



Emerging Career Pathways
in the
New York City Healthcare Workforce:
Changes in the Nursing Career Ladder

The City University of New York
Office of the University Dean for Health and Human Services

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Introduction

Within the healthcare delivery system the Affordable Care Act (ACA) is accelerating trends toward community-based services, patient-centered care, care coordination among multiple providers, a multi-disciplinary team approach, incorporation of new technologies, including electronic health records, and accountability for the total care of the patient. The future healthcare system will be more focused on primary and preventive care and will emphasize effective management of chronic diseases. The role of nurses is evolving as the delivery system is being transformed. The success of these changes will ultimately hinge on the quality of the workforce, especially the nursing workforce. Registered Nurses (RNs) constitute the largest profession within the healthcare industry. There are more than 3.1 million RNs nationwide and more than 270,000 are licensed in NYS.

The impact of health care reform and related professional and economic factors is also affecting the traditional nursing career ladder, starting with the associate degree in nursing (ADN), through the RN to BSN completion, to “advanced practice” graduate level degree programs. For example, recent national reports and changes in personnel practices reflect a strong preference for a more highly educated nursing workforce. The 2011 **Institute of Medicine** report *The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health* recommended that: “nurses should achieve higher levels of education...through an improved education system that promotes seamless academic progression” and that leaders in the field should work collaboratively to “increase the proportion of nurses with a baccalaureate degree.” In addition, more local healthcare providers are now requiring a baccalaureate degree in nursing for all new nurse hires. They are also encouraging currently employed nurses with an ADN to return to school to earn their BSN degree.

CUNY Nursing Programs

CUNY is a major supplier of new RNs for the New York metropolitan area. For example, in 2012, 1021 CUNY nurse graduates passed the National Council Licensure Examination for

Registered Nurses (NCLEX-RN), which represents a CUNY-wide pass rate of 87% for first-time test takers. This total is 42% of all 2012 NCLEX-RN passers who graduated from nursing programs in NYC.

Quality health care is dependent on the availability of an educated and competent workforce. Each year, through its expansive network, CUNY prepares a large, culturally diverse pool of qualified nurses who are dedicated to providing quality health care services to all New Yorkers. Indeed, the local healthcare industry relies on CUNY to provide a reliable supply of new nurses as well as career ladder opportunities for currently practicing RNs. In 2012-13, thirteen CUNY schools offered nursing degree programs.

Nine offered the AAS in Nursing:

- Borough of Manhattan Community College
- Bronx Community College
- Hostos Community College
- Kingsborough Community College
- LaGuardia Community College
- Medgar Evers College
- New York City College of Technology
- Queensborough Community College
- College of Staten Island

Six offered the BS in Nursing (Generic and/or RN to BSN Completion):

- Hunter College
- Lehman College
- Medgar Evers
- New York City College of Technology
- College of Staten Island
- York College

Three offered the MS in Nursing (with various specializations):

