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The lived experience of the Western Australian graduate registered nurse who is male

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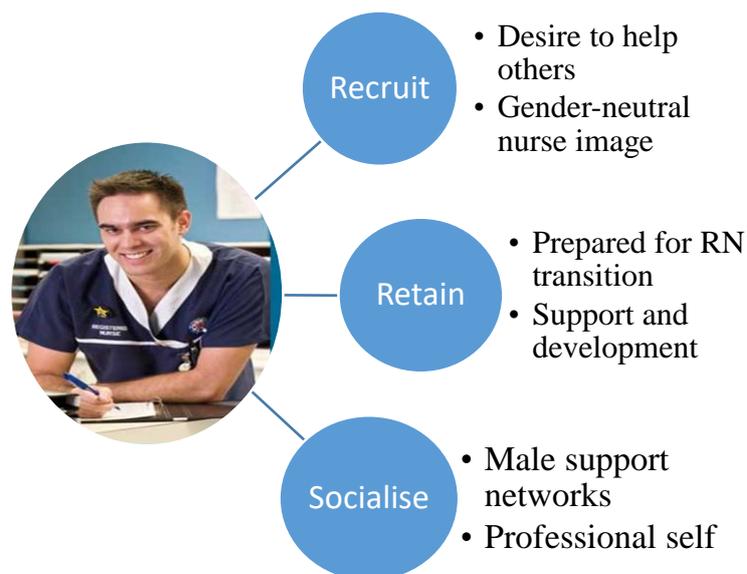
## Chapter 10. Implications and Recommendations

*“To do what nobody else will do, in a way that nobody else can, in spite of all we go through; is to be a nurse”*

*Rawsi Williams*

The study provided awareness into the lived experiences of the GRNMs who participated in this study. The study findings may inform human resource managers, nursing academia and senior nursing professionals around recruitment and retention and the socialisation requirements of this minority group within the female dominant nursing profession.

The recommendations from this study focused on recruitment and retention of men in nursing, and their socialisation into the nursing profession. These three areas require consideration and discussion by all within the nursing profession and especially the influential decision makers, in light of the looming nurse shortages that will impact on the nursing workforce.



**Figure 19** Recommendations from the study findings of the lived experience of a Western Australian GRNM

## 10.1 Implications

This study's findings contributed to existent literature of the long held impression that males are attracted to nursing for the same reason females are, the desire to help others. What this study brought to existing literature was that the promoting of nursing as a caring profession did not ignite interest for the majority of them as caring can be seen as effeminate. As such the GRNMs explicitly focused more on the helping aspect of nursing instead. These GRNMs believed that the desire to help is fundamental in nursing and in becoming a RN, especially as a professional helper.

The findings added to the existent body of literature in pertaining to the challenges men in nursing face and further provided an insight into the implications for professional practice and the engagement of second career men, although the findings cannot be widely generalised due to the methodological approach used in the study. The focus of the second career men who participated, in this case being the majority of the GRNMs, decision to enter nursing was that they were not fulfilled in their previous occupations; thus, they sought out nursing to pursue a meaningful and fulfilling career. The skills that they brought into nursing should not be downplayed in the usefulness that such skills can contribute in their workplace resilience, care provision, and work-related systems and decision-making processes.

The perception of the nurse as female impacts on the nuances that men in nursing constantly face and this cannot be underestimated. In fact, as the GRNMs in this study referred back to the nurse image throughout their interviews in multifaceted categories. These categories included regarding nurses as females, altering their male communication styles, and being constantly mindful of not being misunderstood by the manner in which they present to both female staff and patients alike. Hence there is a need to diversify the image of a nurse to a gender-neutral stance.

Amongst the highest proportions of nurses leaving the profession are those in their early career with males in this cohort twice more likely than the females to leave. It was apparent that orientation and induction into the professional practice environments for the majority of the GRNM participants' in this study was mainly ad hoc and inadequate as they were still left feeling overwhelmed and disillusioned

earlier in their GRN journey. Hence, it is imperative that new GRNs are equipped with the skillset that the health industry requires when they graduate to augment their transition into the health workforce.

Study findings further revealed that GRNMs participants, like those GNs before them, perceived that there was a requirement for them to ‘hit the ground running’ as fully functional RNs and that they were allocated complex patients requiring nursing care beyond their skill levels at the time. Thus indicated that the perceptions of unrealistic expectations of the GNs, regardless of gender, continues within the professional practice environment. With the nursing shortage looming it is in the best interest of those who influence the nursing workforce to consider how to engage the health industry in regards to having graduate nurse positions more readily available with the human resources needed to support these novices in practice.

