

# Nurse Manager Perspectives on Internationally Educated Nurses (IENs) and Hiring Practices in Long-Term Care



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## Introduction

Internationally Educated Nurses (IENs) are an integral part of Canada’s nursing workforce. <sup>1</sup> However, when nurses immigrate to Canada they often encounter many barriers, from being a newcomer to successfully practicing nursing in the Canadian context.<sup>2</sup> These barriers have been well documented and include hurdles at every step of the process of becoming a Registered Nurse (RN) in Canada.<sup>3</sup> While some of these issues have been documented from the perspective of IENs<sup>4</sup>, very seldom are they explored from the perspective of potential employers of IENs. Nurse Managers responsible for hiring IENs can be described as the gatekeepers capable of granting IENs access to practice in Canada. A better understanding of the hiring practices of Nursing Managers may benefit IENs and nurse educators by making them aware of employers’ expectations.

## Purpose

The purpose of this research was to explore the perceptions and experiences that influence the hiring practice decisions of Nurse Managers in long-term care settings who employ IENs who have Canadian RN licensure.

### Research Questions:

1. What perceptions do Nurse Managers have about the performance and readiness of IENs to practice as a nurse?
2. How do Nurse Managers perceive the performance and readiness of IENs to practice in comparison to nurses educated in Canada?
3. How do Nurse Managers’ perceptions and experiences with IENs influence their hiring practice decisions?
4. What elements do Nurse Managers take into consideration when deciding to hire IENs?

## Methods

A qualitative research method using Thorne’s Interpretive Description<sup>5</sup> was used to explore the perceptions and experiences that influence the hiring practice decisions of Nursing Managers in long-term care settings who employ IENs with Canadian RN licensure. This approach allowed for the formation of new insights at specific data points. Participant interviews were analyzed and broad conclusions were derived from the data. This method goes beyond mere description and allowed for a fully developed interpretation of the data received.

Data collection involved semi-structured individual face-to-face interviews. Data analysis consisted of coding the transcribed interviews followed by immersion in the data and identification of emerging themes. This research was approved by the Trinity Western University Research Ethics Board.

## Sample

The sample was composed of seven Nurse Managers in long-term care settings in Western Canada. Six of the Nurse Managers were female and one was male. All had between 24-36 years of nursing experience and had been Nurse Managers for 6-18 years.

## Findings

***THEME ONE – ACKNOWLEDGING THE COMPLEXITIES:*** Nurse Managers have many complex issues to consider as they interview IENs.

### Subtheme A: Giving Everyone a Chance

*“And I also, I have faith in people. Especially as you know, new grads, but also new immigrants ... I mean they need a chance. They need opportunity. So ... trying to support them that way.” (1)*

### Subtheme B: Constraining Elements

*“Um, and its ok, but what we do then its, it’s a little more difficult to say okay, how can, how can we fit them in, into our, into our budget. I mean it’s great if you can. It should be that way. It should be mentoring, we should be mentoring them. They should have a chance to succeed. But when you’re, you’ve got the other, as the administrator you’ve got the budget, you know...” (6)*

***THEME TWO – FINDING THE “RIGHT FIT”:*** Nurse Managers in all interviews emphasize the importance of having new hires be “the right fit”.

### Subtheme A: Possessing the Right Values and Attitude

*“I think that when you talk to somebody, um ... you know if they’re gonna be a good fit. You know if they’re kind, you know if they’re compassionate, just in the answers they give you. That is our values system here, and ... if you’re looking for a paycheck, this isn’t the place to be. If you’re looking to work with seniors who really need your care, that’s what we’re looking for.” (3)*

### Subtheme B: Possessing the Right Experience

*“Umm, I, I look for people sometimes who have experience because umm, residential is its own entity, right, it’s its own specialty. And, um, it is, you know, different than others. So, you know, you tend to look at those who may have some experience.” (4)*

### Subtheme C: Possessing Adequate Communication Skills

*“And, I would have to say, that the one thing that I might pay more attention to is their command of the English language. And that is ... simply because our older residents, need to be able to explain and be understood, and they need to hear and understand those that are caring for them.” (3)*

### Subtheme D: Determining Long-term Intentions

*“Are they here as a stepping stone? And we can ask them straight up too, “Is your ambition to get into acute care?” And if they say yes, I don’t want to hire somebody, train them, and have them hired at [local hospital] a month later.” (3)*

### Subtheme E: Possessing an Innate Feeling

*“So we’ll have um a good, almost sixth sense of who, you know, who someone is when we interview. We have a really good feeling about, and usually we’re right.” (4)*

***THEME THREE – NAVIGATING DIFFERENCES:*** Nurse Managers all discussed the importance of navigating the differences that are often present when hiring an IEN