- Hunter College
- Lehman College
- College of Staten Island

Two offered the Doctorate in Nursing

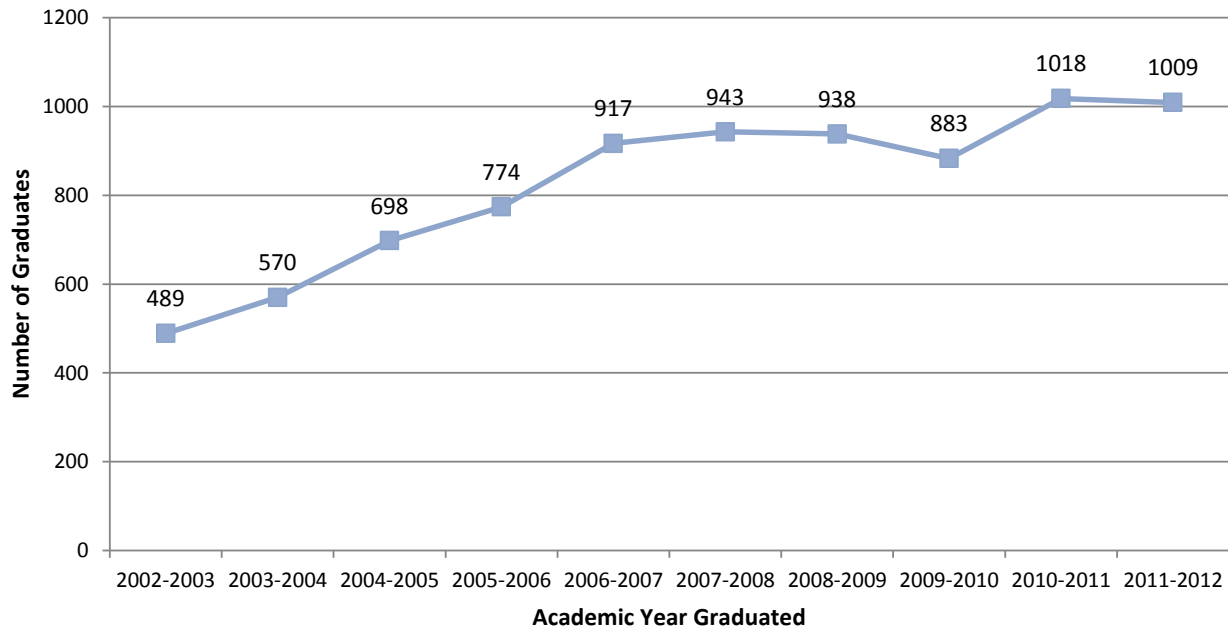
- Graduate Center (PhD and DNS)
- Hunter College (DNP)

In addition, a fourteenth CUNY school, the School of Professional Studies (SPS), has received approval from the New York State Education Department (NYSED) to offer an online RN to BSN completion program starting in spring 2014.

Responding to the Nursing Shortage

CUNY has a responsibility to prepare a sufficient number of qualified personnel to meet the health care needs of NYC residents. In response to the nursing shortage of the last decade CUNY more than doubled the number of graduates of its ADN programs from 489 in 2002-2003 to over 1000 graduates in each of the last two years.

Figure 1. Trends in CUNY AAS Degrees in Nursing, 1997-98 to 2011-12



Source: CUNY Institutional Research Database (IRDB)

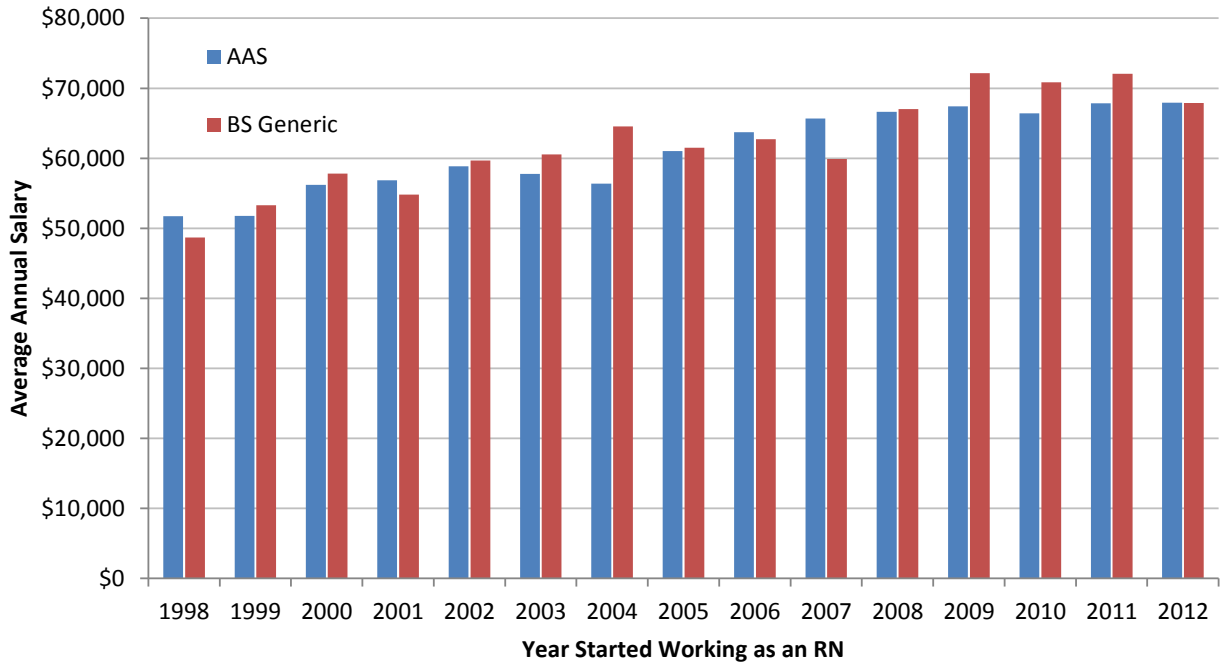
ADN Nursing as a Road to the Middle Class

