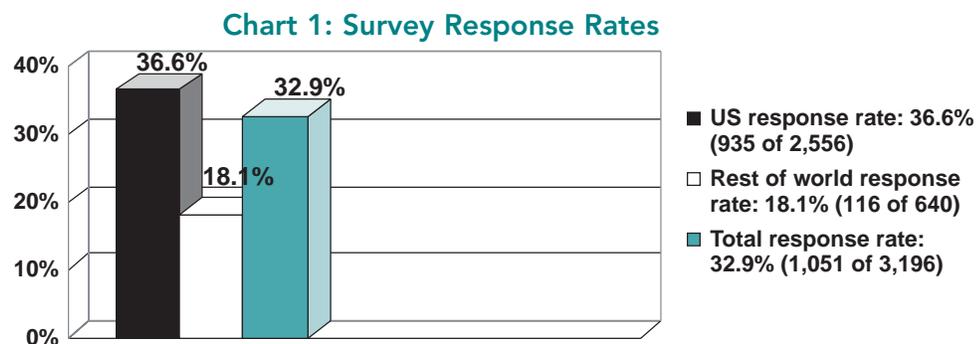
II THE SURVEY / THE RESPONSE

The survey was intended to identify those registered nurses interested in returning to Ontario. In the process, we wanted to know why they had left and what would encourage their return. The survey was designed to encourage response. The one-page survey included a very brief introduction and asked seven questions. We provided space for additional comments. Specifically, the RNs were asked:

- Are you currently practicing nursing?
- When did you leave Ontario?
- What factors influenced your departure?
- Would you consider returning to Ontario?
- What specific factors would encourage you to return?
- If RNAO, in conjunction with interested employers, hosted a job fair in your city or nearby, would you attend?
- If you would like us to contact you, provide your name (and contact information).

Contact information was available for 3,272 of the 5,407 registered nurses who have maintained their Ontario registration. These 3,272 registered nurses became our target group to whom surveys were sent. Although members of this target group are distributed across 73 countries, the great majority – 2,621 (80.1%) – are in the United States. The next largest recipient jurisdictions were Hong Kong 160 (4.9%), Saudi Arabia 106 (3.2%), and England 103 (3.1%).

The response to this survey has been remarkable. Of 3,272 survey forms sent, there were 1,051 responses returned as of February 9, 2001. In addition, 76 forms were returned unopened, the envelope marked “Undelivered”. The 1,051 responses represent a 32.9% response rate on the remaining 3,196 forms.⁷ This is a high response rate for a mailed survey, particularly considering that there were no follow-up reminders. The response rate from the US was higher, at 36.6%.⁸ The response rate for the rest of the world was lower – 18.1%. This reflects a couple of factors: the greater cost to those living overseas of mailing back responses and the short time to respond. We continue to receive responses. (See Chart 1)



III WHERE DID SURVEYED ONTARIO RNs GO?

As noted, the 3,272 target registered nurses are concentrated in a few countries with the vast majority in the United States. The registered nurses in the US are located in all 50 states, but concentrated in a few: Texas (507), Florida (428), North Carolina (271), California (203), Michigan (176) and New York (111). Outside the US, the largest groupings are located in Hong Kong (160), Saudi Arabia (106), and England (103). (See Charts 2 and 3)

By CNO estimates, of 5,407 Ontario registered nurses living outside of Canada, 4,650 are living in the United States and 757 registered nurses are living elsewhere or abroad. At best, our survey reached only 59.1% of all Ontario RNs living outside of Canada.

⁷ This is a very conservative estimate of the response rate because we don't know how many of the 3,196 forms were actually received. We just know that 76 of the original 3,272 were returned to us marked “Undelivered”.

⁸ Survey forms were sent to 2,621 RNs living in the US. Of these, 65 were returned “Undelivered”.