### Subtheme A: Variations in Education and Clinical Practice

*“So when you think of an internationally educated nurse, you think, ok, so their standards of practice might be a little different than from our country obviously.” (4)*

### Subtheme B: Country Specific Variations

*“The Irish nurses and the British nurses I think, its, I know that they do a lot of training with their doctors. And they’re very clinical focused and their assessment skills are great, and ... there’s just something different.” (1)*

### Subtheme C: Variations in Culture

*“I had a nurse, where [she] was struggling to understand the end-of-life care and symptom management because when she was receiving [her formal] education – it was not part of the culture she was coming from.” (2)*

## Discussion

### Theme One

- Studies supported that Nurse Managers often compared IENs to Newly Graduated Canadian Nurses with regards to the level of support required for orientation and mentorship. Nurse Managers preferred to hire Canadian educated nurses as they required less orientation time and mentoring support than IENs (due to insufficient time and budgetary constraints).
- Nurse Managers were unaware of current registration guidelines from the College of Registered Nurses of British Columbia (CRNBC) for IENs. Outdated registration criteria became a restraint in their ability to hire IENs.

### Theme Two

- Many Nurse Managers described the importance for IENs to possess attitudes and values, such as a positive attitude, kindness, and an exceptional work ethic. However, with varying cultural differences, there may be the potential for an IEN to not be hired if they do not align with the employer’s values.
- Demonstrating an “exceptional work ethic” while seen as a desirable quality for an IEN to possess – it may also reveal underlying concerns of the “power imbalance” between the Nurse Manager and the IEN for job security. The IEN may be reluctant to voice any “concerns” in order to maintain employment.
- Nurse Manager’s placed emphasis on Canadian experience as a requirement for employment thus devaluing the IENs previous nursing experience from other countries and placed them at a disadvantage in their initial searches for employment. IENs often then ended up working in hard to fill nursing positions that Canadian educated nurses found undesirable. This finding was supported by other recent studies.<sup>3</sup>
- Several studies in the literature showed similar findings with respect to language and communication as often being the most significant “barriers” for Nurse Managers with regards to hiring IENs. Even though IENs must pass the language competency tests to obtain their license, Nurse Managers seem to pay more attention to their own perceptions of language fluency rather than to language comprehension exam scores.
- Unique to this study was how these Nurse Managers were concerned about losing new hires to acute care settings. Some of the Nurse Mangers spoke about IENs taking a position in a long-term care setting just to ensure that they get Canadian experience, however, they are more interested in acute care.
- Some Nurse Managers spoke about having a “gut feeling” in the interview process that influenced whether they should hire the IEN.

### Theme Three

- Studies in the literature supported the finding that some Nurse Managers perceived IENs practice and experiences as being below the minimum requirements when compared to Canadian standards which could be viewed as another barrier to being employed. IENs were under more scrutiny than their counterparts with regards to their education and practice backgrounds.
- The finding that some Nurse Managers often used various stereotypes (both positive or negative) of IENs in their hiring practice decisions was explored in relation to structural racism.

## Conclusions

Conclusions were that Nurse Managers 1) often perceived IENs as a homogenous group and tended to make assumptions of the employability of IENs in regards to their past experiences with IENs, rather than assess them as unique individuals, 2) often compared the IEN with the newly graduated nurse, and while they might consider hiring the IEN, lack time and money to provide adequate support and mentorship was viewed as a barrier, 3) generally perceived IENs as being ready to practice, but often failed to acknowledge or value their previous years of nursing education and nursing experience from their home countries, 4) were often more likely to hire Canadian educated nurses over IENs d/t perceived preparatory differences, concerns about accent and communication, and the difficulty of navigating various cultural differences OR conversely, in some cases preferred to hire IENs over Canadian educated nurses as they perceived them to be more hardworking, and 5) were more likely to hire IENs that had clear communication skills, positive attitudes, Canadian nursing experience, and a background in nursing care for older adults.

## Insights / Recommendations

Implications for nursing education:

- Enhance collaboration and communication between Nurse Managers, Educators and other stakeholders involved in assisting IENs to find nursing employment by providing them with the requirements that a Nurse Manager may be looking for to better equip IENs for employment interviews
- Continued focus to enhance IENs conversational English to better equip them for the interview process with a specific focus on cultural communication skills and profession specific language competencies

Implications for nursing management

- Familiarize themselves with current registration requirements for IENs so as to better them when making hiring practice decisions
- Engage in a reflexive process to examine any potential cultural biases that could impact hiring practice decision-making

Recommendations for nursing research:

- Conducting similar studies with a larger sample size of Nurse Managers from other health care settings
- Employ Qualitative research on hiring practices and hiring criteria of Nurse Managers, in general, and not just specific to IENs

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