Graduation from a CUNY associate degree nursing program provides aspiring students with an opportunity to start a career in a respected and well-paid profession. Most CUNY students could not have afforded the much higher tuition charged by local private colleges. About half of CUNY's ADN graduates are incumbent healthcare workers who have worked their way up the career ladder from jobs such as home care aide, patient care associate, Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN), or community health worker. They come from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and frequently are residents of the same urban neighborhoods as the patients they now serve. The nursing career ladder, starting at the ADN level, has served as a "road to the middle class" for many working poor people and their families.

Starting Salaries of First RN Jobs

After passing the NCLEX-RN, CUNY ADN graduates could expect to earn over \$65,000 annually in their very first RN job, if it was at a hospital.

Figure 2. Average Yearly Salary in First RN Job, Full-Time Hospital Employment Only, by Year Started Working as an RN, 1998-2012



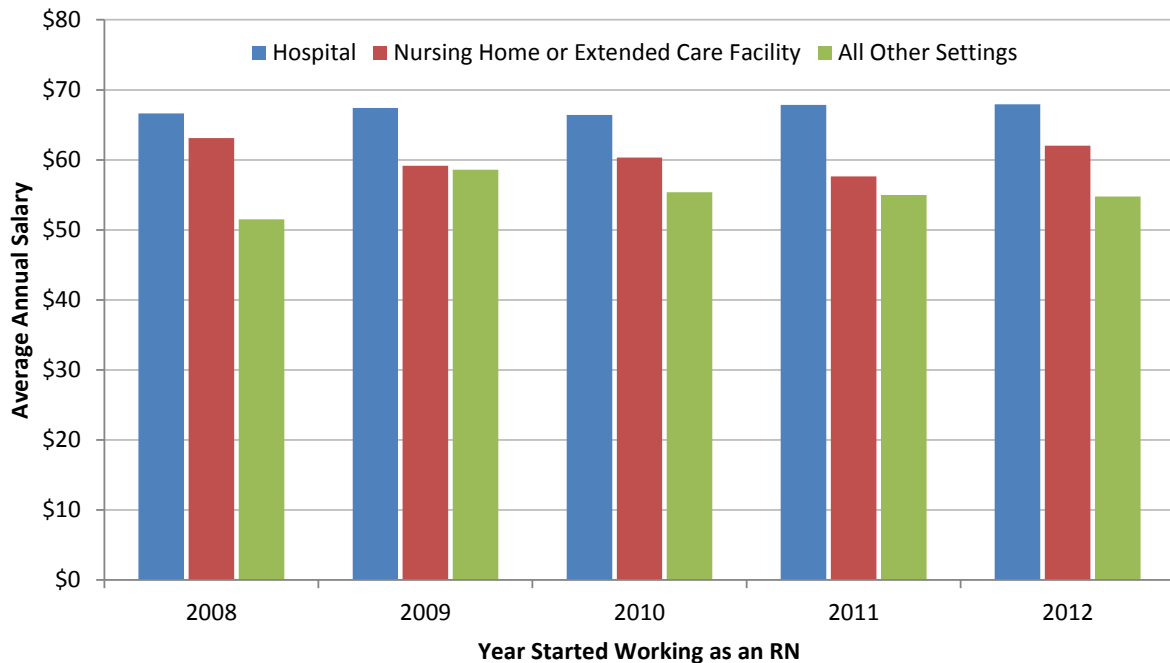
Source: 2008 Survey of CUNY Nursing Graduates (Years 1998-2006) and 2012 Survey of CUNY Nursing Graduates (Years 2008-2011)

The relatively high starting salary for ADN graduates employed in hospital settings has likely been one of the motivating factors for entering the profession, at least for some individuals. What is somewhat unusual in the field of nursing is that, nationally and in the New York area, the starting salary of graduates of generic BSN programs is not much higher than that of ADN graduates. Thus, historically, there were few immediate financial incentives to earn the baccalaureate degree while also continuing to work as an RN.

