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## TIME TO PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE: EXPLORING PRE-NURSING STUDENTS' BELIEFS AND EXPECTATIONS ABOUT THE TRANSITION TO PRACTICE

Fiyinfoluwa Morenikeji

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TIME TO PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE: EXPLORING PRE-NURSING  
STUDENTS' BELIEFS AND EXPECTATIONS ABOUT  
THE TRANSITION TO PRACTICE

by

FIYINFOLUWA JOYCE MORENIKEJI

Presented to the Faculty of the Honors College of  
The University of Texas at Arlington in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

HONORS BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN NURSING

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT ARLINGTON

May 2019

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I am grateful to God for His mercies and favor throughout my research work and being able to complete my senior Honors thesis.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my mentor, Dr. Urban, for giving me the opportunity to work with her on this study and providing me invaluable guidance throughout my research. Her passion, understanding and patience deeply inspired me; she worked closely with me and encouraged me to present our findings at the Sigma Delta Theta Symposium. I am extremely grateful for this experience and the opportunity to work with her.

I would like to thank my family for their continual unwavering support throughout my academic career. Thank you for believing in me and my dreams and for all your sacrifices, I am truly grateful. Thank you for being my stronghold and my biggest cheerleaders; I hope I made you all proud.

April 12, 2019

## ABSTRACT

### TIME TO PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE: EXPLORING PRE-NURSING STUDENTS' BELIEFS AND EXPECTATIONS ABOUT THE TRANSITION TO PRACTICE

Fiyinfoluwa Joyce Morenikeji, B.S. Nursing

The University of Texas at Arlington, 2019

Faculty Mentor: Regina Urban

Upon entering the nursing practice, new graduate nurses (NGN) experience a knowledge and skills gap between their academic preparation and what they will encounter in a clinical practice. Nursing theorists and experienced nurses estimate it takes about 12 to 15 months of work-based experience before an NGN feels competent in their role as a Registered Nurse (Benner, 1982; Duchscher, 2008). Using an IRB-approved comparative descriptive research design, online and on-campus pre-nursing students at UTA were invited to complete an 18-question Likert-scale and short online survey. Participants provided demographic information and answered questions regarding their beliefs. Most pre-nursing students in this study did not have a realistic expectation of the length of time offered for training or the time needed to transition to professional practice as an NGN.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Research Aim

The purpose of this research study was to describe pre-nursing students' perceptions of the transition to professional practice that occurs in the first year of nursing.

#### 1.2 Introduction

According to Gallup polling (2017), the profession of nursing is ranked as the most trusted profession in the United States (US) for the 16<sup>th</sup> consecutive year in a row. In addition, the demand for nurses is growing in the US. Employment of registered nurses in the US is projected to grow 15% from 2016 to 2026, which is faster than the average growth projected for all occupations (Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, 2018). Growth within the field of nursing will be needed because of an increased focus on preventive care growing rates of obesity, heart failure, and other chronic conditions, and an aging population (Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, 2018). Schools and colleges of nursing are an essential pipeline for the creation of new graduate Registered Nurses who are crucial to supplying the current and future needs for nurses in the US.

To prepare to become a nurse, students are tasked with a heavy course load and clinical practicum experiences. They go through rigorous training and are held to a high level of standards. Nursing students work hard to be prepared and eligible to take the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX) after completing their four -year

degree. According to the national council of State Boards of nursing (2017), 157,720 (87.11%) candidates in the US passed the NCLEX on their first attempt. Once a newly graduated student passes the NCLEX exam, they are ready to begin employment as a Registered Nurse. This time period at the beginning of a nurses' career is often referred to as "transition to practice" and reflects the preparation to practice gap that exists between nursing education and professional practice (Hickerson, Taylor, & Terhaar, 2016). The transition from newly graduated nurse, who has passed the NCLEX and is ready to work, to being a competent and safe nurse, is estimated by most nursing researchers and theorists to take between 12 and 18 months (Benner, 1982; Duchscher, 2008).

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Background

There is a lot of research surrounding the issue of transition to practice in nursing. However, few studies have been published that explore nursing students' perceptions regarding transition to practice. Nursing students' perceptions on their transition to professional practice is important because perception goes a long way in influencing one's expectations, experience, and even the outcome of an event. The purpose of this chapter is to focus on nursing students and their perceptions of transition to practice. I reviewed existing information about nursing students' perceptions regarding the transition to professional practice and identified potential gaps in the literature. I concluded with an identification of the research problem and purpose.

