Leaving Academia: Work Experiences and Career Decisions of Former Nurse Faculty

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**Background & Significance**

There is a shortage of nurse faculty both in the United States and globally. There is also a well-documented shortage of nurses. Faculty shortages are the primary obstacle to increasing the supply of potential nurses. Research indicates that few academically qualified nurses are choosing to work in faculty jobs. Among nurse faculty, reported turnover intention rates are high. Faculty departures for non-academic positions contribute to the growing shortage.

The existing evidence on non-retirement faculty attrition is sparse, and based primarily on program surveys. Little is known about factors that influence departure decisions for former nurse faculty. This research provides insight into the nurse faculty work experience and career decision factors. Findings can be used to develop effective recruitment and retention strategies for nurse faculty and may be useful to other health professions facing similar faculty shortages.

**Purpose**

Purpose: Understand the faculty work experience and identify career decision factors from the perspective of former nurse faculty.

**Methods**

Design: Qualitative study using Maxwell’s (2013) interactive model of research design.

Sample & Setting: Purposive heterogeneous sample of 12 former nurse faculty. Data collected in 3 southern states.

Data collection: In-depth, semi-structured interviews. Data collection was concurrent with data collection. Data were saturated at 10 participants. Two more interviews were done to confirm findings and seek discrepant views.

Data analysis: Interviews were recorded and transcribed. The researcher read transcripts multiple times and assigned codes to meaningful data segments. Codes were compared and revised with successive interviews. The codes were sorted into broader categories and assigned codes to meaningful data segments. Themes emerged to answer the research questions.

**Thematic Results**

Research Question 1: How do former full-time nurse faculty describe the faculty work experience? Participant descriptions of the faculty work experience encompassed six themes.

1. Enjoyment of teaching role - Participants described the work as fun and challenging, and loved helping students progress into nurses.
2. Leadership quality - Perceptions of inconsistent leadership and poor administrative support contributed to dissatisfaction.
3. Collegial relationships - Peer relationships were mostly positive, but some colleagues were negative and inflexible.
4. Work hours / workload - Workload was heavier than anticipated and work hours extended beyond traditional office schedule.
5. Career advancement and pay - Low pay and frustrations with rank and tenure systems contributed to dissatisfaction.
6. Student attitudes - Although participants enjoyed working with students, some noted a disturbing trend of disrespectful behaviors and lack of caring attitudes.

Research Question 2: What factors influenced the decision to leave a faculty position? Two themes emerged to explain the decision to leave. The contributing factors correlated with the conceptual model adapted from Tourangeau et al. (2012). Factors in two categories of the model, work environment & organizational support and job content, contributed to job dissatisfaction. Changes in personal characteristics such as family status, health and aging contributed to the decision to leave. The key external characteristics were available alternative employment options.

1. Disenchantment - Nine participants described growing dissatisfaction with the work experience and actively sought a career change.
2. Opportunity - Three participants were content as faculty members and left for an unsolicited offer.

Research Question 3: What changes to the faculty work experience would make a full-time nurse faculty position more enticing? Participants suggested two major areas of change to improve recruitment and retention.

1. Improve compensation
2. Improve the work environment and organizational support

**Selected References**

- Full reference list is available upon request to dhancock@wmcarey.edu.