The findings from this study gave credence to Duchscher’s (2007) Transition Stages Model of doing, knowing and being in the process of becoming a RN. In this study first year post graduation experiences being gender-neutral was articulated through the words of the GRNM study participants. The findings further supported Duchscher’s (2008) suggestion of the need to appropriately support the GRN during each of the three transition stages that relates to each stage unique requirements and challenges that the GRN faces. The GRNMs participants reported feeling unprepared for the responsibility and accountability of their new RN role and frustrated with the feeling of abandonment they initially had. Their depiction of the professional practice environments did not appear conducive to the support needs, both formal and informal, of these GRNM participants alongside a lack of recognition that these needs change as they transition during their first year.

Socialisation of men into nursing is complex and more attention to accommodate this cohort in nursing is warranted, especially in the area of communication. Orbe’s co-cultural communication theory aligned with study findings with the GRNM participant’s experiencing their need, as the minority group, to adjust their communication styles to reduce the disparities between the NMs and those who are female. The GRNMs felt that more could be done within the nursing profession to alleviate the misunderstanding of gender communication demeanours and to foster

better communication for the benefit of cohesive nursing teams to deliver more effective patient care.

## **10.2 Recommendations**

This study has contributed to advancing the knowledge related to what motivates men to enter nursing and their lived experience as NMs through to the end of their first GRN year. The following section makes recommendations for recruitment, retention and socialisation of men as RNs. These recommendations apply to education providers, industry and further research.

### **10.2.1 Recruitment**

The study highlighted the importance of the essence of helping, demonstrated by significant others such as family members and those close to men, particularly females; also nurses in action within the professional practice environment, in this case especially NMs, that drew these participating men into nursing. Moreover, participants highlighted that the professional behaviour of health professionals, particularly nurses, whether as significant others or nurses in practice are scrutinised by those around them. Participants behaviour, attributes and opinions appeared to influence those who come into contact with them and when viewed in a positive light has the potential to encourage others to take up nursing as a career.

Recruitment focuses on what draws men into nursing and what can be done to increase nursing as a career option for men. Therefore areas for consideration included; the essence of helping in relation to the professional helper as the mantra of a nurse, a gender-neutral nurse image, and second career men as potential nurses.

#### **10.2.1.1 Recommendation: The promotion of the nurse's role as the professional helper**

The promotion of the nurse's role in their demonstration of helping others to highlight their meaningful work in their everyday complex patient care environments is recommended. This is threefold:

- Promoting nursing as a helping career, especially when targeting men, is important as men observing nurses in action and knowing women who are nurses has identified that it is the 'helping factor' that draw men into nursing.

Moreover, when their observation was accompanied by the technical and complex decision making during patient care delivery, interest in a nursing career was further enhanced.

- Impress on practising nurses their advocacy role to promote nursing by portraying the helping profession element through their nursing actions as a positive, unique and highly skilled professional.
- The use of Holland's (1997) typology of personality theory for consideration when interviewing potential men for nursing careers as a selection strategy. This theory surfaced from the GRNM's narratives that indicated they were attracted to nursing because of their high empathetic traits and their altruism, along with a 'desire to help'. In addition, their sensitivity and support for equality, and their preferences toward technical specialties pinpointed the SAI classification for them that assimilated with personality traits of nurses.

#### **10.2.1.2 Recommendation: The promotion of a gender-neutral nurse image**

Promotion of nursing as a gender-neutral career was purported in order to accommodate gender diversity within the nursing workforce to meet the demands of diverse patient populations; in particular in regards to patient preferred gender sensitive care delivery. Approximately one in ten nurses are male therefore strategies to increase the visibility of men in nursing requires attention, this visibility has the potential to normalise the image of nursing as gender-neutral and thus to attract more men into nursing.

#### **10.2.1.3 Recommendation: Review of nursing titles within the profession**

The dislike for the term used 'male nurse' by the GRNM participants became evident with their preference to be called 'nurse' noted. They believe nursing should be a gender-neutral profession as both female and males who are nurses provide the same nursing care, undertake the same training, do the tasks with the same ultimate goal of delivering high quality nursing care that is culturally sensitive, and holistic with respect of the patient's preference. Hence, it was agreed that more attention was needed as to how men in nursing are addressed in the professional practice environment and the wider nursing profession.

#### **10.2.1.4 Recommendation: Target second career men as potential nurses**

The majority of men entering nursing currently are those from other careers. Although there is a push to target school aged males as potential nurses, the participants in this study felt this area requires further investigation. They believe it may not be in male school leavers' best interest until nursing becomes more gender equal due to the challenges men currently face in nursing. Hence, it is recommended that:

- It would be more appropriate to focus on second career males as the better option as a recruitment target.
- Universities are encouraged to find a greater gender balance within their teaching faculty.

#### **10.2.2 Retention**

The focus on the retention of GRNMs highlighted the importance of investigating how they transition into practice, in particular, what supports are needed to support them in the workplace. The GRNMs in this study emphasised issues around not being prepared for the professional practice environment, the importance of male role models and the need for a gender-neutral title. The study also emphasised the issue of co-cultural communication for men in nursing.