Chart 2: Global Distribution of Target RNs

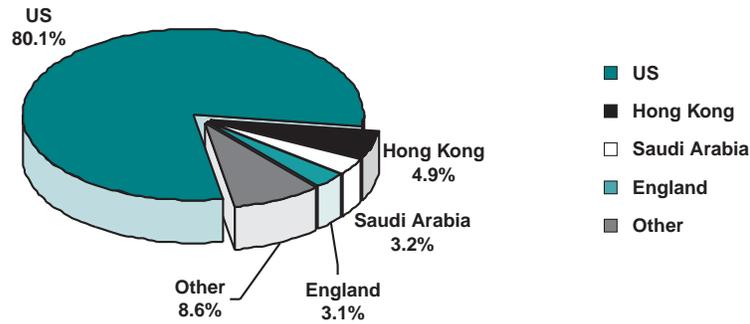
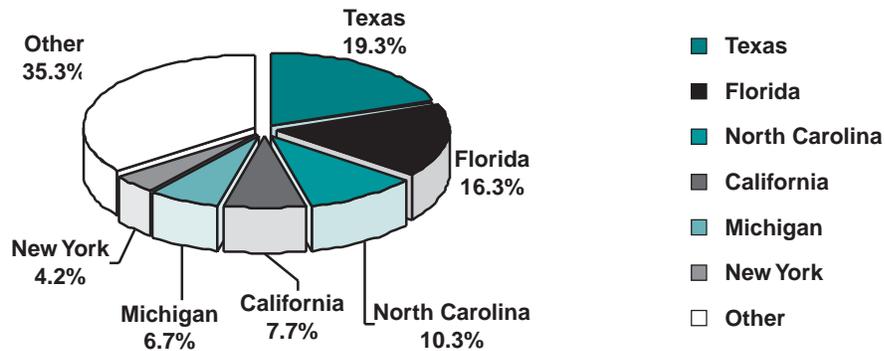


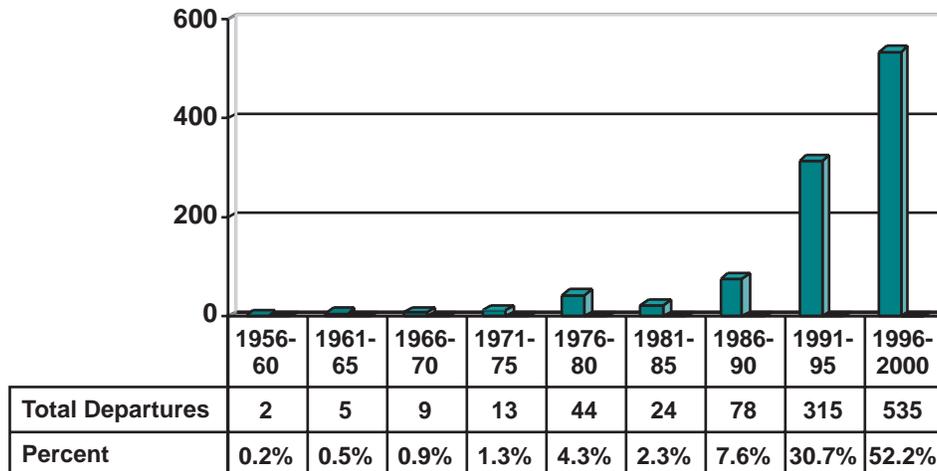
Chart 3: US Distribution of Target RNs



IV WHEN DID ONTARIO RNs LEAVE?

Among survey respondents, the vast majority left quite recently (*see Chart 4*). Of the 1,025 respondents for whom we have dates of departure, 82.93% left after 1991, and 52.2% left between 1996 and 2000. This corresponds to the recent, sharp deterioration in opportunities for nursing employment in Ontario. The potential good news in the fairly recent departures of the majority of responding nurses is that they have not been away for so long that they will be unreceptive to the possibility of returning. Of particular concern to RNAO is the continuing departure of nurses who say they are leaving because they can't find nursing positions – even in the year 2000 – well after the MOHLTC initiatives commenced. This is particularly puzzling since Ontario employers are stating that they are unable to find registered nurses for full-time employment.

Chart 4: Numbers of Reporting Ontario Registered Nurses by Dates of Departure



V WHY DID ONTARIO RNs LEAVE?

RNs volunteered the following responses when asked: *What factors influenced your departure?* (Note: some cited multiple factors) (See Chart 5):

1. A large majority (659 or 62.7%) cited downsizing, or lack of employment opportunities, or lack of full-time employment. This includes 38 of the 80 who left in 1999 and 11 of the 23 who left in 2000. Some of the comments:

I was laid off at ___ Hospital. My only chance at a job, being a new grad (with one and a half years' experience) was agency work. I hadn't even finished paying off my student loan.

No nursing jobs, too many lay-offs and I needed to support my family.

The complete disregard and lack of respect for professional RNs and their need to earn a decent full-time income, with reasonable hours, at one place of employment.

We left Canada for more positive work environment, to be treated better by our employers and for better job security. We decided we had had enough...

Comments from those who left as late as early 2000 were disturbingly similar to those who had left earlier. For example:

There were no full-time positions available in Ontario. Only part-time or casual work. Hospitals and long-term care facilities all offered poor staffing, increased workload and nurse-patient ratios. (departed January, 2000)

Lack of consistent schedule, poor working conditions (at times unsafe), lack of funding for further education or career growth... (departed May, 2000)

2. Family or personal issues were cited by 294 (or 28.0%).

3. A smaller number (138, or 13.2%) cited pay and benefits. Some examples:

I doubt if Ontario could match my salary which ranges between \$34 - 36/hour, depending on the shift differential for weekends from team leading.

