Comparison of Florida's Nurse Population to the General Population

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The demographic composition of Florida's nurses is distinctly different from Florida's population overall. The nursing profession in Florida has historically been comprised predominantly of white women. In contrast, Florida's population is racially and ethnically heterogeneous, and is projected to increase in diversity. This paper describes the age, gender, and race/ethnicity of Florida's LPN, RN, and ARNP nurse populations, in comparison to the age and race/ethnicity of Florida's total population. Specifically, we examine how race/ethnicity and gender of nurses varies by age and type of nurse license, and how race/ethnicity of the nurse population varies by region of Florida. Issues of cultural diversity, the changing demographics of Florida's nurse population, and the demographics of current nursing students (who will soon become the next generation of nurses) are also discussed.

Data on nurse demographics are collected by the Board of Nursing when a nurse applies for licensure in Florida. The Florida Center for Nursing (Center), in partnership with the Florida Board of Nursing and Medical Quality Assurance, collect workforce information as nurses renew their licenses on a biennial basis. The Center conducts analysis of the entire Florida nurse population every two years and reports results in Center publications.[1,2] Data used in this report were for the *potential nurse workforce* – those with an active license, Florida address, and no disciplinary restrictions. The potential nurse workforce may or may not be employed in nursing. Nursing schools are surveyed and education data are reported annually by the Center.[3]

According to the 2010 census, Florida's population was 57.9 percent non-Hispanic White, 15.2 percent non-Hispanic Black, 22.5 percent Hispanic, and 4.5 percent other race/ethnicities.[4] Florida's Hispanic population is projected to grow to 24.5 percent of the population by 2020.[5] In comparison to the diverse population of the state overall, the Center reported that 70.5 percent of RNs working in nursing were White, 12.0 percent Black, and 8.3 percent Hispanic in 2010.[1]

Why is it important to have a diverse nurse population whose demographics reflect Florida's overall population? Racial and ethnic diversity promotes cultural competence – which is defined as a set of skills (including attitudes, behaviors, policies) that allows people to work effectively in multicultural environments.[6] Culturally competent nurses are better able to understand their patients' perspectives and needs, languages, cultural traditions and norms. Culturally competent nurses are sensitive to patients' beliefs as they relate to specific cultures (including concerns specific to gender, race, ethnicity, language, religion, sexual orientation) and are able to effectively communicate and care for diverse patient populations.[7] Nurses with a high level of cultural competence are also aware of differences in non-verbal communication (i.e., eye contact,

touch, and appropriate personal space), gender-specific communication, and cultural or religion-specific health beliefs.[7] Nurses skilled in cultural competence, who are capable of establishing working, caring relationships and healthy communication with a growing multicultural community, are and will continue to be a valuable asset to the nursing workforce.

Sensitivity to other cultures is also important to relationships within the nursing profession itself, by improving how nurses relate to one another, how they feel about their jobs, and professional retention and recruitment.[8] Diversity within a place of employment may impact workgroup cohesion, which in turn impacts patient care and satisfaction. For instance, a culturally diverse staff may have conflicts in the work environment, and workplace conflicts can lead to high turnover. A recent study of nurses in a Virginia hospital found those with higher levels of job satisfaction were more likely to value differences and have trust in nursing colleagues of diverse cultural groups.[8] Furthermore, nurses not intending to leave their job had higher trust levels with culturally diverse groups, indicating a positive relationship between cultural competence and increased retention. Diversity curriculum taught in both nursing schools and as continued professional education and professional development can help to improve the work environment.

Although Florida's RN population is mostly white, definite changes in racial and ethnic composition can be seen when comparing younger and older nurses, and among nurse license types. The largest variations in nurses' racial and ethnic diversity are seen when comparing the population 40 years and younger to those 61 years and older, and by comparing the racial and ethnic makeup of the potential nurse workforce to Florida's population (Table 1). Within all nurse license types, nurses who are Hispanic, Black, or Asian make up a larger percentage of nurses 40 years and younger compared to older age groups. As a more detailed example, Hispanics are 22.5 percent of Florida's population, and Hispanic nurses comprise almost 14 percent of the RNs age 40 years and younger, but only 2.8 percent of the RNs age 61 years and older. The percentage of Hispanic nurses is more than four times higher in the youngest groups of LPNs, RNs, and ARNPs compared to the oldest groups. White nurses comprise 58.7 percent of the RN's 40 years and younger, compared to 83.8 percent of RNs 61 years and older. Diversity among LPNs 40 years and younger is remarkable, as this group is 46 percent White, 36.3 percent Black, and 12.8 percent Hispanic. In comparison, LPNs older than age 61 are 17.3 percent Black, 3.3 percent Hispanic, and 76.5 percent White. Within ARNPs, the percentage of Hispanic nurses increases among younger ARNPs, but White ARNPs are overrepresented at all age groups. Hence, within all nurse license types, younger nurses are more reflective of Florida's general population than are nurses in the oldest age group, demonstrating a trend that the nurse population is beginning to more closely reflect the general population of Florida.

