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Appreciation, Please

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NEVER SAY "APPLIANCE NURSE" AGAIN
An Editorial Comment

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In addition to working as a full time nurse educator, I work one shift per week as a staff nurse in a local hospital. Though I work this part-time job for many reasons, i.e., the enjoyment of providing patient care, to maintain my bedside nursing skills, as a mentor for my students, and because of the research opportunities available at the facility, there is no doubt that another reason for working the job is to make the car payment.

At a Sigma Theta Tau conference I was introduced to the term "appliance nurse". I had not heard the term before, but I quickly came to understand that it referred, not kindly, to the nurse who works to pay the bills or to "pay for an appliance". I was surprised by my own feelings about this term. I thought, "That describes me. Is it wrong or unprofessional or inappropriate for me to work to pay the bills?"

The incident has made me think about the reasons that professional nurses work. I think there are many reasons; including the ones I have listed above for myself. I think there is no question in my mind that providing for and protecting oneself and one's family financially is a major reason. I believe that some nurses who may be initially motivated to work for financial reimbursement or for a short period of time to pay off a personal or family debt, are some of the finest nurses in the profession. What difference does it make why they come to work, if they come and perform in an outstanding manner, providing high quality nursing care to patients and clients who desperately need that care. Because they provide high quality care to patients, as their peers, we should be appreciative of their assistance for as long as they can stay. We should encourage them to be involved in research, continuing education, and teaching by providing opportunities for those who wish them. We should wish them well when they leave us to pursue other endeavors. We should encourage them to return as soon as they are able to do so. Perhaps, as professional nurses, we can find it in ourselves to never use the term "appliance nurse" again.
The "Appliance Nurse" Phenomenon
Understanding Why Professional Nurses Work

INTRODUCTION

In 1979 Lucie Young Kelly defined the "appliance nurse" as ".. one who works only long enough to pay for a new household appliance." Though the term is scarcely used in the literature, its meaning seems to be understood by nurses using it in conversation. In a brief survey of this researcher's colleagues, it was understood that appliance nurses are those who work episodically and usually for a short period of time until they earn enough money to pay off a debt or to take care of personal or family desires or needs. It has been applied to nurses who are not actively involved in nursing scholarship activities, such as nursing research.

The term "appliance nurse" is not used as a positive description of nurses. It appears to imply that working for financial reimbursement is not an appropriate motivation for a professional nurse. It makes one think about the reasons that nurses do become actively employed. Do they work for completely altruistic reasons, i.e., service to fellowmen, maintenance of bedside skills, opportunity to share knowledge with students and peers, opportunity to do research to enlarge the nursing knowledge base? Do they work because nursing provides sufficient funds to satisfy one's financial desires or needs? Is it a combination of the two?

It is the hypothesis of this research proposal that professional registered nurses work because they wish to participate in all of the altruistic activities listed above and more. However, they are also responsible persons who need to make a living to support themselves and their families. They have chosen profession of nursing to meet both needs, and the length of time they work, a short or episodic time or a entire professional career, does not affect these motivations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Kelly (1979) commented on the conversion of nursing leadership from older, unmarried nurses to married nurses with family obligations. She heralded this change as an important one in creating a new model for nurses in general and nursing leadership specifically. Kelly said, "Goodbye, appliance nurse; its time for a new model."

In a study examining the generation gap in nursing, Brewin-Wilson (1985, p. 27) again mentioned the term "appliance nurse". She defined the term similarly to Kelly as "those who work only when something is needed for the house or children". She noted that older nurses felt that younger nurses, "think of their paychecks first, then patient care." Brewin-Wilson stated, "Yet younger nurses are no more likely than older ones to have entered the profession for the money. And they, along with all of the other survey respondents, believe that helping others is of far greater importance than salary."

At a Sigma Theta Tau International Regional Conference in 1997, Judith Blaufuss, R.N., M.S., a nurse administrator and outstanding clinician, was asked how to motivate the staff nurse
who was not interested in being involved in "nursing scholarship". In its 1994-1995 information pamphlet, The Sigma Theta Tau International emphasizes that nursing scholarship is based in "furthering the use of nursing research in health care delivery as well as in public policy."

Blaufuss defined nurses not involved in nursing scholarship as "appliance nurses".

**STUDY QUESTION AND GOALS**

The question to be addressed in this study is "Why do actively employed registered nurses work?" The goal of the study is to determine what factor financial reimbursement is in maintaining active employment as a nurse.

**METHOD**

**Subject**

The subjects for the study will be the registered nurses employed full time and part time at the Salt Lake City Veterans Administrative Hospital.

**Procedure**

The enclosed questionnaire has been distributed to 10 registered nurses to establish validity and reliability of the tool. As a result of this pilot study, changes were made in the questionnaire for clarification of the questionnaire for future study participants.

The enclosed questionnaire and cover letter will be distributed at home to registered nurses employed at the Salt Lake City VA Hospital by mail. Nurses will be asked to complete the enclosed questionnaire (Appendix 1) and return it in a preaddressed stamped envelope to the researcher within one month of its distribution. The questionnaire does ask for some demographic data, but will, otherwise contain no identifying information about the research participant. Therefore, it will be completely anonymous. Return of the questionnaire will signify consent for use of the contained information on the part of the participant. No other consent form will be required.

