Motivators of Pursuing Nursing Education at the Graduate Level

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Issue of Concern:
Having a greater understanding of the motivators to return to school, barriers preventing return, and factors that enable students to persist in a graduate level program will facilitate nursing programs to recruit qualified students and help (facilitate) meet the needs of current and future students. While there is an abundance of literature reporting on these factors for undergraduate (RN-BSN) students, there is a dearth of information on the similar considerations for graduate (MSN) students. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to ascertain what the motivators, barriers, and persistence factors are for nurses seeking to earn a graduate nursing degree.

Background:
- There remains a growing need for a highly educated nursing workforce
- Pursuing a graduate degree in nursing has not been as widely encouraged as the baccalaureate degree
- Master's prepared nurses are needed for leadership, management, advanced practice, faculty and researchers
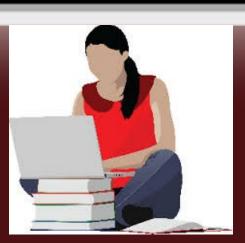
Theoretical Framework:
Social Ecological Model (SEM)
- Considers the complex interplay between individual, relationship, community and societal factors
- The SEM provides a robust framework that explains variance in individual behaviors (Thompson, 2017)
- In spite of the urgent need for higher education in nursing, a gap remains.

Purpose:
To ascertain what the motivators, barriers, and persistence factors are for nurses seeking to earn a graduate nursing degree

Methods:
This study utilized a cross-sectional descriptive survey of graduate level nursing students to determine what factors motivated them to return to school, the barriers they had overcome, and what elements allowed them to persist in their studies.

Results:
Highest level of agreement for motivation
- Finding personal satisfaction in earning a MSN (M = 4.76)
- A desire to expand nursing knowledge (M = 4.31)
- A belief that nurses with a MSN command greater respect as professional (M = 3.76)
- The belief that earning an advanced degree would increase confidence at work (M = 3.61)

Barriers:
- Financial challenges (M = 3.70)
- Inflexible work schedules (M = 3.54)
- Difficult family situations (M = 3.20)

Persistence factors:
- Personal reasons encourage persistence (M = 4.82)
- Confidence in the ability to complete the program (M = 4.45)
- Family encouragement and support (M = 4.45)
- Faculty encouragement and support (M = 4.18)

Recommendations:
1. Work with employers to encourage tuition reimbursement and loan repayments as incentives. For those who work in facilities already providing such financial support, make sure nurses are aware of the opportunities and informed about the resources through the employer or during recruitment visits. Additionally, begin identifying potential sources of income for scholarships.
2. Discuss student loans and other forms of financial assistance with potential students. Students are not always aware of these sources of assistance.
3. Provide flexibility in course scheduling and discuss scheduling with each student during advising sessions.
4. Be aware of common barriers students may encounter. Ask alumni to discuss how they overcame barriers in a manner that allowed them to complete the MSN program.
5. Utilize student success coordinators to discuss factors that contribute to student success and retention and to develop short and long term plans specifically for each student. Basically, the key is communication early and often in in an effort to aid the students with whatever comes their way.
6. Set up opportunities for students to get acquainted with one another. Online courses can make it difficult for students to get to know each other even if they work in the same facility.
7. Finally, develop a comprehensive student orientation program. This allows faculty to get to know students and vice versa.

References available on request.