##### **10.2.2.1 Recommendation: Realistic anticipatory expectation of transition into the professional practice environment**

It became evident in this study that anticipatory expectations and actual socialisation of the GRNMs were not congruent and as such undergraduate nursing students (both male and female) need to be exposed to the realities of their transition into the professional practice environment. Duchscher's seminal work goes a long way in identifying the stages of transition and the unique challenges the new GRN will encounter and as such maybe beneficial in scenario based learning. Hence, it is suggested that academics, clinical supervisors and nurse leaders within industry consider:

- Commence discussions with undergraduate students in the academic setting and when on clinical practicum on the role and responsibility of a RN early in the undergraduate nurse program.

- Focus on professional transition in the third year of undergraduate nursing studies that outlines the reality of transition and the challenges within each of the transition stages they will face as new RNs. The use of scenario based learning promotes discussions on strategies to meet these challenges such as working within a team, leadership, and the art of delegation, and decision making in a collaborative inter-professional framework as a RN.
- Collaboration between academia and the health industry to review nurse orientation and induction programs. Investigate the possibility of reducing the gap between theory and practice as a RN, with shared information of what is needed in industry that can be provided or commenced by academia prior to the new GRNs entry into the professional practice environment.
- Education for nursing staff within the health industry of what skills and knowledge novice registered nurses bring into the professional practice environment and the support these nurses require to reach their full potential.

#### **10.2.2.2 Recommendation: Co-cultural communication inclusion**

Co-cultural communication issues for men in nursing was a recurrent theme for the participants of this study throughout their journey within the nursing profession. Alongside the cultural sensitivity and awareness programs that are wide spread within health, it is recommended that co-cultural communication be included.

- Review of local and health department policies on cultural competent communication and equal opportunity and diversity in regards to consideration of co-cultural communication inclusion within their descriptors.
- Education and awareness sessions on working within a diverse workforce to include co-cultural communication styles and behaviours of the minority group(s) within the dominant workforce gender.

#### **10.2.3 Socialisation of men as registered nurses**

In regards to the socialisation of men as RNs, the study findings revealed the value of male role models for men in nursing and both formal and informal support networks, and the co-communication issues they faced. In relation to professional self the GRNMs participants identified the qualities and skills of the authentic leader as those that they will incorporate into their leadership style as a RN.

### **10.2.3.1 Recommendation: Male role model and male support networks**

The influence of male faculty on the development of the NMs in the way they provide nursing care, their professional behaviour, and their RNM identity was demonstrated. This focused on the importance of male role models for NMs and was deemed by the GRNM participants to be essential in professional practice settings. They further emphasised the need for the establishment of male networks within nursing, both formal and informal, in academia and within the professional practice environment, as a resource and support for men in nursing to reduce the isolation and marginalisation that they felt at times.

### **10.2.3.2 Recommendation: Leadership education**

The study findings supported the importance of authentic leaders within the nursing workforce. Authentic leadership skills can be inherent in those who have a desire to help, however the skills can also be learnt. Hence this learning would be beneficial in the undergraduate curriculum in preparation for the GRN socialisation into the professional practice environment, as an element in graduate nurse programs and in continual professional development of nurses.

### **10.2.3.3 Recommendation: Further research**

It is recommended that further research be undertaken in regards to the socialisation of men in nursing. In doing so the unique challenges that men face when considering and entering the nursing profession can be investigated further to ensure this valuable human resource as a potential nursing workforce is not overlooked.

## **10.3 Conclusion**

New GRNMs face unique challenges when transitioning to the workforce in addition to those challenges that all new GRNs' face. These challenges occur long before men enter the profession. These include the typical image of nurse as female, the titles RNMs are given such as male nurse, men are seen as less caring and the gender stereotyping associated with men in nursing. All of which has the potential to inhibit men with the personal traits of the nurse from contemplating entering the profession.

When their strong desire to help others is ignited by the support of significant others, such as family members or from observing nurses in action, then these challenges come to the forefront. Their socialisation as they enter are influenced by the support afforded them and workplace cultures that they are exposed to. The importance of male role models both within academia and in the clinical setting cannot be underestimated. It is through these gender contacts that they learn how to deliver nursing care from a male's perspective, how to side step unprofessional behaviour and develop their co-cultural communication styles that are conducive to a collegial work environment.

Men as they continue their journey seek recognition of their worth as a registered nurse in their professional helper role and for their male aptitudes that enhance nursing as a cohesive gender-neutral highly skilled and unique profession. Their inclusion as part of a diverse nursing workforce that will meet the needs of a diverse population in an ever challenging complex health environment cannot be underestimated with the imminent nursing workforce sustainability issues looming.