**Risk and Compensation to the Study Participant**

There will be no compensation offered to the participant. The only risk will be one of the times required to fill out the questionnaire and place it in the mail.

**Data Analysis Methods**

Descriptive statistical analysis will be used in interpretation of the results of this study. The data will consist of nominal data. The number of participants with each response will be counted. Final data will be examined for the proportion of participants in each demographic group of the survey. The motivations expressed for nurses to work will be examined in relation to education, position held, length of experience in nursing, and involvement in professional
activities.

**Budget**

Three page questionnaire printing at .07 cents per page _________________________________ $63

Envelopes at approximately $2 per box ______________________ $6

Postage stamps at .32 per stamp ____________________________ $96

Total ______________________________________________________ $165

**REFERENCES**


APPENDIX 1

APPLIANCE NURSE QUESTIONNAIRE

Demographics (please mark all that apply)

Age: ____  # of years you have been licensed as an RN ____

Gender:
1. Female ____  # of years you have worked as an RN without taking a break in your employment ____
2. Male ____

Education:
1. diploma ____  # of years you have
2. associate ___ been actively employed as an RN ___

3. baccalaureate___ Professional organizations to which you belong:
1. ANA ___

4. master's ___ 2. UNA ___

5. Ph.D. ___

Work status: 3. Sigma Theta Tau ___
1. full time ___
2. part time ___

4. Specialty Organization (Please list) ___

Current work position: 5. other ___
1. staff nurse ___
2. nurse manager___
3. dept head or administrator ___

4. educator ___

5. NP ___

6. Clinical specialist ___

Marital Status: Single ___ Married ___
Are you the primary wage earner in your living situation? Yes ___ No ___

Survey Questions

A. Why did you choose nursing as a career? (CHOOSE ONE) B. Why do you currently work in nursing? (CHOOSE ONE)
1. ___ To serve my fellow men 1. ___ To serve my fellow men

2. ___ To contribute to the 2. ___ To maintain my nursing skills financial support of myself and/or my
C. Please choose, from among the following options, all the reasons that you are currently employed. Rank these reasons from the most important to the least important by starting with the number 1 as most important.

1. __ To serve my fellow men  
2. __ To maintain my nursing skills  
3. __ To maintain my nursing license  
4. __ To contribute to the financial support of myself and/or my family  
5. __ To contribute to nursing knowledge through participation in nursing research  
6. __ To teach nursing principles to others  
7. __ Other (please write in as many other reasons as are appropriate. Please prioritize them with the other options you have chosen from above.)

D. Have you ever held a position in a specialty organization?  
   1. __ yes   2. __ no

E. If you have ever held a position in a specialty organization, please list the position and how long you held it.

F. Indicate the three items that are most important in motivating you to do your best work. Number them in order of importance to you, from one to three (one being the most important).
Dear VA Registered Nurse

I am interested in the reasons that registered nurses are employed in their profession. I think there are many reasons, all valid and professional. I would like to do a small survey to find out what reasons apply to our staff. I would appreciate your assistance. Completion of the enclosed questionnaire will be considered your consent to participate.

The enclosed questionnaire looks long, but it should take less than five minutes to complete. No single response is more important than another. The most important thing is that you follow directions carefully, mark every section of the survey, and be as honest as possible.
Please place the completed questionnaire in the attached addressed, stamped envelope and mail it back to me. Since all responses are to remain anonymous, do not place a return address on the envelope. For obvious reasons, once you have mailed your anonymous questionnaire, you will be unable to withdraw from the study. Unfortunately, though I feel your time is very important, I am unable to provide monetary compensation for your participation.

I am performing this study in my role as Assistant Professor of the Brigham Young University College of Nursing. The study is being supported by a grant from the Brigham Young University College of Nursing. The study is not being sponsored in any way by the Veterans Administration or the Salt Lake City Veterans Administration Medical Center. However, the VA Medical Center Institutional Review Board has reviewed and approved this proposal. If you have any questions or comments that wish to address to me personally, please feel free to call me on digital pager 481-8975. You may also address questions to Larry Wood, Chairman of the Brigham Young University Institutional Review Board at 378-3405.

Again, thank you so much for your time and your support.

Patricia Rushton, Ph.D, ANP  
Assistant Professor  
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23 April 1997

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Dear Dr. Henry,

In a recent Sigma Theta Tau Regional Conference I heard the term "appliance nurse" for the first time. I found that I had very strong feelings about the way the term was defined and presented. It really made me think about my motives for working and those of my peers.
I have written the enclosed editorial comment for consideration for publication in IMAGE. I am also in the process of designing a questionnaire to survey the work motives of my own peers. I would appreciate it if you would read the editorial and advise me about its appropriateness for publication and how you think I should proceed.

Thank you so much for your time.

Sincerely,

Patricia Rushton
R.N., Ph.D., CS, ANP, AOCN