#### 2.2 Review of Literature

As defined by Meleis and Trangenstein (1994), transition is the movement from one life stage, status, or condition to another. It is embedded in context and experience and may involve more than one person. Graduating from nursing school, and learning how to become a registered nurse is a major life transition. The transition from being a new graduate nurse (NGN) to a competent Registered Nurse, who can work without the supervision of a preceptor and provide safe and proficient care, has been the subject of nursing research for many decades and is estimated to take at least one year (Kramer, 1974; Benner, 1982; Duchscher, 2008). During the first year of practice, Duchscher (2008)

suggests that NGNs may have to progress through three different stages in the first 12 months of practice, which was described as doing, being, and knowing. These stages attempt to describe the transition to professional practice and the attainment of competence and confidence in one's role that occurs for new graduate nurses. This time of transition to practice for NGNs is characterized by developing increased nursing knowledge and clinical judgment and becoming competent in additional skills. Many NGNs describe the level of stress, anxiety, and responsibility they are faced with during the transition to practice period as extraordinary and overwhelming (McCalla-Graham & DeGagne, 2015).

NGNs who find it difficult to navigate their first year of practice may experience dissatisfaction with their job, employer, or even the field of nursing. NGNs who report feeling stressed emotionally, physically, and cognitively during the first year of practice may also report feeling low levels of job satisfaction. As a result, an NGN in their first nursing position may consider transferring to a different unit or leaving the job entirely (Kovner et al., 2016). Turnover, or leaving one's initial position or employer, is an important issue among NGNs. According to two recent multi-site studies, the turnover rate for NGNs in the first year of practice is estimated to be between 12 and 25% (Spector et al., 2015; Kovner, Brewer, Fatehi, & June, 2014).

Students make the choice to become nurses for many reasons. They may choose a career in nursing because they are surrounded by family members in the health fields who serve as role models. These family members often share stories and perceptions of nursing, which encourage and motivate the student nurse (McLaughlin, Moutray, & Moore, 2010). A reason often mentioned why students want to study nursing is because they have a strong desire to care for people. These students may have had previous experiences taking care

of their family, friends, or working in hospital settings, so they believe the exposure gives them a glimpse into nursing. Some students are drawn to nursing because it can provide job security and financial independence. In addition, a growing population of students are interested in science and technological advancement, and working in nursing provides that opportunity (McLaughlin et al., 2010).

Students learn about nursing through classroom and clinical experiences that are designed to prepare them to work as Registered Nurses. Nursing students, who are early in their program of study, may have different expectations of what it will take to become a competent and safe nurse than students closer to the end of their program of study. Nursing school curricula aim to familiarize nursing students with the realities of nursing and prepare them for safe practice and appropriate patient-centered care. Thus, their classroom and clinical experiences will influence and shape students' perceptions of what it will mean to be a nurse (Vaismoradi, Bondas, Jasper, & Turunen, 2014).

Participating in nursing school clinical experiences provides the nursing student a glimpse into what life as a nurse might be like. Practice in providing patient care through clinical experiences complements the theoretical side of nursing learned in the classroom and the students are brought one step closer to understanding the reality of nursing. First patient care experiences of pre-nursing students can be a determining factor of their perception of nursing as a professional role. The first experiences in patient care are often eye-opening for students, because they are no longer practicing in the skills labs or through simulation experiences but instead, they are dealing with real life patients. Providing care for patients helps students to connect the dots of what was taught in class with "real life patient care." Although it can be intimidating, this is where some students realize that

nursing may not be the best career for them. However, for other students who had negative experiences, one positive patient experience could be the determining factor to influence their perceptions about nursing (Pearcey & Draper, 2008).

Only a few studies specifically explore nursing students' perceptions about the transition to practice that occurs in the first year of nursing. The perceptions of nursing students regarding the first year of practice are important to the transition process. Doody, Tuohy, and Deasy (2012) asked students about their expectations regarding being prepared for their role as a nurse. In this context, being prepared included managing assigned patient and workload, having time management skills, developing interpersonal skills and awareness of ethical situations, and providing health education to patients. Many students reported feeling confident in their clinical abilities, but fewer of them reported feeling confident in their level of knowledge (39%) and 61% reported anticipating some level of "problems" with the transition.

