Perceptions of Neonatal Nurse Practitioner Role Among NICU Nurses

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Purpose: The purpose of this project was to examine Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) nurses’ perceptions of the NNP role and barriers to entering the role.

Background: A shortage of neonatal nurse practitioners (NNPs) exists. Hiring NNPs from outside the current NICU staff has resulted in turnover and additional cost. If current nursing staff prepared as NNPs, the organization would benefit; yet few nurses have done so. Reasons that dissuade nurses from pursuing the NNP role have not been adequately examined. Knowing how nurses perceive the NNP role may help to decrease barriers and inform plans to address the problem.

Setting: Large level three NICU in a major academic medical center in the Mid-Atlantic.

Methods: A survey regarding NNP role perceptions, reasons for not pursuing the role, and factors that would encourage them to become a NNP, was distributed to all NICU nurses via electronic Survey Monkey and paper. Participation was voluntary and anonymous.

Result: 88% of the nurses responded, with 1% not having a response. Only 12% chose to pursue the role. Reasons for not preparing to be a NNP varied.

Impression of NNP role: 49% very positive, 36% positive, 13% somewhat positive, 2% somewhat negative.

Results:
- Response rate was 48% (N=54).
- More than half had considered the role.
  - 11/54 enrolled in graduate school
  - 1/11 enrolled in a NNP program
- Themes identified:
  - Happy to work with those in the role
  - Poor schedule for the NNP staff
  - Lack of time and money for school
  - Lack of understanding of school requirements
  - Fear of decreased salary or seniority
- Opinions expressed included that some NNPs make the role undesirable.

The one negative impression was noted in qualitative analysis to be of the use of the role not the role itself.

Conclusions: Despite generally positive regard for the NNP role, only one nurse was preparing to be a NNP. Reasons for not preparing to be a NNP varied. Results showed that the role is highly respected, but hours and compensation reduce its appeal. Misperceptions and opportunities for increased communication can inform staff education efforts. Efforts to engage staff in pursuit of higher education may need to begin earlier.