Table 1. Racial/Ethnic Composition of Florida's Population and Florida's Potential Nurse Workforce (by age group)

	White (%)	Black (%)	Hispanic (%)	Asian (%)	Other (%)
Florida's Population	57.9	15.2	22.5	2.4	2.1
RN	**71.6**	**11.7**	**8.3**	**6.8**	**1.7**
<= 40 years	58.7	14.6	13.9	10.7	2.1
41-60 years	74.3	11.0	7.1	6.0	1.6
>= 61 years	83.8	9.3	2.8	2.9	1.2
ARNP	**80.0**	**8.0**	**6.9**	**3.5**	**1.6**
<= 40 years	72.7	8.1	12.6	5.0	1.6
41-60 years	80.6	8.3	5.9	3.4	1.7
>= 61 years	88.0	7.0	2.5	1.6	0.9
LPN	**59.8**	**27.7**	**8.3**	**2.2**	**2.0**
<= 40 years	46.0	36.3	12.8	2.6	2.3
41-60 years	63.9	25.2	6.8	2.2	1.9
>= 61 years	76.5	17.3	3.3	1.4	1.5

Note: Those missing race/ethnicity are not included in these calculations.

Variations in the racial/ethnic diversity of nurses are seen within the regions of Florida, and the nurse population in each region more closely mirrors that regions' population. (See Appendix for regional details). Among RNs, Whites are overrepresented and Hispanics are underrepresented within most regions. For example, in the South region, whose population is 48 percent Hispanic and 28 percent White, the RN population is 38.9 percent White and 23.6 percent Hispanic. Among LPNs, the percentage of White nurses is usually similar to the regional population, while the percentage of Black nurses is usually larger than the regional population. Among ARNPs, White nurses are overrepresented within all Florida regions.

Men are becoming a larger percentage of the nurse population, particularly among RNs 40 years and younger, and among ARNPs 60 years and younger (Figure 1). Eleven percent of RNs and 15.1 percent of ARNPs age 40 years or younger are men. Slightly over 9 percent of the LPN population age 60 years and younger are men. In recent years, the nursing profession has become more appealing to men, as marketing campaigns target men and highlight the professional rewards and opportunities of a career in nursing. Even during this economic recession, nursing and healthcare remain growth industries.
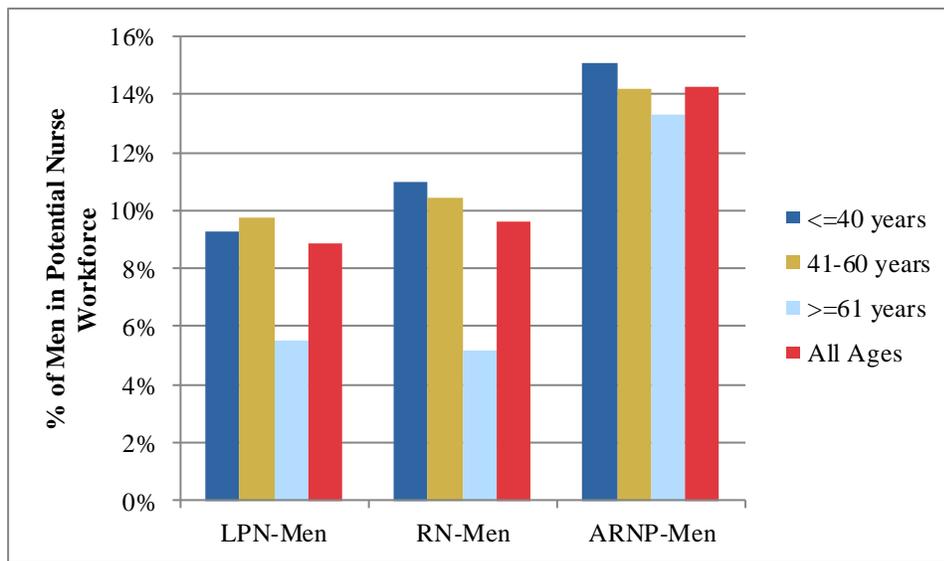
Figure 1. Percentage of Men in the Potential Nurse Workforce by age group