Using semi-structured interview questions, Andrews (2013) explored the expectations of 14 senior "millennial" students as they prepared for graduation. All of the students verbalized an expectation that the transition would be a stressful experience, which was influenced by feelings of self-doubt and anxiety about making independent decisions. They reported an expectation that they would receive support to continue learning through participation in an orientation program. Saber and colleagues (2015) identified four major concerns of senior nursing students regarding their transition to practice. In focused interviews, students reported that they anticipated feeling stressed in their transition to practice because of their need to improve their clinical and time management skills. Students in this study also identified concerns regarding their exposure to infections, the

potential for workplace violence, and the impact that the transition to practice would have on their personal lives.

Although a great deal of research explores the experiences of NGNs during their transition to practice year, there is little research on nursing students' perceptions of transition to practice. This is important because the perception of nursing students about their future nursing experiences can either have a positive or negative impact on the reality of their first year of professional practice. No research has been done with pre-nursing students that focuses specifically on their perception of the time it takes to become comfortable, confident, and competent to perform the average day-to-day tasks that are expected of them in their job. Therefore, the purpose of this research study was to describe pre-nursing students' perceptions of the time it takes to complete the transition to professional practice that occurs in the first year of nursing.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Research Design

The aim of this research study was to describe pre-nursing students' perceptions of the transition to professional practice that occurs in the first year of nursing. This study utilized a quantitative descriptive research design. Since few studies have been published about the perception of nursing students on the transition to practice that occurs in their first year of nursing experience, a quantitative descriptive approach was an appropriate research design to utilize for this study. Permission was sought from Mrs. Deborah Hughes and Dr. Regina Urban, University of Texas at Arlington faculty, for permission to recruit participants for the study from their respective pathophysiology courses. An application to the UT Arlington's Institutional Review Board was made to seek approval to conduct this research study.

This study was conducted at a large public university with a college of nursing that offers a baccalaureate program in the southwest United States. All pre-nursing students who were enrolled in the undergraduate nursing pathophysiology course offered in face-to-face formats or through the accelerated online program in the Spring 2019 semester were eligible to participate. Pathophysiology students who were excluded from the study were those students who were under the age of 18, and those students who were already Registered Nurses (RNs), Licensed Vocational Nurses (LVNs), or Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) / Paramedics. It was assumed that students with this kind of



background working in healthcare (RNs, LVNs, EMTs) would have a different perception of the transition to professional practice based on their work experiences than students who have not worked in these higher-level health care positions. This study was limited to exploring the beliefs of nursing students regarding the time it takes to transition to practice. Students who were pursuing other healthcare related degrees were excluded from this study.

### *3.1.1 Participants*

Participants for this study were recruited during face-to-face lecture class or via announcements and emails in the online courses. They were informed about the purpose of the study and its potential risks and benefits to them as a participant. Participation in this study was not required for course completion and students could opt out of participation at any time. Students who chose to participate in the study were assigned a participant number by the researchers to preserve their anonymity and were provided with an electronic link to the study's questionnaire so that it could be completed online. Participant responses to the questionnaire were kept in a password-protected program (i.e. Qualtrics and in an excel spreadsheet on a university computer) and only the researchers had access to this data.

Study questions (Appendix A) were comprised of demographic questions, multiple choice questions, and open-ended response questions. Demographic data collected included the participants' age, gender, race/ethnicity, current level in nursing school, previous degree in another field, recent job in the health care field, and the presence of family or friends who are currently working in healthcare. Additional study questions asked participants their opinions regarding how long they thought the transition to practice takes, how long the average hospital's orientation for newly graduated nurses might be, and how

confident they may feel about their on-the job training preparing them for their role. They were asked about which persons or what experiences influenced their perceptions about transition to practice. Statistical analysis of participant demographics and answers to survey questions was conducted using Statistical Program for the Social Science (IBM SPSS 25). Data from open-ended or short answer questions were used to illustrate the findings obtained from the participants.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

#### 4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the results of the data analysis from this research study on pre nursing students' perceptions regarding the transition to practice that occurs in the first year of nursing. A description of the sample's characteristics was provided. Four major research questions were identified, and the results derived from the survey data of the sample were explained.

