

# Challenges for Mature Nurses

## Background

The average age of the registered nurse (RN) in 2004 was estimated to be 46.8 years, up from 42.3 years in 1996 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Health Resources and Services Administration Bureau of Health Professions, 2004). The aging of the nursing workforce presents major challenges to hospitals, long-term care and outpatient facilities and other health care settings that already face unprecedented shortages of nurses (Center for American Nurses, 2005). The supply of RNs will decline at the same time the baby boomers are retiring and entering the Medicare program, increasing the demand for nursing services (Buerhaus et al., 2000).

## Mature Nurse Survey Results

An online survey of 3,342 nurses, conducted by the Center of American Nurses in 2003, found that:

- 82 percent of respondents plan to retire during the next 10–12 years.
- 60 percent of the nurses have done little to prepare for retirement.
- 56 percent of the nurses expressed job satisfaction.
- Reasons to leave: 56 percent of the nurses cited mental/emotional stress, 53 percent stated a shift from patient focus.
- Reasons to stay: 26 percent of the nurses named flexible scheduling, 20 percent mentioned part-time work/project work.

## Key Issues

- **Lack of financial literacy.** Many nurses lack the financial skills for preparing to leave the workforce.
- **Unsafe, inadequate ergonomic protections for nurses.** Nurses are at risk of incurring musculoskeletal disorder injuries in the workplace.
- **Brain drain from nursing.** There is a need to develop strategies for retaining mature nurses and for building collaborative, intergenerational work relationships.
- **Inadequate work environment design and technology.** There is a need to strengthen the effectiveness of interventions for improving organization and job design, reducing job stressors and creating a healthier work environment.
- **Lack of incentives for retaining mature nurses.**
- **Inadequate policies supporting the mature nurse** (Center for American Nurses, 2005).

## References

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