As Florida's population ages, so too do Florida's nurses. In 2010, the percentage of Florida residents age 70 and older was 12.9 percent, and this population is predicted to increase to 15.3 percent by 2020 and 17.3 percent by 2025.[9] The nurse population reflects the aging of the general population, as the average age of RNs and ARNPs in the potential nurse workforce is 50.1 years and 52.2 years. Over time, as the population bubble of baby boomers ages, Florida's nurse population will age out of nursing and transition to retirement thus contributing to a future shortage of nurses.

Schools of nursing are an ideal place to begin addressing disparity issues, through a culturally competent curriculum and a diverse faculty.[10] Schools need to attract diverse students at all educational levels – LPNs, RNs, ARNPs – who will then be able to implement their knowledge of cultural competence and health disparities into the workforce. Racially and ethnically diverse nursing graduate students will become the future nurse leaders and educators, who will in turn influence policy and work to resolve health disparities.

The Center's 2010 education survey showed a natural continuation of the increasing diversity of the future nurse workforce.[3] During the 2009-2010 academic school year, whites comprised 42.9 percent of the LPN students, 59.5 percent of RN students, and 55.5 percent of Master's students. Hispanics were 15.7 percent of LPN students, 13.0 percent of RN students, and 14.8 percent of Master's students. The percentage of male students also bodes well for increasing gender diversity – 14.2 percent of LPN students, 13.7 percent of RN students, and 11.8 percent of Master's students are men. As these trends continue, future nurses in Florida will be a more fitting reflection of Florida's population.
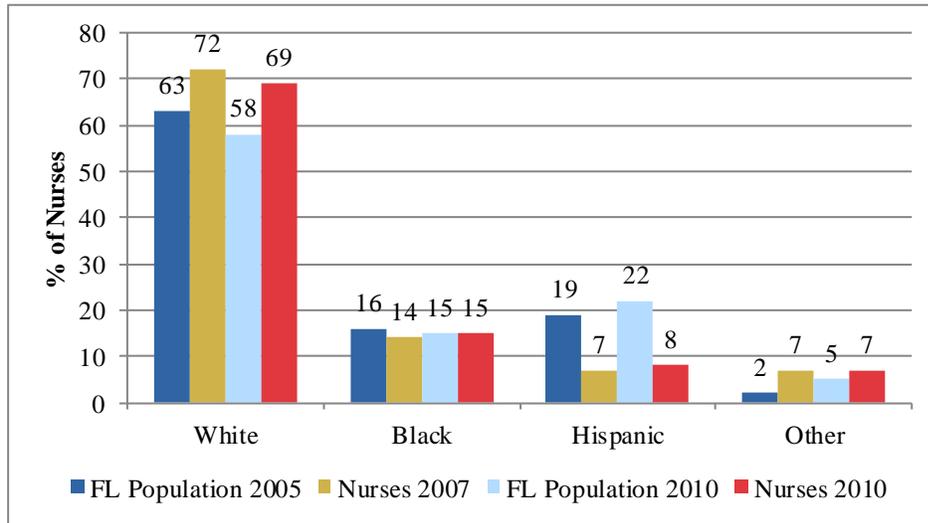
Conclusion

Figure 2. Race and Ethnicity Comparisons in the Nurse and Florida General Populations

Change in the race and ethnicity of an entire population occurs slowly. The Center produced a comparison between the nurse population and the Florida population in 2007.[11] Since this initial analysis, Florida's population of Whites has decreased by 5 percent, and the Hispanic population has increased by 3 percent. The percentage of White nurses has decreased three percent, while the percentages of Black and Hispanic nurses have each increased one percent. Trends indicate that over time the nurse population will become more heterogeneous as older nurses retire and new nurses join the profession. Cultural competence will become an even more valuable workforce asset, and the nurses of the future will be prepared to work with diverse patient populations.