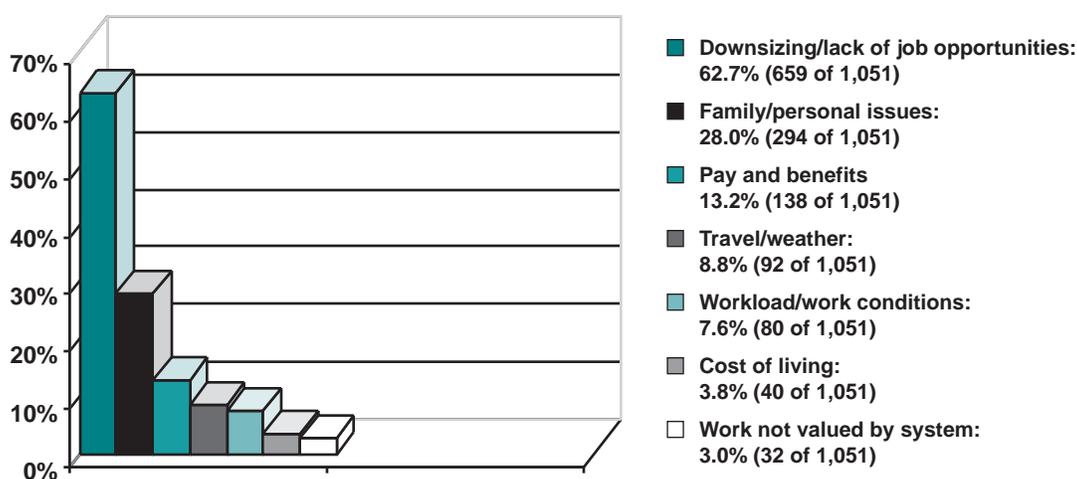
I now have a clear pay grid that is based on education, certificates and years of experience.

4. Other issues ranked much lower:

- Travel/weather: 92 (8.8%).
- Workload/working conditions: 80 (7.6%)
- Cost of living: 40 (3.8%)
- Not being valued by the health care system: 32 (3.0%).

The very strong showing for the downsizing and lack of job opportunities is remarkable, given that these were “top-of-mind” factors. In other words, those responding were not choosing from a list of factors already created; these responses came without any prompting. This outcome is consistent with stories RNAO has been hearing from its members.

Chart 5: Top-of-mind Reasons for Leaving Ontario



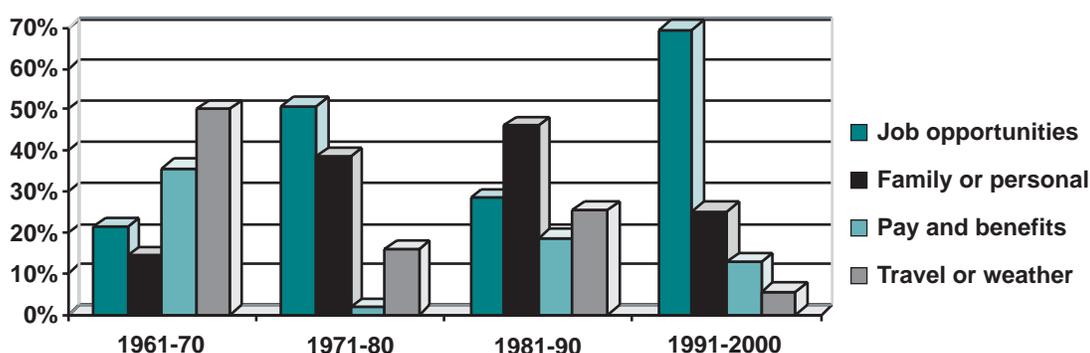
VI A SHIFT IN DEPARTURE CAUSES OVER TIME

The data reveal that causes of RN departures have changed over time. In the past decade, there has been a sharp upsurge in the importance of job availability and a decline in other key factors, such as pay and benefits, family/personal considerations and travel/weather factors. This corresponds closely with the tremendous deterioration in the nursing market during the 1990s. (See Table 1 and Chart 6).

