

Finding Employment as a Newly Licensed Registered Nurse in Louisiana



Findings from the 2019 Louisiana Center for Nursing Newly Licensed Registered Nurse Survey

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LOUISIANA CENTER FOR NURSING

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Executive Summary

Newly licensed registered nurses (NLRNs) face significant challenges that impact successful transition into the workforce. Finding employment begins either before graduation or sometime soon thereafter for the majority of new graduates. Once employed, they are exposed to a world that may often time overwhelm them. It is no secret that new nurses feel stressed and fatigued during the transition from academia to practice. They must learn to manage patients, families, caregivers, relationships with their healthcare team, as well as their personal lives, and in some situations, they may be placed in managerial or supervisory positions they have not been adequately prepared to handle. If not given the proper support during this very critical time, NLRNs may experience anxiety, frustration, and burnout which could lead to attrition (Hofler & Thomas, 2016).

The 2019 Louisiana Center for Nursing (LCN) NLRN Survey represents the fifth biennial survey of NLRNs conducted by LCN. The initial survey, originally entitled the New Graduate Survey, was conducted in 2011. The name of the survey was changed to better identify the target population – graduates from pre-RN licensure nursing programs that successfully passed the National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses (NCLEX-RN) and received their initial RN license. Conducting the LCN NLRN Survey every two years allows for monitoring of employment trends and challenges reported by NLRNs in Louisiana which will equip employers of NLRNs and nurse educators with information that can be used to help create a seamless transition from academia to practice.

Key Findings from the 2019 LCN NLRN Survey

A total of 629 NLRNs completed the 2019 LCN NLRN Survey yielding a 16.3% response rate which is three percentage points higher than the 13.3% response rate obtained with the 2017 LCN NLRN Survey. Because of the low response rate, it should not be assumed that the entire target population of NLRNs in Louisiana would respond in a similar fashion. It is also important to note that findings from this study are in line with similar studies that have been conducted across the country (Orlowski & Berg, J, 2020; Feeg & Mancino, 2018).

Education and Transition to Practice for NLRNs

- Ninety-eight percent of the NLRNs were employed at the time they completed the survey.
- Thirty-three percent (33%) of the NLRNs were minorities, which is equivalent to the percentage of minorities in the 2018 graduates from Louisiana's pre-RN nursing programs (2018 LSBN Annual Report).
- Eighty-nine percent of the NLRNs completed their education in Louisiana compared to 92% in 2017, a decrease of three percentage points.
- Since 2015, over half of the NLRNs were prepared at the baccalaureate level, which was a shift from 2013 when over half of the NLRNs were prepared at the associate degree level.
- Thirty-six percent (224) of the NLRNs reported having a degree or certificate in another field, with the greatest percentage having a bachelors' degree in another field (49%), followed by an associate degree (18%).
- Eleven percent (11%) of the NLRNs that had a degree or certificate in another field reported that they were licensed practical nurses.
- Twenty six percent (26%) of the NLRNs indicated that they graduated from an accelerated nursing program.
- Eighty-five percent of the NLRNs plan to advance their education: 32% planned to pursue a baccalaureate degree in nursing, 41% a masters' degree in nursing, and 14% planned to pursue a doctorate.

- Seventy percent (70%) of the NLRNs took the NCLEX-RN between two to seven weeks after graduation; 34% between 2-14 weeks; and 36% between 5-7 weeks.
- Ninety-five percent (95%) of the NLRNs reported passing the NCLEX-RN on first take.
- The percentage of NLRNs seeking employment prior to graduation went from 57% in 2013 to 78% in 2019, an increase of 31 percentage points.
- In 2019, 38% of the NLRNs reported that they had participated in a nurse residency program compared to 15% in 2017.
- Sixty-four percent (252) of the NLRNs that had not participated in a nurse residency program reported that a nurse residency/transition to practice program was not offered by their employer.
- The top two motivating factors reported by NLRNs for participating in a nurse residency program were increasing skills and confidence (66% of respondents) and receiving a salary/stipend (56% of respondents).