The starting salaries of newly licensed graduates in non-hospital settings are somewhat lower for those employed in nursing home and/or extended care facilities and lower still for those employed in non-institutional settings including the Visiting Nurse Service (VNS), ambulatory care, physicians' offices and other community-based settings. On average, newly licensed

graduates could expect to earn about \$12,000 less annually in a community-based setting compared to a hospital setting.

Figure 3. Average Yearly Salary in First RN Job for AAS graduates, Full-Time Employment Only, by Year Started Working as an RN, 2008-2012



Source: 2012 Survey of CUNY Nursing Graduates

Local Hospital Closings

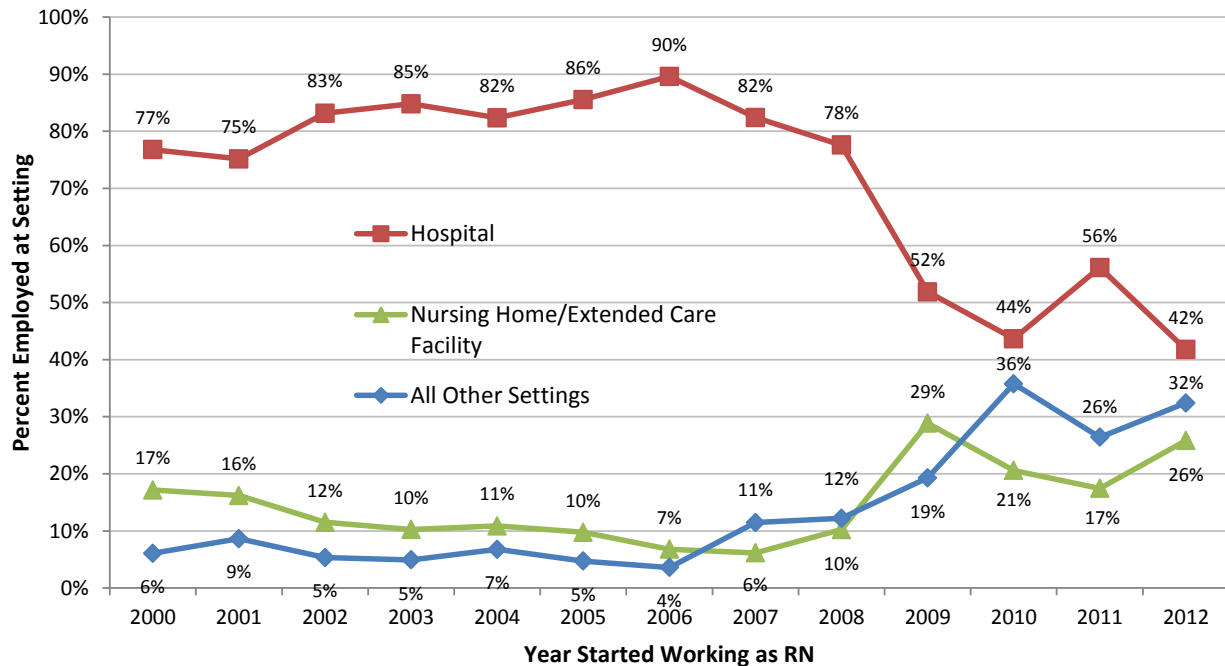
The downturn in the U.S. economy coupled with implementation of federal and state health care reforms has led to an easing of the nursing shortage in NYC. Since 2008 there have been eight hospital closings in NYC alone (St. Vincent’s, North General, Peninsula, St. John’s, Mary Immaculate, Cabrini, Victory Memorial, and Parkway). Others are in imminent danger of closing. In recent years there have also been hospital consolidations, downsizings and hiring freezes. Thus newly licensed graduates also compete with laid-off but more experienced nurses for fewer job openings in hospital settings.