Table 1: Percent of Respondents Citing Selected Key Factors in Departure from Ontario

Factor	1961-70	1971-80	1981-90	1991-2000
Job opportunities	21.42%	50.88%	28.43%	69.53%
Family or personal	14.29%	38.60%	46.08%	25.53%
Pay and benefits	35.71%	1.75%	18.63%	12.94%
Travel or weather	50.00%	15.79%	25.49%	5.53%

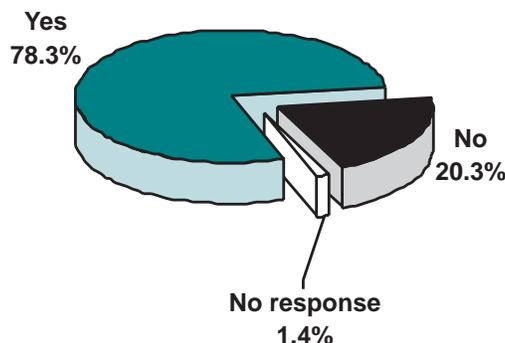
Chart 6: Reasons Why Ontario RNs Left Canada Over Time



VII WOULD ONTARIO RNs COME BACK?

This is perhaps the most stunning result. Fully 78.3% of respondents (823) would consider returning to Ontario. Only 213 (20.3%) say that they would not return. (See Chart 7)

Chart 7: Numbers of RNs Who Would Consider Returning to Ontario



Of the 873 RNs reporting that they were practicing, 708 (81.1%) expressed interest in returning. Interestingly, most (112 or 65.1%) of the 172 who were not practicing still expressed an interest in returning to nursing in Ontario. It is worth noting that many of those who answered that they would not return still listed factors that could bring them back. Thus, even many of the “No” RNs might still be persuaded to return, under the right circumstances.

The responses also indicate that those RNs who left more recently are more likely to consider returning. For example, only 65.4% of nurses who have been away for more than ten years were likely to consider returning, while 81.5% of nurses who have been away five years or less would consider coming back to Ontario.

It is important to keep in mind that in addition to the 823 who indicated an interest in returning to Ontario, there may be others who are also interested. There are 2,135 other RNs practicing out of country who are still registered in Ontario but since contact information was not available they were not sent a survey. In addition, there are 2,221 RNs to whom we sent a survey but did not receive a response. We cannot be sure that all of those who did not respond actually received the survey. Nor can we be sure that those who did not respond would not be interested in returning. This constitutes a pool of 4,356 RNs, some of whom may be as receptive to returning as are their counterparts.

VIII WHAT WOULD BRING ONTARIO RNs BACK?

Of the several reasons given by the responding RNs, two key factors stand out:

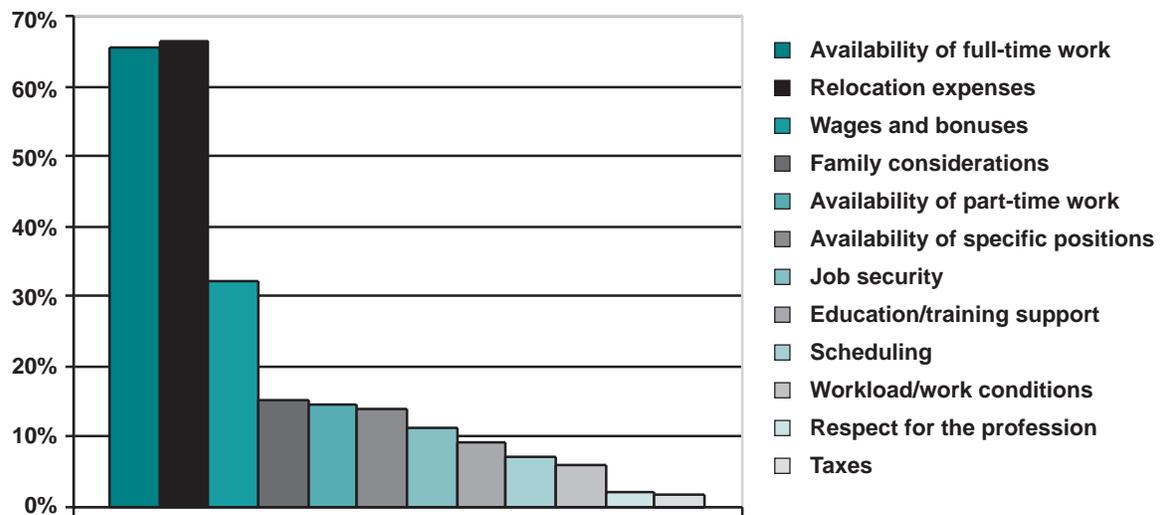
- 688 (65.5%) would be encouraged to return by the availability of full-time work
- 697 (66.3%) mention relocation expenses in the same context

A further 152 (14.5%) gave the nod to the availability of part-time work. These respondents frequently mentioned family issues, which suggests that they are struggling to juggle career and family obligations.