NLRNs Find Employment

- Ninety-eight percent (98%) of the NLRNs were employed at the time they completed the survey which was consistent with the 2017 survey.
- Eighty-seven percent (87%) of the NLRNs submitted less than three job applications before finding a position as a RN compared to 53% in 2011.
- Ninety-seven percent (97%) of the NLRNs found employment as a RN in less than three months.
- Methods used by NLRNs to seek employment included: clinical experience at the healthcare facility (38%), hospital/health facility websites (32%), previous employment (31%), knowing someone at the healthcare facility (23%), job fair (16%); and referral (seven percent).
- Sixty-four percent (64%) of the NLRNs had worked as a RN for more than a year at the time they completed the 2019 LCN NLRN Survey, followed by 24% that reported being employed seven to ten months.
- The vast majority (95%) of NLRNs were working full-time, three percent reported working part-time and two percent were working on a per diem basis.
- Seventy-seven percent (77%) of the NLRNs reported being employed in an acute care hospital at the time of completion of the survey, five percent were working in clinic/ambulatory care, four percent in long term care/skilled nursing facilities and three percent were working in home health/community health/public health.
- Seventy-nine percent (79%) of the NLRNs reported that they were working in their job of choice.
- Fifty-eight percent (58%) of the employed NLRNs reported starting salaries of \$22-\$24 an hour compared to 64% in 2017. The percentage of NLRNs reporting a starting salary of \$25-\$27 an hour increased by ten-percentage points over the last two years (23% in 2019; 13% in 2017).
- Twenty-nine percent (178) of the NLRNs reported that they had changed employment settings at least once since their initial position as a RN.
- Reasons given for changing positions included uncomfortable work environment (21%), which included bullying, lack of training, unsafe staff/patient ratios and lack of support by management/administration; relocation (17%); need for better pay/benefits (11%); better opportunities (7%); travel nursing (3%); and other (25%).

NLRNs That Were Not Employed

- Two percent of the NLRNs reported that they were unemployed at the time they completed the 2019 LCN NLRN Survey.

- Six of the NLRNs reported that they were not actively seeking employment and five said they had been seeking employment for less than three months.
- Reasons given for not being hired included: employers were not currently hiring; lack of experience; and no positions were available for new graduates.

Narrative Comments by NLRNs

Each year the LCN NLRN Survey is conducted, respondents are asked to share comments/concerns about their employment seeking experiences in Louisiana and each year there have been hundreds of comments shared about their successes and challenges in pursuing employment as a RN in Louisiana, as well as their experiences as newly employed RNs. The following represent a few of the NLRNs comments that are presented in their authentic voice without any editing. More of their comments can be found in the actual report. In an effort to maintain anonymity, the letter 'X' was used when NLRNs referred to specific health care agencies or cities.

NLRNs that found it relatively easy to find employment in Louisiana

- It was easy to find the job I wanted. I've applied for 5 jobs and got every job I applied for. I picked the wrong area to work in at first because I thought it was what I wanted but was not happy. It's important to follow your heart. Once I followed my heart, I could simply not picture myself working anywhere else. I love my job. It's so rewarding.
- I had absolutely no problem, but I was an LPN for 10 years before I went back to school. I believe being an LPN helped me find employment faster because I had nursing experience.

Lack of experience and not feeling prepared

- It is difficult to find employment when most jobs list experience as a RN as a preferred qualification.
- Many jobs require experience—therefore during school, many students, including myself, are forced to obtain nurse tech positions. This not only creates stress for the student but hinders learning experiences and studying time. I would have not been able to obtain a position in the NICU without experience as a nurse tech and this is true for many others I graduated with. It is very difficult to obtain experience in nursing while in nursing school and the nurse tech jobs that are offered are few and far in between.

Nurse residency /transition to practice programs

- The residency program should be available for all brand new RN grads. There is too much that gets left behind or out in a three month orientation with different preceptors.
- Finding a job a new nurse is difficult because transition programs were not available in my areas of interest and other jobs all wanted experience or had unsafe patient to nurse ratios. Even the job I did take had an 8:1 ratio and it was extremely overwhelming as a new nurse.

Hiring / Interview process

- More entry level positions should be available in specialties!
- New grad RNs should be able to give jobs a trial time in order to determine if they want to continue working there.

Work environment

- We are desperately short of nurses and new grads are being shoved through orientation and then expected to pick up 60+ hours a week "to help the unit." Expect to learn to say no because your empathetic personality as a nurse will be heavily played on "for the needs of the unit", forget about your own needs.
- The nurse pt. ratio is ridiculous. Pay is so far below the national average that leaving the state is always an option. Administration that has no clue as to what the nursing process is. They form all decisions/opinions from a financial stand point, not matter the detriment to the nurse or pt. Violence against nurses is out of control. Psych/drug addiction pts are 75%+ of all pts being treated now. There

are no safe guards in place anywhere. It's a dump and run scenario that is burning nurses out at an exhausting rate. CHANGES NEED TO BE MADE!!!!

