

Investigate Reasons for Non-Licensure of Nursing School Graduates

The Examination Committee investigated the reasons why nursing school graduates from the 2000 calendar year have not taken the NCLEX-RN or NCLEX-PN examination. This study was designed to investigate the reasons why candidates who complete their nursing education, submit a registration for the NCLEX examination yet never take an NCLEX-RN or NCLEX-PN examination. It was anticipated that the results of the study would provide information that might impact the nursing shortage

A literature review in the subject areas of medicine, nursing, and education using several key words such as licensure, nursing education, job satisfaction, attrition, retention, and testing was conducted. This search generated approximately 150 citations. Most of the citations identified were not relevant to the research question. No studies were found that discussed reasons for nonlicensure of nursing school graduates. Furthermore, no studies addressed graduates of LPN/VN programs. Anecdotal information from several boards of nursing indicates that some of the reasons for graduates registering but not testing are fear of failure and lack of a monetary incentive since graduates in some jurisdictions can work under a temporary permit for extended periods of time.

A survey was developed based on review of appropriate literature and expert opinion. The survey was sent to all of the candidates (RN and PN) who registered to take the NCLEX examination in the year 2000 and as of January 2003 had yet to take the exam. The initial survey was sent to 2,022 nonlicensed candidates who applied for, but never took either the NCLEX-RN or NCLEX-PN examinations. Unfortunately, the response rate for the survey was less than 10% of the sample and the returned surveys were not representative of the sample. The Examination Committee decided to continue additional data collection in FY04, based on a refined survey tool.

Data collection using a revised survey entitled, *A Survey of Reason for Not Taking the National Nurse Licensure Examination (NCLEX®)*, began in December 2003. In addition to the paper version of the survey, an internet-based survey was created to allow electronic submission responses.

The paper version of the 2004 survey was sent to 2,898 candidates with domestic (U.S.) addresses. A postage-paid envelope and instructions on how to proceed with electronic submission, if preferred, was included in the mailing. Additionally, 1,852 candidates with international addresses were also asked to participate in the survey process. A letter was sent detailing the process for using the internet-based survey. As an incentive to increase the response rate, participants were offered the opportunity to be entered into a drawing to win one of two free online continuing education (CE) courses from the NCSBN Learning Extension.

As of April 15, 2004 the following final response rate of approximately 15% was tabulated based on 578 total responses from 3,759 total addresses (2,096 domestic and 1,663 international). Of the 578 total responses, 405 were from domestic addresses (32 online, 373 by mail) for a domestic response rate of 19% and 173 responses were from international addresses (172 online, 1 by mail) for an international response rate of 10%.

In an effort to determine how representative the responders were of the entire population, a comparison was performed of responders by RN/PN examination registration, U.S./internationally educated with nonresponders by RN/PN examination registration and U.S./internationally educated. Based on the results, it was determined that the respondents to the survey were representative of the population as a whole.

With the representation of the population determined, the data was then sorted to create a subpopulation with the characteristics appropriate to this study. On the first sort of data, all respondents currently licensed in the U.S. to practice nursing were deleted. The original sample was chosen from those candidates who registered in 2001 but had not yet taken the exam and successfully passed by December 2003 (first mailing). The next sort was to remove candidates who reportedly had not completed requirements for graduation and were therefore unable to take the licensure exam. These candidates apparently paid their fees, but had either not completed all required course work for graduation or may have not passed a predictor examination required by their

educational program. The completion of these sorts created a total subpopulation of 357 candidates, decreased by 214 from the original number of survey responses.

In order to determine why this group did not complete the process for licensure, the responses to the survey question: "Which of the following choices best describes your reason(s) for delaying or not taking the NCLEX[®] examination?" were tabulated. The respondents were asked to select all that applied and therefore had multiple responses. A significant number of candidates wrote comments in the last portion of the questions that listed 'Other, please specify'. Upon review of the written comments, it was determined that the comments were reiterations of the reasons listed in the question. Therefore, when possible, the responses were recategorized into the appropriate category. The remaining twenty-four respondent comments referred to financial burdens as a result of taking and failing qualifying exams (such as TOEFL) or the NCLEX itself as a reason for not taking NCLEX. These responses/comments on financial burden are listed at the bottom of Table 1 as a separate and additional category. Table 1 provides the respondents' answers as to the reason for delaying/not taking the NCLEX examination.

