

# WWAMI CENTER FOR HEALTH WORKFORCE STUDIES

University of Washington • School of Medicine • Department of Family Medicine  
Box 354982 • Seattle WA 98195-4982 • phone: (206) 685-6679 • fax: (206) 616-4768 • <http://depts.washington.edu/uwchws/>

## Project Summary

November 2006

### *What Happens to Registered Nurses Whose Licenses Expire? An Exploratory Study in Washington State*

**Background:** We surveyed RNs with expired Washington State licenses to add to our understanding of why many RNs leave nursing and whether some non-practicing RNs might return to the nursing workforce.

**Study Design:** We surveyed a 50% sample of Washington RNs who did not renew their licenses in 2002 and 2003, and conducted extensive follow-up of a sample of non-respondents.

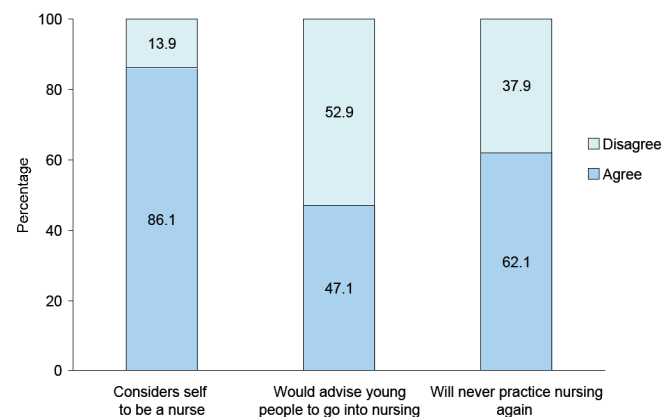
#### Major Findings:

- ✘ Many of the RNs with expired licenses had moved out of state, which contributed to the initial low survey response rate.
- ✘ Of the respondents (64% final adjusted response rate), 71% were not working as nurses and 44% of these had retired.

Among non-practicing, non-retired RNs:

- ✘ 46% were satisfied and 42% were dissatisfied with their last nursing position.
- ✘ A minority (41%) was employed in another occupation, and only 3% were searching for RN work.
- ✘ Nearly two-thirds agreed that they “will never practice nursing again.”
- ✘ Among possible factors that might induce them to reenter nursing, 31% said “none.”
- ✘ Since the start of their nursing careers, most respondents reported that some conditions have improved (e.g., RN pay), while others have worsened (e.g., dangers and physical demands of the job).
- ✘ A majority said they still considered themselves to be nurses, but more than half would not advise young people to enter the profession.

Attitudes Toward Nursing Among Non-Practicing, Non-Retired RNs with Expired Washington State Licenses\*



\* n=72. Number of missing responses for “considers self to be a nurse” was 0, “would advise young people to go into nursing” was 2, and “will never practice nursing again” was 6.

**Policy Implications:** This study suggests that most RNs who leave active practice do so because of retirement or for personal reasons, and while they may still view themselves as nurses, they show little likelihood of rejoining the nursing workforce. This study adds to our understanding of why RNs leave nursing: important information for increasing retention of RNs who are currently practicing.

*Findings from this study are more fully described in WWAMI Center for Health Workforce Studies Working Paper #110: Skillman SM, Palazzo L, Hart LG, Keepnews D, What Happens to Registered Nurses Whose Licenses Expire? An Exploratory Study in Washington State, November 2006.*