Settings of First RN Jobs

The hospital closings and ongoing healthcare reforms are also associated with changes in the setting of the first RN job for graduates of CUNY’s ADN programs. Figure 4 below shows the dramatic decrease in first RN job employment in hospitals and the concurrent increase in first

RN job employment in nursing homes and extended care facilities and in “other” non-institutional, more community-based settings such as the VNS, ambulatory care and physicians’ offices.

Figure 4. Setting of First RN Job, AAS Graduates Only, by Year Started Working as an RN, 2000-2012



Source: 2008 Survey of CUNY Nursing Graduates (Years 1998-2007) and 2012 Survey of CUNY Nursing Graduates (Years 2008-2011)

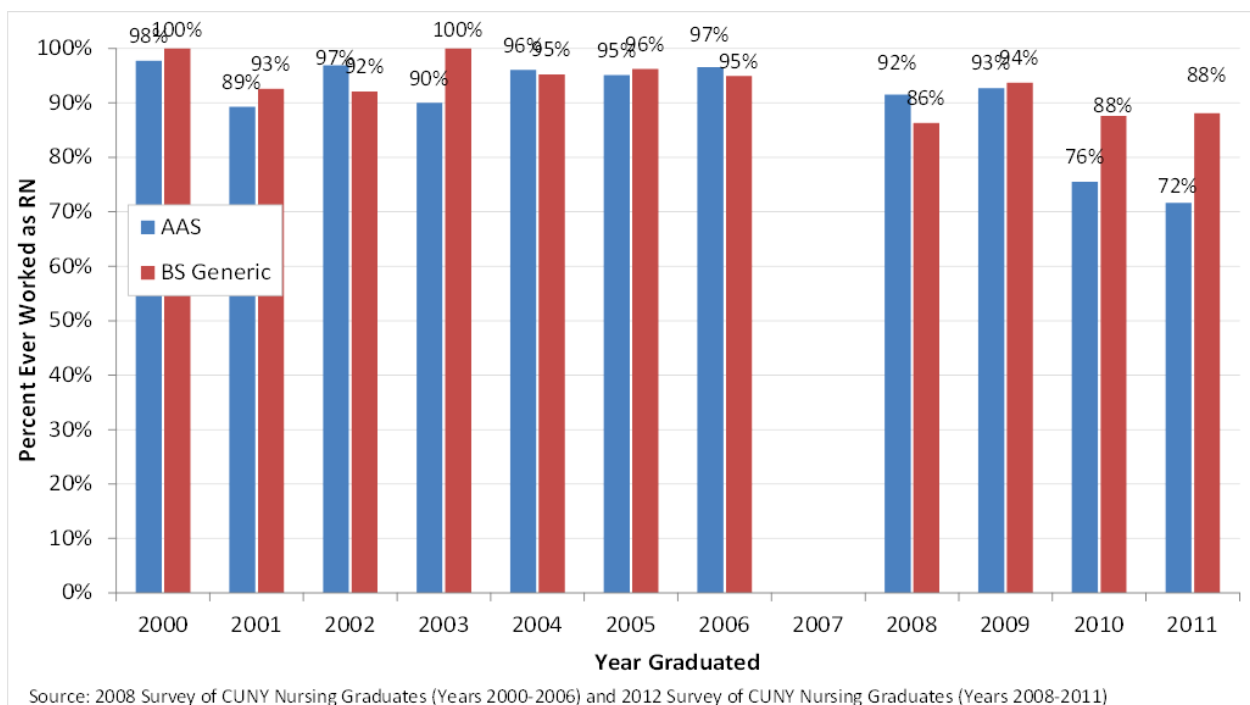
A More Competitive Nursing Job Market

A decrease in the percentage of nurses employed in hospitals and acute care settings is consistent with implementation of the ACA. The preference for baccalaureate prepared nurses and the local hospital closings have created an even more competitive job market, especially for new nurse graduates. According to the NYS Center for Health Workforce Studies, the number of RN jobs in NYC actually declined from 99,010 in 2005 to 96,210 in 2011.