Respondents listed a variety of other top-of-mind factors (See Chart 8):

- wages/bonuses (337 - 32.1%)
- job security (120 - 11.4%)
- education/training support (97 - 9.2%)
- scheduling (74 - 7.0%)
- availability of specific positions or locations (146 - 13.9%)
- workload/work conditions (62 - 5.9%)
- family considerations (160 - 15.2%)
- respect for the profession (23 - 2.2%)
- taxes (18 - 1.7%)

Chart 8: Factors Cited by Respondents as Encouraging them to Return to Ontario



Some specific comments from those wanting to return include:

Treat RNs with the respect they deserve and they will return.

I remain worried about job security in Ontario. Many nurses were laid off in the early 1990s with restructuring (seeking assurances).

I want to ... (but) Just because Ontario needs nurses now - what will happen in 5 years?

Only (return) if jobs are full time and in an area where I am interested.

I want to return, my life, family, friends and future hopes are back home.

It is my desire to return to Ontario providing I can obtain full-time work to support myself.

If I can get a good RN position in hospital - a med-surg unit - with good salary, benefits and a full-time position.

I never wanted to leave my home but I had no choice.

Not unless I could be offered the same benefits.

The following are typical of responses from RNs who said they would not return:

I am afraid the same thing would happen again (bed closures and nursing staff lay-offs).

Why? To face another nursing lay-off in a few years?

IX ARE ONTARIO RNs PRACTICING NURSING?

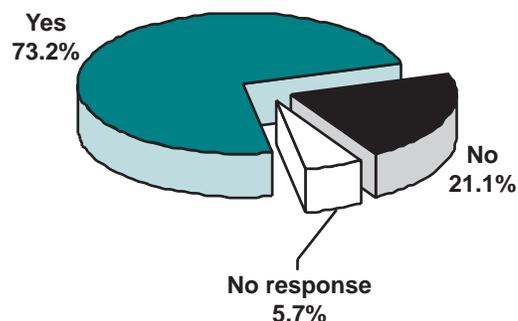
The survey shows that the vast majority are currently practicing nursing, which is not surprising given that so many left the province fairly recently. 873 respondents (83.2%) reported that they were practicing nursing. Respondents from the US were somewhat more likely to be practicing (84.3%) than their counterparts from elsewhere (74.1%). Only 173 respondents (16.5%) listed themselves as non-practicing.

X WOULD ONTARIO RNs COME TO A JOB FAIR?

Interest in returning is also strong, as expressed in interest in attending RNAO job fairs. Fully 769 (73.2%) of respondents state that they would attend (See Chart 9). Respondents in the US are slightly more willing to attend (73.3%) than are respondents from the rest of the world (72.4%).⁹ Another 222 (21.1%) were not interested in attending.

As noted in the previous section, we could reasonably expect many more than 769 RNs to be interested in attending RNAO job fairs, as this survey did not capture the majority of nurses.

Chart 9: Number of Respondents who would Attend a Job Fair

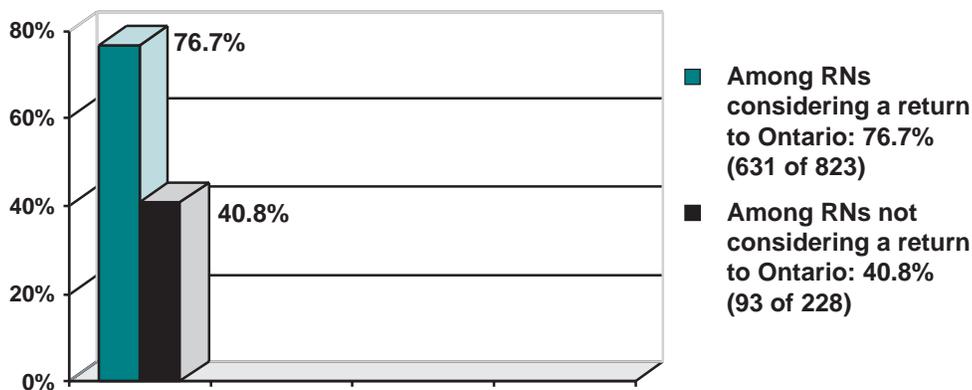


XI DO ONTARIO RNs WISH TO BE CONTACTED?

When asked if they wanted to be contacted by RNAO, 631 (76.7%) of the 823 who expressed an interest in returning to Ontario said yes. Remarkably, of the 228 who stated that they were not interested in returning to Ontario, 93 (40.8%) volunteered to be contacted. (See Chart 10.) This is a very high level of receptiveness. In some cases, it reflects an expressed willingness to help Ontario understand why nurses leave. In other cases, it may reflect a tentative interest in staying. In either case, it indicates a surprising level of receptiveness, given that the majority of the RNs were forced to move due to lack of employment in Ontario.