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APPENDIX

Northwest Florida Region

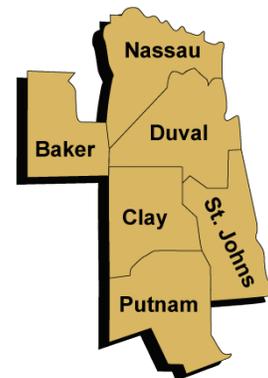| Race/Ethnicity	RNs	LPNs	ARNPs	Regional Population
White	89.8%	79.6%	93.5%	76%
Black	4.5%	15.0%	2.7%	14%
Hispanic	1.7%	1.6%	1.8%	5%
Asian	2.6%	2.2%	1.2%	2%
Other	1.3%	1.7%	0.8%	4%
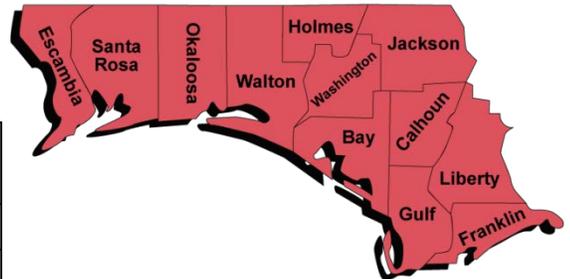
North Central Florida Region

Race/Ethnicity	RNs	LPNs	ARNPs	Regional Population
White	82.4%	72.0%	87.9%	70%
Black	8.8%	22.9%	6.4%	19%
Hispanic	3.0%	2.6%	2.2%	7%
Asian	4.5%	1.2%	2.5%	2%
Other	1.3%	1.3%	1.0%	2%

Northeast Florida Region

Race/Ethnicity	RNs	LPNs	ARNPs	Regional Population
White	76.3%	59.4%	88.8%	66%
Black	11.0%	31.4%	5.2%	21%
Hispanic	2.7%	2.8%	2.4%	7%
Asian	8.8%	4.9%	2.9%	3%
Other	1.2%	1.6%	0.7%	3%

East Central Florida Region

Race/Ethnicity	RNs	LPNs	ARNPs	Regional Population
White	74.1%	65.6%	83.7%	62%
Black	9.9%	23.1%	5.4%	13%
Hispanic	6.7%	7.1%	6.1%	19%
Asian	7.5%	2.2%	3.2%	3%
Other	1.8%	2.0%	1.6%	2%

West Central Florida Region

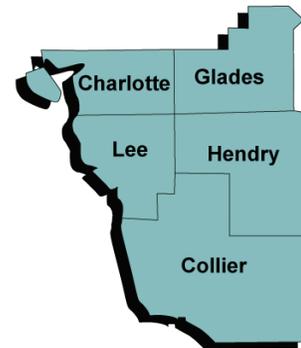| Race/Ethnicity	RNs	LPNs	ARNPs	Regional Population
White	82.2%	72.6%	87.8%	69%
Black	6.5%	17.6%	4.1%	11%
Hispanic	4.5%	5.9%	3.8%	16%
Asian	5.6%	2.2%	2.8%	2%
Other	1.2%	1.6%	1.5%	2%

Southeast Florida Region

Race/Ethnicity	RNs	LPNs	ARNPs	Regional Population
White	74.8%	51.9%	81.8%	63%
Black	13.1%	39.7%	9.5%	15%
Hispanic	4.6%	4.2%	4.3%	18%
Asian	6.1%	1.9%	2.9%	2%
Other	1.5%	2.4%	1.6%	2%

Southwest Florida Region

Race/Ethnicity	RNs	LPNs	ARNPs	Regional Population
White	86.7%	74.5%	89.8%	70%
Black	5.1%	15.8%	2.0%	7%
Hispanic	3.9%	7.0%	3.8%	20%
Asian	3.2%	1.3%	2.3%	1%
Other	1.1%	1.4%	2.0%	2%

South Florida Region

Race/Ethnicity	RNs	LPNs	ARNPs	Regional Population
White	38.9%	20.5%	51.2%	28%
Black	24.5%	51.4%	20.0%	20%
Hispanic	23.6%	22.7%	19.7%	48%
Asian	10.2%	2.5%	6.8%	2%
Other	2.9%	2.9%	2.3%	2%