In the chart below we can see just how competitive the job market has become in NYC. Especially in the last two years there has been a significant and very troubling decrease in the percentage of CUNY ADN graduates, who had also passed the NCLEX, but were still not employed as RNs eighteen months after they graduated. Of the spring 2011 graduates, 28% are in this predicament. There is also a decrease in the percentage of newly licensed generic BSN

graduates not yet employed as RNs. Of the spring 2011 generic graduates, 12 % fall into this category. Thus hundreds of newly licensed graduates are neither earning a higher salary to support their families nor practicing to the full extent of their training and the scope of their license. We may be in danger of creating a “lost generation” of nurses. If they are out of the RN workforce too long, and their nascent clinical skills deteriorate, they may find it difficult to re-enter.

Figure 5. Percentage of CUNY AAS and BS Generic Graduates Who Ever Worked as an RN within 18 Months of Graduation, Out Of All CUNY AAS and BS Generic Spring Graduates Who Received Their RN License, 2000-2006 and 2008-2011

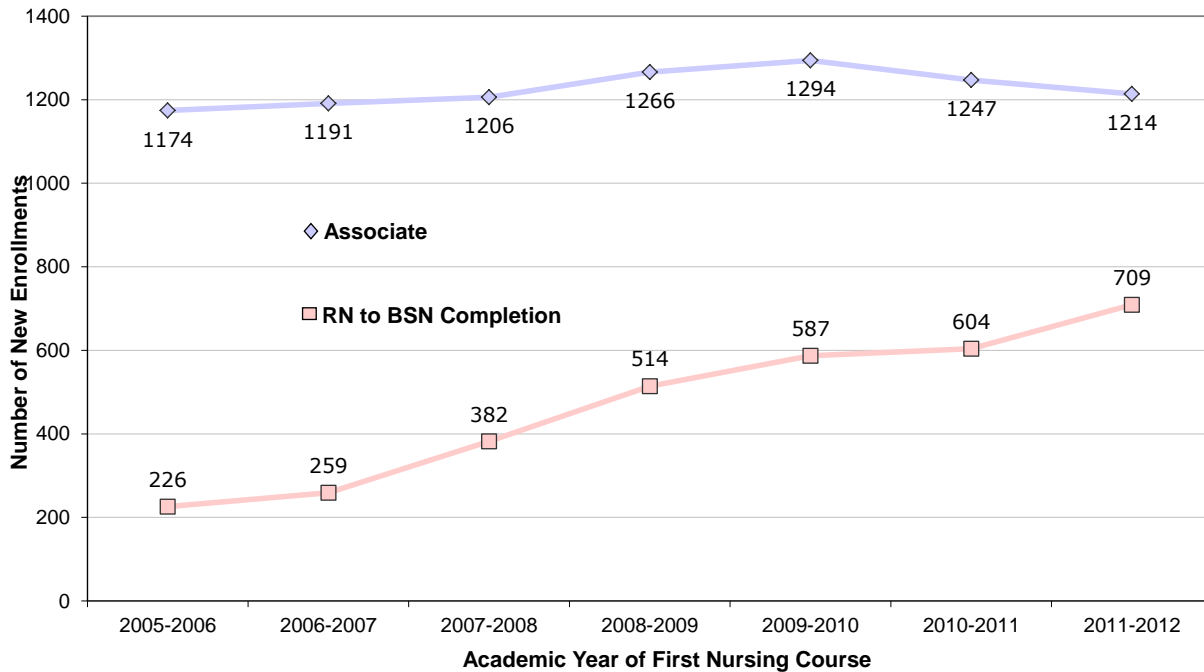


A Surge in RN to BSN Enrollments

The tight job market and the preference for baccalaureate prepared nurse graduates are contributing to the dramatic surge in enrollment in CUNY’s RN to BSN programs as well as a recent decrease in enrollment in our ADN programs. The slight decrease in ADN enrollment is to be expected in an environment in which job placement of recent graduates is a problem. More graduates are enrolling in RN to BSN programs sooner, either immediately or within a few years of graduation. According to our survey, 60% of recent ADN graduates, whether they are working

in their first job as an RN or not, is already enrolled in an RN to BSN program (either at CUNY or elsewhere); another 23% of graduates plans to enroll within a year.