⁹ In the case of overseas nurses, many explained that they ticked “No” not because they were unreceptive to job fairs, but because they knew RNAO would not be able to mount a fair in their location.

Chart 10: Willingness to be Contacted by RNAO on Nursing Employment in Ontario



XII SUMMARY

The survey revealed a high level of interest in Ontario’s nursing situation among registered nurse expatriates. This is reflected in various ways.

First, there was the very high response rate to the survey – 32.9% (36.6% from the US). This is high for a mailed out-of-country survey with no follow-up reminder. Responses continue to arrive.

Second was the high willingness to return. Well over three-quarters (78.3%) of all respondents stated that they would consider returning to Ontario.

Third was the great readiness to attend RNAO job fairs – 73.2%. Many others indicated that they would attend, but ticked “No” because they knew that RNAO could not mount a job fair in their jurisdiction.

Fourth was the willingness to be contacted by RNAO. Of those who indicated an interest in returning to Ontario, 76.7% were prepared to be contacted. A significant minority (40.8%) of those who stated that they were not interested in returning also put their names on our contact list.

The survey also showed that a large majority of respondents (83.2%) are currently practicing as RNs. While those practicing were more likely to be interested in returning (81.1%), even 65.1% of those not currently practicing stated they would consider returning.

The survey requested top-of-mind reasons for leaving Canada. The lack of employment opportunities ranked first by a wide margin: 62.7% of respondents cited this factor. Family or personal issues ranked second at 28.0%. Pay and benefits were mentioned by 13.2%. Travel or weather reasons were listed by 8.8%. Eighty respondents (7.6%) included workload and work conditions. Cost of living factors were mentioned by 3.8% of respondents. Finally, 3.0% of respondents included not being valued.

The factors seem to have fluctuated in importance over time, with job opportunities figuring more prominently in the past decade, while wages, personal reasons and travel figured less prominently.

The question on return factors sheds further light on RN motivation. An overall majority (65.5%) selected the availability of full-time employment as a return factor, while 66.3% selected relocation expenses. In attached

notes, a number of nurses described their concerns over the costs of moving back. A minority (14.5%) identified the availability of part-time work as a factor that would attract them back to Ontario.

Respondents listed many other top-of-mind factors that would weigh in their calculation on whether to return or not. Most commonly mentioned was the compensation package (32.1%). In decreasing order, there were family considerations (15.2%), availability of specific positions or locations (13.9%), job security (11.4%), support for education and training (9.2%), scheduling (7.0%), workload and work conditions (5.9%), respect for the profession (2.2%) and taxes (1.7%).

XIII POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The response to the survey has been overwhelming and gratifying. Nurses told us that they had been reluctant to leave Ontario. They said that if we treated our current nurses with the respect and consideration that professionals are due, we would not only retain our existing nursing workforce, but we would start to provide the stability that would attract Ontario nurses back to the province.

There is considerable interest in returning to nursing in Ontario. However, the conditions and terms of employment will have to change in order to lure back nurses who have moved away. Nurses want secure employment. It is also clear that the great majority of nurses want full-time positions. Yet, in Ontario, less than half of all nursing jobs are full-time. This is simply unsustainable. **No other profession would ever accept this situation!**

There are clear implications from this survey for employers, The Registered Nurses Association of Ontario (RNAO) and the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care.¹⁰ Action is needed to ensure that we are able to retain and recruit enough registered nurses for Ontario.

Recommendations for Employers

- Full-time employment is critical. Employers must commit to a minimum target of 70% full-time employment for nurses.
- Workload is also key. Employers must develop organizational guidelines, based on the significant level of available research, to support appropriate nurse-patient ratios.
- Many comments were made about the need for educational support. We recommend that employers place a high priority on providing a comprehensive orientation and in supporting ongoing education opportunities.

Recommendations for RNAO

- The high response rate to this RNAO survey, in addition to the large proportion of respondents who wanted to be contacted, indicates the level of trust enjoyed by RNAO. With this trust comes a responsibility to continue to “speak out for health and speak out for nursing”.
- The high desire and willingness to attend job/career fairs means that RNAO must continue to organize this type of activity.

¹⁰ These recommendations are particular to the survey responses. For a more comprehensive discussion and recommendations on the full spectrum of recruitment and retention issues, see RNAO & RPNAO. *Ensuring the Care Will Be There*.

