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## **New study examines Wyoming nurses' intention to continue their education**

Employers in the health care industry along with national medical and nursing organizations are placing increased emphasis on having nurses earn baccalaureate degrees or higher. What do Wyoming nurses employed in the health care industry view as motivators and barriers to continuing their education? Past research indicates that nurses with higher levels of education have improved patient safety and delivery of health care services.

A new study from the Research & Planning (R&P) section of the Wyoming Department of Workforce Services (WDWS), "Nurses Returning to School: Motivation and Job Satisfaction as a Buffer between Perceived Employer Discouragement and Time Constraints," addresses the issue of continuing education among Wyoming nurses.

In conjunction with the University of Wyoming's Fay W. Whitney School of Nursing, the Wyoming State Board of Nursing (WSBN), and Wyoming Center for Nursing and Health Care Partnerships (WCNHCP), R&P surveyed 2,086 licensed nurses in the summer of 2013.

The main goal of the study was to investigate the relationship among motivation, barriers, and job satisfaction on intent to return to school.

Some of the key findings in the study include:

- Of those nurses included in the study, 45.2% had less than a bachelor's degree in nursing. A total of 56.7% were working as a staff nurse in the health care industry.
- The direct relationship between the amount of time available for both work and school (time constraints) was fully mediated by motivation. This result indicates that as time is perceived as a barrier, a nurse with a higher level of motivation is more likely to return to school.
- As the level of perceived employer discouragement increases job satisfaction decreases while the level of personal and professional motivation increases. This result suggests that employers continue to play a direct role in a nurse's intent to return to school regardless of how motivated or satisfied they are with

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their jobs.

- Employers play both a direct and indirect role on the decision to return to school. As employer groups and national organizations continue to advocate for a more educated nursing workforce, a shift in workplace support at each specific local workplace will be necessary.

According to Dr. Mary Burman, Dean and Professor of the University of Wyoming's Fay W. Whitney School of Nursing, "The Institute of Medicine, in their report on *The Future of Nursing*, recommends that 80% of nurses have a baccalaureate degree by 2020. To meet this goal for the State of Wyoming, a variety of strategies will be needed. The [WDWS R&P] study highlights the positive role that employers can play by encouraging and supporting nurses to return to school for their baccalaureate degree."

In response to the WDWS R&P study, Cynthia LaBonde, Executive Director of the WSBN emphasizes "the most important outcome of improving the educational attainment of the nursing workforce is ensuring patient safety and enhancing the scope of practice." The scope of practice includes increased influence in the workplace and interdisciplinary knowledge.

"Nurses Returning to School: Motivation and Job Satisfaction as a Buffer between Perceived Employer Discouragement and Time Constraints" is available online at [http://doe.state.wy.us/LMI/nursing/2014/nurses\\_returning\\_to\\_school.pdf](http://doe.state.wy.us/LMI/nursing/2014/nurses_returning_to_school.pdf). Print copies are available by contacting Research & Planning at (307) 473-3807.

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