

**H**aving an adequate supply of registered nurses (RNs) in the U.S. workforce is critical to ensuring a safe and effective health care system. Over time, there has been a substantial body of evidence to suggest a potential shortfall of nurses that could have a major impact on health care delivery. The factors contributing to this RN shortage include the aging of the U.S. population, the aging of the RN workforce, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, which predicts that 30 million more U.S. residents will become insured and seek medical care in the years ahead. Data on the RN workforce can be used to predict possible shortages and assist in the allocation of resources, program development, and recruitment efforts in both the health care system and education sectors.

importance of completing the survey. The day after the telephone announcement, a letter inviting RNs to participate in the survey was mailed and included a \$1 incentive. The letter, which explained the voluntary nature of the survey and the due date for the following week, contained a link for online survey participation. The letter was sent first class to allow the return of invalid addresses.

2. Week 3: A hardcopy of the survey was sent to nonresponders, and included an online option. Participants were instructed to complete the survey within the following 2 weeks.
3. Week 5: A telephone announcement was sent to remind nonresponders to complete the survey, and to thank those who had already participated.
4. Week 7: A hardcopy of the survey was sent to nonresponders, and included an online option. Participants were instructed to complete the survey within the following 2 weeks.
5. Week 9: Deadline for surveys and closure of the online option.

#### **Nonresponse Analyses and Sample Weighting**

A formal nonresponse bias analysis was conducted following the close of the survey. Although response rates are a valuable indicator of survey quality, they may not be a good measure of response bias. An analysis of basic demographic data (i.e., gender, age, race/ethnicity, number of years since graduation, number of years since first licensed) for all RN licensees sampled from the Nursys database was used to compare the survey respondents and nonrespondents, to determine the representativeness of the survey participants.

#### **Summary of Results**

The current study was a collaborative research effort that identified the most current characteristics of the RN workforce in the United States.

Results were compared to HRSA (2010) results, which were based on RN workforce data from 2008, and HRSA (2013) results, which were based on Census data from 2008–2010. Importantly, when comparing the current study's results to those of HRSA (2013) it should be noted the HRSA (2013) data were from individuals who reported their current occupation as nursing and who currently had or were seeking a job. These data were obtained from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey. The current study was a survey of all RN

the state level and believe that the dataset enhances the ability to plan for the future. More information about the development and current status of implementation can be found in Moulton et al. (2013) and Nooney et al. (2010). Additional questions pertaining to the Nurse Licensure Compact and tele-health were added as a supplement to the MDS by NCSBN.

#### **Procedure**

Surveys were distributed in early 2013 using a modified Dillman approach (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2009), which included the following steps:

1. Week 1: RNs in the initial sample received a telephone announcement that they should expect a survey in the mail. The telephone announcement stated the purpose and

Results on the following topic areas are discussed: gender, age, racial/ethnic diversity, education, licensing, employment status, position setting, position title, employment specialty, Nurse Licensure Compact, and tele-health.

### **Gender**

The current study indicated that male RNs are a relatively small but growing minority in the nursing workforce (see Table 1). An examination of gender, by year licensed cohort, revealed a trend toward an increase in the proportion of males in the workforce. Specifically, for respondents licensed before 2000, 5% were male, while of those licensed between 2010 and 2013, 11% were male.

Examining highest education of RNs by gender, the current data show 71% of male respondents and 62% of female respondents are working in nursing and held bachelor or higher







most ( $M = 47.12$ ,  $SD = 11.94$ ), followed by PhD-nursing ( $M = 44.97$ ,  $SD = 17.33$ ), noting that PhD-nursing had a higher median number of hours. Respondents with a diploma in nursing worked the fewest ( $M = 33.36$ ,  $SD = 14.27$ ). This





### **Employment Specialty**

In the current study 17% of RNs reported their primary practice specialty as acute care/critical care, followed by 13% who reported a medical-surgical specialty (see Table 12). Respondent RNs reported specializing in population-specific care; for example 6% reported a geriatric specialty and 6% reported a pediatric specialty. Five percent of RNs reported maternal-child health as a specialty; all other specialty positions were reported to be less than 5%. Rehabilitation and women's health both were identified as a specialty by 2% of RNs, a finding similar to that reported by HRSA (2010), where rehabilitation specialty was 3% and women's health 4%. Twenty percent of RNs reported their specialty in the "other" category.

### **Nurse Licensure Compact**

The Nurse Licensure Compact (NLC) enables multistate licensure for nurses. In 2000, NCSBN launched a new initiative to expand the mobility of nurses as part of our nation's health care delivery system. The NLC allows nurses to have one multistate license, with the ability to practice in both their home state and other party states. The following states were members of the NLC at the time of survey data collection: Arkansas, Arizona, Colorado, Delaware, Iowa, Idaho, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, New Hampshire, North Carolina, North Dakota, Virginia, Wisconsin.

Results indicated that of the respondents who indicated their primary state of residence was a compact state, approximately 36% indicated utilizing their compact license; specifically, 92% indicated they had practiced in one additional state, while 8% indicated they practiced in multiple additional states. Further study on the utilization of the compact license is needed.

### **Tele-health**

In an effort to investigate the utilization of tele-health, respondents were asked to indicate if they utilized tele-health in their primary or secondary positions. Results indicated that 9% utilized tele-health, 80% did not utilize tele-health, and 11% were unsure.

Respondents who indicated they utilized tele-health in their primary or secondary positions were asked to indicate if patients were ever located in a different state when the respondents utilized tele-health. Results indicated that of those who utilized tele-health, 27% indicated patients had been located in a different state, while 8% were unsure.

### **Discussion**

The current study had a few limitations. First, the current study's response rate was 39%, lower than anticipated. Although response rates anticipated were 50-60%, the current study's response rate was 39%. This may be due to the fact that the study was conducted during a time of economic recession, which may have affected the response rate. Additionally, the study was limited to a single state, which may have affected the response rate. Finally, the study did not include a control group, which may have affected the results.