- The many comments made about the need for educational support implies that RNAO and its Center for Professional Nursing Excellence must continue to lead in the development of orientation programs, mentorship initiatives, advance clinical fellowships, and other educational programs that serve to retain, recruit, and support the professional development of Ontario's nurses.

Recommendations for the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care

- The responses support the need for the province to fund agencies to facilitate the necessary job security to convince nurses to maintain a commitment to nursing in Ontario.
- The government has taken steps in the right direction with its commitment to hire 12,000 more nurses. It must continue to flow earmarked funds, with clear accountability mechanisms, until the RN/population ratio is comparable to the rest of Canada.¹¹
- Funding methods must encourage agencies to hire at least 70% of nurses to full-time positions and discourage casual employment.
- Many comments were made about the need for educational support. We commend the funding provided by MOHLTC to support educational initiatives for RNs and RPNs, as it clearly serves to respond to the needs of nurses working in Ontario, and as an incentive to bring nurses back home. We urge the government to continue funding educational opportunities to support nurses.
- Much interest was expressed regarding career days/job fairs. We commend MOHLTC for sponsoring these events and urge the Ministry to continue its commitment to fund them.

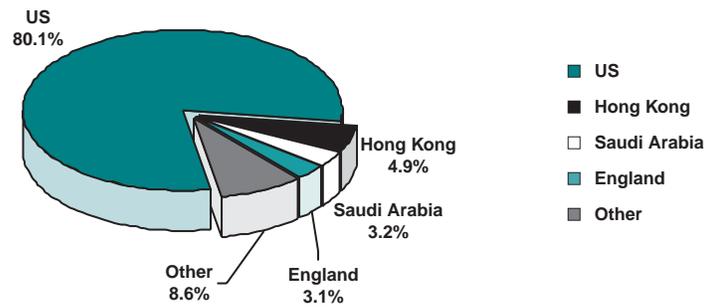
To conclude, RNs want meaningful work. They expect to have reasonable control over their work environment, and to be able to deliver the kind of care they know their patients need. Having once been burned by stop-go funding for nurses, they want to see some proof before uprooting themselves and their families to come back home. When we can demonstrate healthy, reasonable work situations and true commitment to the central role of nurses within the health-care system, RNs will respond.

There remains a well of good will and commitment to nursing among expatriate RNs that is inspiring. The fact is that fixing these critical retention issues for nurses will also serve to help us keep those RNs still in Ontario as well as encouraging the return of those who have left. Let us earn their return!

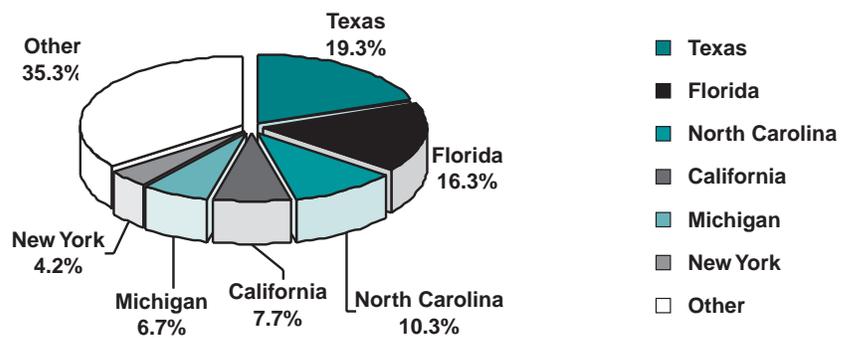
¹¹ Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI) reported in July, 2000 that Ontario had the lowest number of registered nurses per capita compared to all other provinces and territories. Specifically, in 1999, there were 67.6 registered nurses employed in nursing per 10,000 population. This represents a decline from 74.7 in 1994.

XIV SURVEY RESULTS AT A GLANCE:

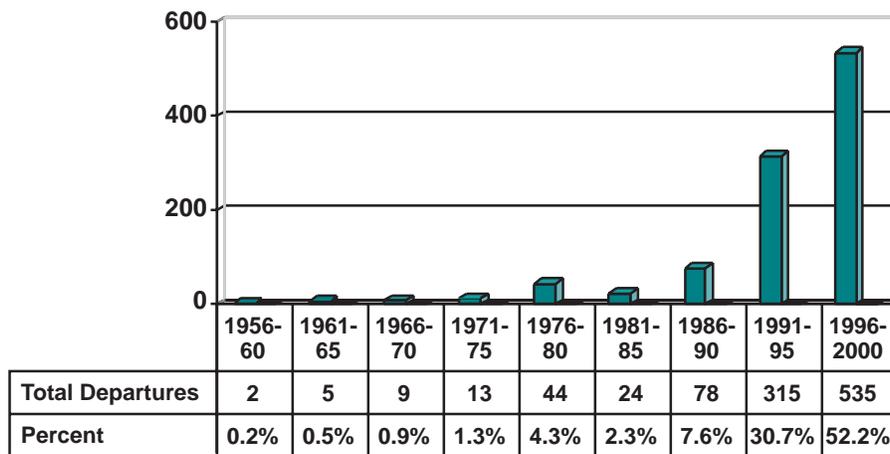
Global Distribution of Target RNs



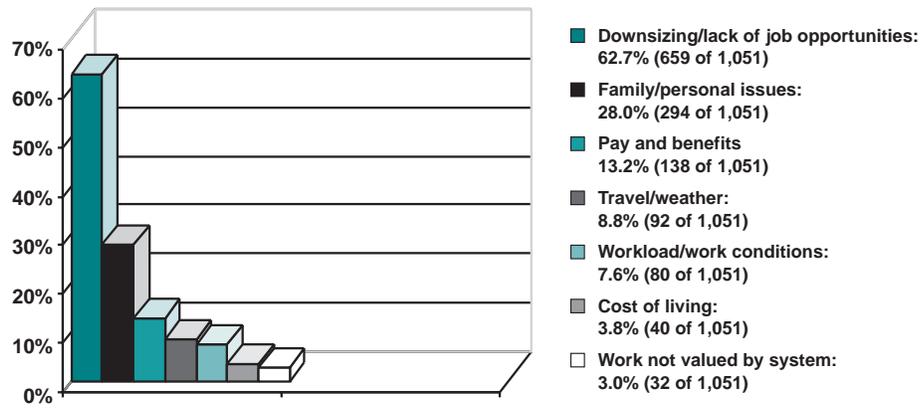
US Distribution of Target RNs



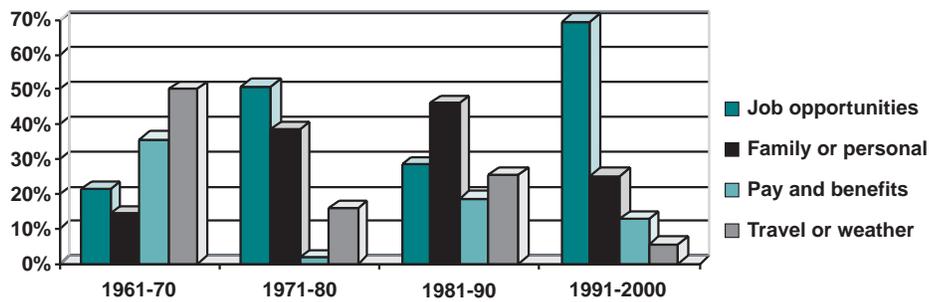
Numbers of Reporting Ontario Registered Nurses by Dates of Departure



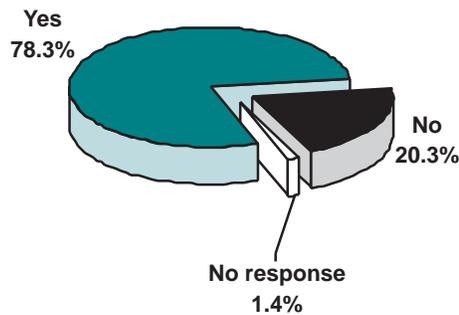
Top-of-mind Reasons for Leaving Ontario



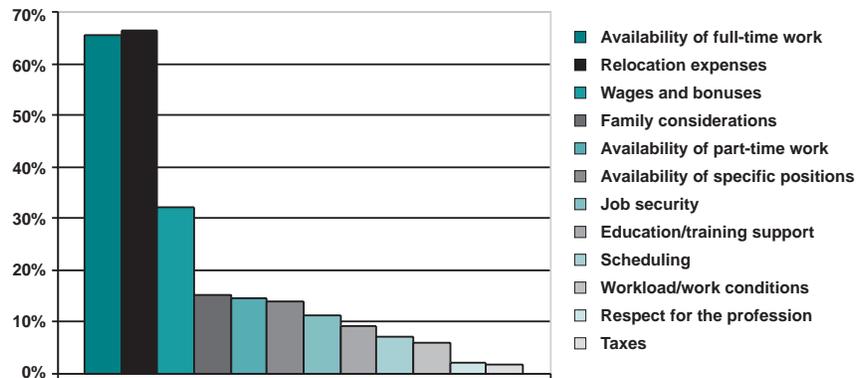
Reasons Why Ontario RNs Left Canada Over Time



Numbers of RNs Who Would Consider Returning to Ontario



Factors Cited by Respondents as Encouraging them to Return to Ontario





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