##### *4.1.1 Demographic Characteristics*

The final sample for this study consisted of 176 pre-nursing students, of which 97 were classified as on-campus students and 79 were classified as online students. Table 1 describes the demographic characteristics of online and on-campus students. When compared to their on-campus counterparts, online students were significantly more likely to be older (33 years old vs. 21 years old,  $p < .001$ ) and to report having earned a previous degree (68.4% vs. 10.3%,  $p < .001$ ). Online students were also significantly more likely to report working in a health-care related position during the last 12 months (45% vs. 11%,  $p < .001$ ) and having a close family member or friend working as an RN (58% vs 22%,  $p < .001$ ). There was no significant difference in gender or the frequency in which each group reported working in non-healthcare environment.

Table 4.1: Demographic Characteristics of Pre-Nursing Students

$\bar{X}$ (SD)	Online (N = 79)	On-campus (N = 97)	Total (N = 176)	<i>P</i>
Age,	33 (8.6)	21 (4.8)	26.8 (8.7)	<i>p</i> < .001
Male, N (%)	11 (13.9%)	11 (11.3%)	22 (7.2%)	<i>p</i> = .243
Ethnicity, N (%) *				<i>p</i> < .001
White	37 (46.8%)	22 (22.7%)	59 (33.5%)	
Black/African-American	20 (25.3%)	15 (15.5%)	35 (19.9%)	
Hispanic/Latino	13 (16.5%)	24 (24.7%)	37 (21%)	
Asian	5 (6.3%)	23 (23.7%)	28 (15.9%)	
Prior Degree = Yes, N (%)	54 (68.4%)	10 (10.3%)	64 (36.4%)	<i>p</i> < .001
Health care volunteer = Yes, N (%)	12 (15.2%)	4 (4.1%)	16 (9.1%)	<i>p</i> < .001
Health care job = Yes, N (%)	36 (45.6%)	11 (11.3%)	47 (26.7%)	<i>p</i> < .001
Non-healthcare job = Yes, N (%)	25 (31.6%)	28 (28.9%)	53 (30.1%)	<i>p</i> = .913
Family / Close friend RN = Yes, N (%)	46 (58.2%)	22 (22.7%)	66 (38.6%)	<i>p</i> < .001

#### 4.1.2 Research Question 1

What are the differences between on campus and online pre-nursing students' beliefs about the time that is needed to transition to practice and become a "real nurse?"

Experienced nurses and nursing theorists estimate that it takes approximately one year of experience before new nurses report feeling like a "real nurse" or comfortable, confident, and competent to perform the average day-to-day tasks that are expected of them in their job. In this sample, 43% of online students and 68% of on-campus students expected that they would feel like "real nurses" within *six months of experience or less*.

When asked why they believed that length of time would be needed to achieve competency as a real nurse, participants offered a variety of answers. An online student who believed only three months would be needed to achieve competence as a nurse stated: “I have to pass the NCLEX then I will consider myself as a 'real nurse'.” Another online student explained, “I think that it takes at least 6 months to become a "real nurse" and that you really learn what you need to know in nursing school.” Additionally, in the on-campus group, when students had no prior undergraduate or graduate degrees, then they were significantly more likely to believe that a shorter amount of time would be needed to achieve professional competency ( $r_s = .293, p < .001$ ).

In this sample, only 20% of online and 9% of on-campus students reported that they would feel like a real nurse after 12 months of experience. In the online pre-nursing student group, a history of working in a paid non-healthcare ( $r_s = .218, p < .001$ ) or healthcare related position in the last 12 months ( $r_s = -.142, p = .034$ ) was significantly associated with the belief that a longer amount of time would be needed to achieve professional competency. An online student who had a more realistic view of the time needed to transition to nursing practice indicated:

There are so many variables in dealing with and managing a patient(s). Once I think I am settled in, something will occur, and that uncomfortable feeling will be gone. It can take years for a doctor to feel comfortable, why would it be any different for a nurse? There is a reason that it is called the practice of medicine or the practice of law. A person may feel comfortable, confident, and competent but there is always going to be something that will give you pause.

A Mann-Whitney U test revealed that a statistically significant difference exists between on campus and online students with respect to the amount of time needed to become a “real nurse,” with on-campus students reporting that it would take a shorter amount of time to become competent in their role as a nurse than did the online students ( $z = -3.77, p < .001$ ).