Table 1. Reason(s) for delaying or not taking the NCLEX examination

	RN (n=271)		PN (n=86)	
	US Educated (n=28)	Internationally Educated (n=243)	US Educated (n=49)	Internationally Educated (n=37)
Question #4 Reasons for delaying (Select all that apply)				
1. Board of Nursing did not make me eligible	4 % (n=2)	7 % (n= 29)	6 % (n= 5)	8 % (n= 6)
2. CGFNS	0 % (n=0)	9 % (n= 38)	0 % (n= 0)	14 % (n= 10)
3. Can work using permit or endorsement	0 % (n=0)	.5 % (n= 2)	0 % (n= 0)	0 % (n= 0)
4. Can't apply for licensure – legal reasons	2 % (n= 1)	2 % (n= 9)	3 % (n= 3)	0 % (n= 0)
5. Can't pass TOEFL, TOEIC or TSE	0 % (n= 0)	4 % (n= 16)	0 % (n= 0)	6 % (n= 4)
6. Physical/Mental disability	6 % (n= 3)	1 % (n= 4)	2 % (n= 2)	0 % (n= 0)
7. Increasing family responsibilities	10 % (n= 5)	3 % (n= 11)	3 % (n= 3)	7 % (n= 5)
8. Continue Education	2 % (n= 1)	2 % (n= 8)	5 % (n= 5)	4 % (n= 3)
9. Difficulty obtaining work visa	2 % (n= 1)	9 % (n= 41)	0% (n= 0)	1% (n=1)
10. Not confident in ability to pass exam	25% (n= 13)	11 % (n=50)	27 % (n= 25)	6 % (n= 4)
11. Employed outside of nursing	6 % (n= 3)	4 % (n= 17)	3 % (n= 3)	1 % (n= 1)
12. Financially independent/do not need to work	4 % (n= 2)	.5 % (n= 2)	0 % (n= 0)	3 % (n= 2)
13. General Test Anxiety	15 % (n= 8)	6 % (n= 28)	15 % (n= 14)	4 % (n= 3)
14. Non-US transcript/program eval. incomplete	0 % (n= 0)	5 % (n= 23)	1 % (n= 1)	10 % (n= 7)
15. Not enough time to prepare	6 % (n= 3)	18 % (n=80)	9 % (n= 8)	15 % (n= 11)
16. Registration or ATT expired	15 % (n= 8)	11 % (n=49)	14 % (n= 13)	14 % (n= 10)
17. Relocated and can't take the test/work	4 % (n= 2)	3 % (n= 12)	1 % (n= 1)	3 % (n= 2)
18. No longer interested in nursing as career	0 % (n=0)	0 % (n= 0)	2% (n=2)	1% (n= 1)
* Financial reasons/can't afford all of the fees	0 % (n= 0)	4 % (n= 17)	7 % (n= 6)	1 % (n= 1)
Total responses	52	436	91	71

The following information is summarized from Table 1.

US-educated RNs (n=28), list the following reasons for delaying/not taking NCLEX:

- Not confident in my ability to pass exam – 25% (n=13)
- General test-taking anxiety – 15% (n=8)
- Registration/ATT expired – 15% (n=8)
- Increased family responsibilities – 10% (n=5)

The internationally educated RNs (n=243) list the following reasons, and 17 respondents note the unasked category of 'Financial Reasons':

- Not enough time to prepare – 18% (n=80)
- Not confident in my ability to pass exam – 11% (n=50)
- Registration/ATT expired – 11% (n=49)

The U.S.-educated PN respondents (n=49) listed the following reasons to the delaying/not-taking question including six respondents in the 'financial reasons' category:

- Not confident in my ability to pass exam – 27% (n=25)
- General test-taking anxiety – 15% (n=14)
- Registration/ATT expired – 14% (n=10)

Finally, the internationally educated PN respondents (n= 37) noted the following reasons:

- Not enough time to prepare – 15% (n=11)
- CGFNS – 14% (=10)
- Registration/ATT expired – 14% (n=10)
- Non-U.S. transcript/program evaluation incomplete – 10% (n=7)

The results of this study suggest some common themes as to why a presumably motivated candidate population, identified as such due to the completion of formal education and initiation of the licensure application process (including NCLEX registration and payment of all applicable fees), fails to follow through on the nurse licensure process. There appears to be little differentiation between reasons for nonlicensure for RNs and PNs. However, there seem to be somewhat different reasons for U.S and internationally educated candidates.

In general, U.S.- educated candidates selected reasons for not taking the NCLEX examination that were related to their self-perceived ability to pass the NCLEX examination. Internationally educated candidates, while to some degree concerned about their ability to pass the NCLEX, seem to select reasons that are more structural rather than personal in nature.

Responses such as 'not having enough time to prepare,' 'CGFNS,' 'expirations of ATT's' and 'financial considerations' suggest that because the process for an internationally educated candidate takes longer, is more expensive, and in general requires more attempts than a U.S.-educated candidate; that those candidates, who are not initially successfully, may give up more readily than a U.S.-educated candidate. Based on the reasons selected by the internationally prepared candidates, it could be that this group needs more information about, and familiarity with, the process and requirements for licensure.

Since the time of this study many Boards of Nursing have made changes to the NCLEX registration and licensure application processes that may help both international- and U.S.-educated qualified candidates enter the profession in less time than is currently required. Examples of these changes include reduction of wait time between NCLEX administrations, online initial licensure applications and acceptance of additional English proficiency examinations. Other initiatives such as international availability of the NCLEX examinations, unified cut scores for English proficiency examinations and multiple methods for educational credentials review may make the total licensure process even more efficient for all candidates.

The conclusions of this study are limited to a small section of candidates who show interest but do not enter the nursing profession. The findings and the relatively low number of prospective nurses impacted, suggest that there are few, if any, specific recommendations that can be made to Boards of Nursing that will encourage candidates to take the licensure examination and thus reduce the nursing shortage.