

Graduate Entry Nursing Education: An Untapped Resource for the Future Nursing Workforce?

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Background

Although existing in the USA for many years, graduate entry programs are still in their infancy in Australia. These programs offer masters level preparation for graduates from non-nursing disciplines to enter beginning practice as registered nurses.

In 2009, Monash University took its first intake of graduate entry students into a four semester accelerated program offered over 18 months. An evaluative research project was developed to explore characteristics of this particular cohort and to influence further course development.

Method

A mixed methods approach was employed to explore various characteristics of the first five cohorts.

Finally, it sought to explore students' initial perspectives on nursing and where they envisaged the course would take them.

Findings

Demographic data indicates:

- Students come from a vast array of professional backgrounds
- a higher male gender balance than in traditional undergraduate programs.

Previous Discipline	%
Science	36.9
Business	13.1
Arts, music, theology	9.5
Health science/ health promotion	6.5
Psychology	6.0
Education	3.6
Law	3.6
Information Technology	3.0
Medicine	3.0
Complementary & alternative medicine	3.0
Paramedic	2.4
Pharmacy	1.8
Dentistry	1.2
Social work	1.2
Physiotherapy	1.2
Tourism, international development	0.6
Engineering	0.6
Nutrition	0.6
Disability	0.6
Veterinary science	0.6

Gender	%
Female	70%
Male	30%

Reasons students entered nursing were consistently associated with:

- Having personal or family experience within the health care system
- Flexibility within the nursing workforce
- Unemployment or dissatisfaction with current work.

Conclusions

The course has attracted a broad range of professionals. It has potential to make unique contribution to the nursing workforce.

Graduate entry programs allow access to nursing for individuals who might not otherwise enter the profession and provide another means for addressing workforce shortages.

Reference

McKenna, L. & Vanderheide, R. (2012) Graduate entry to practice in nursing: exploring demographic characteristics of commencing students, *Australian Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 29(3), 49-55.