#### *4.1.3 Research Question 2*

What are the differences between on campus and online pre-nursing students’ beliefs about the amount of training time that is offered to them by their first employer?

In the literature the length of active formal training in which a new graduate is paired with an experienced nurse generally averages 12-18 weeks. The length of time received depends on the acuity level of the patients treated on that unit and if it is considered to be a specialty area of nursing. Specialty areas, such as the Emergency Department or the Operating Room may offer training for up to 26 weeks. After this time, NGNs are expected to work independently with an assigned patient load that is equal to other experienced nurses.

In this sample, 11.5% of online students and 44.3% of on-campus students expected to receive formal training time beyond 26 weeks – which is not consistent with current practice. A Mann-Whitney U test revealed that off-campus pre-nursing students statistically may have a more accurate understanding of the shorter training times being offered to new graduate nurses than on-campus pre-nursing students ( $z = -3.91, p < .001$ ). On-campus students with no history of working in a paid non-healthcare related position were significantly more likely to believe that they would receive a longer training time as NGNs ( $r_s = .294, p < .001$ ).

#### *4.1.4 Research Question 3*

What are the differences between on campus and online pre-nursing students' beliefs regarding the likelihood of working in their first choice of unit or specialty upon graduation?

In nursing, new graduates do not always have the opportunity to work in what they would consider to be their “first choice” of unit or specialty. Most of the participants in this study believed that they would be somewhat or very likely to work in a unit that was their first choice after graduation: on-campus (62%) and online (79.7%). Approximately half of on-campus (50.5%) and online students (55.7%) reported believing that their transition to practice would be shorter because they were working in their first choice of unit or specialty area. An online student supported this belief, stating: “A career in nursing is centered around care, compassion, and passion. If receiving a position in the specific area that a student is passionate about, I believe it makes the transition easier.” Another on-campus student explained: “I would be more enthusiastic and eager to explore the concepts of my first choice and not being able to work in my first choice would be a bit disappointing.”

Other participants described a different viewpoint regarding the area in which they would work after graduation. They focused on the amount to learn once you are on the job and the time needed to gain experience as being more important than the unit you are working on. As one online participant described: “I feel that regardless of whether you work on your unit of choice or not, you still have a lot to learn as a new nurse immediately out of nursing school.” Another on-campus student observed:

I think working in my first choice of hospital unit after graduation will have no difference in my transition to becoming a real nurse because I believe that no matter how interest you are in your choice, there are still multiple aspects of the job you have to learn and understand through time and experience.

And for some students, they are willing to go with the flow and accept what comes their way, as this online student described:

I do not think that working in the unit of my choice will make becoming a real nurse any easier. Regardless of where I begin my nursing career, I feel that the transition will be somewhat difficult, nerve wracking, and satisfying all at once. Becoming a real nurse will mean the patients are in my hands and I feel that, that will feel the same on any unit.

#### *4.1.5 Research Question 4*

What is the relationship among having an RN as a family member or close friend and / or having a job in a healthcare setting and pre-nursing students' beliefs about time to competency and the amount of time given for on the job training?

Having a friend or close family member as a nurse and working in a healthcare related job is associated with the transition to practice beliefs of pre-nursing students. A Spearman's rank-order correlation was run to determine the relationship among pre-nursing students' having a friend or close family member as a nurse, working in a healthcare related job in the last 12 months, estimation of the time needed to achieve competence and estimation of the amount of time given for on-the job training. Having an RN as a family member or close friend ( $r_s = .253, p < .001$ ) and to have worked in a healthcare related position in the last 12 months ( $r_s = .277, p < .001$ ) was significantly associated with



judgments of more time needed in order to become competent in their role. From RNs, these pre nursing students learn advice about the world of nursing, such as: “Expect to not know everything immediately out of nursing school and expect to continuously review and add in to previous information learned in nursing school” (Participant quote, 2019)

If a pre-nursing student had worked in a healthcare related position within the last 12 months, they were also significantly more likely to report that less time would be given for on the job training ( $r_s = -.129, p < .01$ ). There was no significant relationship between having an RN as a family member or close friend and pre-nursing students’ beliefs regarding the amount of time they would receive on the job training. Several participants shared additional insights from Registered Nurse friends or family members regarding training. One online participant indicated: “Most facilities are willing and able to assist new nurses and are patient with new nurses. Most older nurses are great mentors and teachers to continue to learn from.”