New Clinical Enrollments, CUNY AAS and RN to BSN Programs, 2005-06 to 2011-12



SOURCE: CUNY Institutional Research Database (IRDB)

CUNY’s new online RN to BSN completion program at SPS will provide a new option. In our recent survey, the most common reason cited by ADN graduates who enrolled in a non-CUNY RN to BSN completion program was that “CUNY did not offer an online program.” The new SPS program corrects this situation.

Data Sources

CUNY’s Institutional Research Database (IRDB), maintained by the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment (OIRA), is a warehouse of CUNY’s official student data, combining information from all of the colleges in a single relational database. The IRDB contains detailed enrollment, graduation, and course data for all CUNY students from 1990 to present.

In 2008, the Office of the University Dean for Health and Human Services conducted a survey of CUNY nursing graduates from 1997-2007. The survey examined CUNY graduates’ educational

experiences, their experiences as newly licensed RNs, and their experiences in the labor market. It included students that graduated with an AAS in Nursing, a generic BS in Nursing, and an RN to BS in Nursing. In 2012 the survey was revised and updated and administered to nursing graduates from 2008-2012. A stratified random sample of all graduates was created for both surveys. The 2008 survey was conducted entirely by telephone and the response rate was 69 percent of eligible graduates from the sample, yielding information for 1896 CUNY nursing graduates representing 22 percent of the entire population of nurses who graduated from CUNY's AAS and BS degree programs in nursing over the ten-year period. The 2012 survey was conducted both by telephone and online, and had a response rate of 52 percent of eligible graduates for a total of 1685 completed surveys, representing 25 percent of the population of graduates over the five-year period.

Recommendations for Future Funding

The CUNY School of Professional Studies (SPS) Online RN to BSN Program

Our first priority is for all ADN graduates to enroll in an RN to BSN program. This will enhance their career prospects and is consistent with IOM recommendations. To facilitate academic progression Queensborough Community College designed and implemented ADN/BSN dual degree programs with both Hunter College and York College. Other CUNY schools are developing similar partnership models. SPS is developing dual degree opportunities with several of CUNY's ADN programs. It is CUNY's responsibility to provide a seat in an RN to BSN program for all our ADN graduates. To increase our capacity the SPS program must hire new nursing faculty, who have training and experience to teach online, to meet the still surging demand for baccalaureate level education in nursing, not just for CUNY graduates but for currently employed RNs who are returning to school to meet the higher educational requirements that their employers and their professional colleagues now expect. Therefore, NYACH should provide support to SPS to hire additional faculty to grow its new program in a timely way to be able to serve RNs who want to enter the workforce, advance in their careers or achieve job security in their current positions.

RN “Transition to Practice” Paid Internship

Another priority is for CUNY, in collaboration with healthcare industry, to develop a university-wide “transition to practice” program designed for newly licensed ADN graduates who are enrolled in RN to BSN programs but still not employed as RNs. There is a real danger of creating a “lost generation” of nurses. If these inexperienced RNs are shut out of the workforce for an extended period of time, cut off from the culture of professional practice, and unable to improve their clinical skills, it may be difficult for many of them to re-start their nursing careers. To address this concern CUNY has proposed an **RN “Transition to Practice” Paid Internship Program** that would place newly licensed RNs, who are concurrently enrolled in a CUNY RN to BSN program, into a 12 week, 300 hour paid internship/orientation program where they would be supported by a preceptor at an affiliated healthcare provider. This would provide them with on-the-job experience, sharpen their clinical skills, facilitate their integration into the nursing profession, and enhance their opportunities for full-time employment. Therefore, NYACH should provide support to CUNY to implement such a program which would include funding for stipends for the participating interns and for training and honoraria for the necessary cadre of preceptors.

Acknowledgements

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