The results of this study demonstrated a significant difference between pre-nursing on-campus and online students’ perception of the time needed to become a competent nurse and of the time offered in training to new nurses. Also, the majority of pre-nursing students in this sample believed they would be somewhat or very likely to work in their first choice of unit after graduation. It is concerning that the expectations of pre-nursing students in these areas do not line up with the reality of what NGNs face when entering the workforce.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

The perceptions of pre-nursing students regarding transition to practice are important to understand. In this study, three research questions were asked in order to describe the perceptions of pre-nursing students: time needed to achieve competence, the length of training time they believed would be offered by employers, and how likely they felt it would be that they would work in their first choice of unit after graduation. This chapter's purpose is to provide additional information about these beliefs and discuss the clinical significance of these findings. Also, this chapter reviews the limitations of the study and makes recommendations for future research.

In this sample, 68% of on-campus students and 43% of online students stated that they would feel like “real nurses” with *six months of experience or less*. These beliefs are not consistent with the evidence. Nursing theorists have suggested that it takes approximately one year of experience before nurses report feeling like a “real nurse” or comfortable, confident, and competent to perform the average day-to-day tasks that are expected of them in their job (Benner, 1982; Duchscher, 2008). This amount of time needed to achieve competence is also reported by experienced nurses (Hickerson, Taylor, & Terhaar, 2016). In this study, online pre-nursing students were significantly more likely to report needing a longer time to transition to practice than on-campus students. Pre-nursing students with current experience working in a healthcare environment or who have

a family member or close friend as an RN were also significantly more likely to report that a longer amount of time would be needed to transition to practice.

The length of formal training where an NGN is actively paired with a nurse preceptor is not standardized in the U.S. The length of time NGNs are given depends on the level of acuity of the patients and their individual differences in learning new skills and knowledge with the preceptor (Letourneau & Fater, 2015; Spector et al., 2015). Generally, NGNs average 12-18 weeks of active precepted time, but specialty areas, such as the Emergency Department or Surgical Services may offer training for up to 26 weeks. After this time, new graduate nurses are working independently. In this sample, off-campus pre-nursing students were significantly more likely to report shorter training times being offered to new graduate nurses than their on-campus counterparts. In contrast, 11.5% of online students versus 44.3% of on-campus students reported that they expected to receive formal training time beyond 26 weeks.

As nursing students near graduation, they are typically also applying for their first jobs as an RN. Nursing students are encouraged by nursing instructors to consider applying for several different areas in acute care nursing to ensure that they can obtain a position that is of interest to them. If they do not obtain employment in an area of their first choice, they are encouraged to work in the position they have obtained for at least two years before applying for a transfer. Most pre-nursing students in this sample believed that they would be somewhat or very likely to work in a unit that was their first choice after graduation: on-campus (62%) and online (79.7%). Approximately half of the on-campus (50.5%) and online students (55.7%) reported that they believed that their transition to practice would actually be shorter because they were working in their first choice of specialty or unit. The

current reality in acute care is that NGNs often do not get to work in their first choice of unit. Even if new graduates are privileged to work in their first choice of unit, no evidence exists that obtaining your first choice of unit for employment will shorten the transition time period.

No studies have been previously published that explore these transitions to practice expectations of nursing students. In this sample, a lack of knowledge existed among pre-nursing students about the time needed to achieve professional competence, the length of formal training that will be offered to them, and the potential for not being able to work in your “first choice” of nursing specialty or unit for your first employment setting as an RN. It is important to understand the beliefs of pre-nursing students regarding transition to practice. If the expectations of pre-nursing students do not line up with reality, cognitive dissonance is likely to occur.

Cognitive dissonance is an inner conflict which occurs when one’s beliefs or expectations about an event are not congruent with an external reality (McLeod, 2018). If students’ expectations about transition to practice do not match with the reality of what is occurring, they are likely to think they are at fault or that something is wrong with them because they are not progressing smoothly through their transition. They may also reach an alternate conclusion that something is wrong with their employment environment that is causing their transition to be more difficult. Either of these conclusions could contribute to the NGN choosing to seek employment on another unit or with another employer, which is also known as turnover (Lin, Viscardi, & McHugh, 2014).

### 5.1 Study Limitations

This research has some limitations to consider. Sampling includes a list of characteristics essential for eligibility or membership in a target population (Burns & Grove, 2015). Participants in this study were recruited from only one baccalaureate program in the southeastern United States using convenience sampling techniques. Therefore, the results may not be representative of nursing student perceptions elsewhere in the U.S. A multi-site study focused on students in associate and baccalaureate degree programs across the U.S. may have yielded different results. Another limitation to consider is that students at various levels and different tracks within the program were not asked to participate in this study. A sample that includes nursing students in each undergraduate semester would provide an opportunity to obtain a more diverse outlook on nursing students' perceptions of these transition to practice issues and to track potential changes in their perceptions across semesters.

### 5.2 Recommendations

This research study illustrates selected pre-nursing students' beliefs on the time to complete the transition to professional practice that occurs in their first year of nursing. It is recommended future research focus on assessing students at each semester of the nursing program to determine current transition to practice knowledge and beliefs. Also, it is recommended that undergraduate academic nurse educators be surveyed to assess what formal transition-to-practice information is intentionally shared with nursing students in their courses. This information would provide a baseline of what is currently being taught about transition to practice so that an evidence-based curriculum can be developed to teach all components of transition to practice. The provision and reinforcement of information

regarding transition to practice may help students to adjust their expectations to be more in line with the current reality of nursing practice before they start in their first position as an RN.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

The first year of practice as an RN is recognized as an intense transition of personal and professional growth to becoming a “real nurse” or comfortable, confident, and competent to perform the average day-to-day tasks that are expected of them in their job. As demonstrated in this study, most pre-nursing students lack an understanding of the time needed and the training offered to transition to practice. In addition, they may have unreasonable expectations regarding working in their first choice of employment setting and its influence on transition to practice. It is clear that additional research is needed in this area in order to better understand the beliefs of nursing students regarding transition to practice and to design interventions to assist them.

APPENDIX A  
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS



*Demographic Questions*

1. Are you licensed as a Registered Nurse (RN), Licensed Vocational Nurse (LVN), or Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) or paramedic?

- a. No
- b. Yes

If yes. Exclusion criteria. The survey ends here.

2. Are you 18 years old or older?

- a. No
- b. Yes

If no. Exclusion criteria. The survey ends here.

3. How old are you?

4. Which gender are you:

- a. M
- b. F
- c. Other category not listed
- d. Prefer not to answer

5. Which one of these best describes your race / ethnicity?

- a. Caucasian
- b. African-American
- c. Hispanic / Latino
- d. Asian
- f. Other category not listed

6. Which one of these best describes your current level in nursing school:

- a. pre-nursing
- b. senior I

7. As a nursing student, which of these best describes your current nursing program:

- a. mostly online and off campus BSN program
- b. the traditional on-campus BSN program

8. Do you have a previous degree in another field?

- a. No
- b. Yes

If yes, list the degree(s) here: \_\_\_\_\_

How many years have you worked using this degree? \_\_\_\_\_

9. During the past 12 months have you worked in a healthcare related job or position as a volunteer?

- a. No
- b. Yes

If so, what volunteer health care positions have you / did you work in?

10. During the past 12 months, have you worked in a healthcare related job or position for paid wages?

- a. No
- b. Yes

If so, what paid health care positions have you / did you work in?

11. During the past 12 months have you worked in a *non-healthcare* related job or position for paid wages?

- a. No
- b. Yes

If so, what paid non-healthcare positions have you / did you work in?

12. Do you have a close family member or friend who is working as a Registered Nurse?

- a. No
- b. Yes

### *Transition Questions*

1. After you graduate from nursing school and have started your first job as a nurse, how long (in months) do you think it will take for you to become a “real nurse”?

*A “real nurse” means that you are comfortable, confident, and competent to perform the average day-to-day tasks that are expected of you in your job. You are able to recognize when a patient is getting worse and you have an idea of how to manage your patient and / or ask for help appropriately.*

- a. 3 months
- b. 6 months
- c. 9 months
- d. 12 months
- e. 15 months
- f. more than 15 months

2. Short answer: Why do you think it will take that length of time to become a “real nurse”?

3. How long (in months) do you think the average hospital gives to a newly graduated nursing student for formal on-the job training time?
- 3 months
  - 6 months
  - 9 months
  - 12 months
  - 15 months
  - more than 15 months

4. Short answer: After you graduate from nursing school and have started your first job as a nurse, do you think that you will feel like a “real nurse” at the end of your on-the-job training, or that it will occur at some point in the future? Why do you think so?

*A “real nurse” means that you are comfortable, confident, and competent to perform the average day-to-day tasks that are expected of you in your job. You are able to recognize when a patient is getting worse and you have an idea of how to manage your patient and / or ask for help appropriately.*

5. Has anyone ever taught you (or told you) about the transition that occurs after you graduate from nursing school and begin professional practice as a registered nurse?
- No
  - Yes (If answered positively...the next two questions will be asked)
5. a If so, who talked to you about (or taught you) this information?
5. b What do you remember them telling you / teaching you to expect?

6. How likely is it that you will be able to work in a unit of the hospital that will be your first choice (or the area that you think you most want to work in)?
- very likely
  - somewhat likely
  - somewhat unlikely
  - very unlikely
  - I really don't know / I have no opinion.

7. Do you think that working in your “first choice” of hospital unit after graduation will...
- make the transition to becoming a real nurse shorter?
  - make the transition to becoming a real nurse more longer?
  - make no difference in the transition to becoming a real nurse?

8. Short Answer: Why do you think working in your first choice of hospital unit after graduation will have this effect on your transition to becoming a real nurse?

APPENDIX B  
RECRUITMENT LETTER

Dear Pathophysiology Students,

We are requesting your participation in a UT Arlington research study titled, “Time to professional competence: Understanding the beliefs and expectations of nursing students.” The aim of this study is to describe nursing students’ perceptions of the time needed to complete the transition to professional practice that occurs in the first year of nursing. Students who are interested in participating are asked to complete an online survey by clicking on the link below.

Completing the 18-question survey should take no more than 5 to 10 minutes. This survey has multiple choice and short answer questions. There are no perceived risks or direct benefits for participating in this study. No course credit or extra credit will be offered for your participation. There are no alternatives to this research project, and you may choose to quit at any time while taking the survey. You must be at least 18 years old to participate.

Any identifiable information will be kept confidential with access limited to the research team. We may publish, present, or share the results, but your name will not be used.

To participate in this study, please click on this link:

[https://uta.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_bfU0dbkQUkcy0mN](https://uta.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_bfU0dbkQUkcy0mN)

For additional information, please contact us at:

Regina Urban, PhD, RN-BC, CCRN, CNE

Principal Investigator / Clinical Assistant Professor

College of Nursing and Health Innovation, University of Texas at Arlington

Contact Phone: 817.272.2776. Email: rurban@uta.edu

Joyce Morenikeji

Co-Investigator and Senior Honors Student, College of Nursing and Health Innovation

University of Texas at Arlington

Contact Phone: 832.552.3878. Email: fiyin.morenikeji@mavs.uta.edu

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## BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Fiyinfoluwa Joyce Morenikeji was born in Lagos, Nigeria to Dr. Deji and Bunmi Morenikeji and lived there until the age of 17, when she moved to Texas. She decided to pursue a degree in nursing at the University of Texas at Arlington. During her first semester she was introduced to the Honors College and was provided the opportunity to complete undergraduate research.

Being a member of the Honors College, Joyce had the privilege to work hand in hand and closely with professors whose classes she contracted. One of the first classes she contracted was pathophysiology and this was coordinated by Dr. Regina Urban who eventually became her mentor. Dr. Urban informed Joyce about a study she was conducting on pre-nursing students' expectations about time to competency. Joyce researched the topic and was intrigued because of the potential for cognitive dissonance when the reality of nursing does not match up with expectations of the NGN and how this in turn can affect the NGNs' mental health. She could relate to this topic because she was about to graduate and had little to no knowledge about time to competency, so she decided to learn about other people's beliefs on time to professional competency. Dr. Urban agreed to be Joyce's mentor for her Senior Project and through her Honors senior research, she was able to gain knowledge about pre-nursing students' beliefs and expectations about the transition to practice.

Joyce is grateful to the Honors College for providing her with the amazing opportunity to conduct an undergraduate thesis.