Nurses eating their young

- The options in 'X' are limited and experienced nurses cause new nurses to leave a program due to bullying.
- Some nurses have a competitive attitude toward new nurses. This creates frustration in the workplace and puts patients in danger. They fail to inform nurses about policy and procedure and show frustration when questions are asked."

Nurse patient ratio

- I am concerned about the safety for patients when nurses in Louisiana facilities are required to care for a max of patients greater than five on most med-surg floors. New nurses are faced with the overwhelming responsibility of caring for a great number of patients with a high acuity within a short amount of time. Aside from this, I have had no difficulty finding employment at the facility of my choice.
- Unsafe staffing and increasing patient ratios is harming patients and will result in many intelligent and talented newly licensed nurses leaving the profession after a very short amount of time.

Salary

- In Louisiana the work/pay ratio does not balance out. Nurses are overworked and underpaid. We are not compensated nearly enough for the time we spent in nursing school or for the many duties we perform daily as our role as a nurse. This is why there is a nursing shortage nationwide and incoming college students will not choose nursing as their major. Even though it is sad that we are not compensated for the work we do, the job is rewarding emotionally. I would not trade my career choice for anything, but overworking, underpaying, and overwhelming nurses can cause anyone to have a change of heart.
- There really is no concern for finding employment, the concern is finding the right employment. There are jobs for nurses, but being a "new" nurse the benefits and pay are not as great as they should be.

Other

- Encouragement/pressure from nursing school and peers to rush into becoming an advanced practice nurse right out of school. It's alarming how many brand-new nurses are working as an RN for the minimal amount of time required in order to apply for graduate school (there is hardly even a time requirement anymore). It's unfortunate to see these fresh RNs viewing their position as nothing more than a steppingstone to becoming an NP. There is immeasurable value in actually practicing as an RN and acquiring critical thinking skills before ever considering taking education to the next level. I find more students and new graduates are looking down on the RN profession as a whole because they believe that it's only a position for those who aren't smart enough to further their education immediately after graduation, and that's not the case. If new graduates were required to work longer before attaining further degrees, there may be less shortage in the field and less unprepared NPs in practice. In order to improve newly licensed RN employment in Louisiana, we must first emphasize the importance and purpose of working as an RN at all instead of glamorizing the next step and the dollar signs that come with it.
- A shadow shift before accepting a position should be an option at more hospitals. Work environment is very significant in determining job satisfaction.

Recommendations

Recommendations that stem from this report include but are not limited to the following:

- Implement collaborative innovative academic-practice partnerships between pre-RN nursing programs in universities and community colleges and healthcare systems that will create an environment that allows the NLRN to attain the critical thinking, clinical, communication and professional skills that are needed to become a safe, effective, compassionate member of the nursing profession.
- Develop accredited comprehensive nurse residency programs across the state that will allow for a seamless transition from academia to practice for NLRNs.
- Develop nurse mentoring / coaching programs for NLRNs that will allow them to achieve competency, confidence, and autonomy as a RN.
- Create a work environment that is supportive, safe, and provides opportunities for NLRNs to increase their skills and advance professionally within the organization.
- Utilize innovative strategies such as flex scheduling and decreased nurse patient ratios on large units, such as medical surgical units, to create an environment where NLRNs can enhance their skills, feel valued and productive, and grow as leaders.
- Explore the role of repayment of student loans as a deterrent to NLRNs advancing their education.
- Repeat the NLRN Survey every two years to continue to monitor trends in hiring practices experienced by NLRNs as changes occur in the state's health care system, economy, and nursing workforce, in order to better inform policy makers, schools of nursing, prospective nursing students, and other interested stakeholders.

Introduction

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) Occupational Outlook Handbook (2018), employment of registered nurses (RNs) is projected to grow 12% from 2018 to 2028. About 210,400 openings for RNs are projected each year, on average, over the next decade. Many of those openings are expected to result from the need to replace workers who exit the labor force due to retirement and the need to replace workers who transfer to different occupations. New graduates continue to be the largest source of RNs for recruitment. Yet, there are significant concerns amongst employers about the attrition rate of newly licensed registered nurses (NLRNs) within their institutions. About 17% of NLRNs leave their first job within the first year; 31% by the second year; and by four and a half years, the turnover rate is 49% (Feister, 2013). By six years after graduation, the rate is about 55%. By better understanding the viewpoints and desires of NLRNs regarding the nursing profession, healthcare organizations can be better prepared to attract and retain nurses from a generation which is fast becoming one of the largest cohorts of the nursing profession.

Purpose

The Louisiana Center for Nursing (LCN) has conducted the NLRN Survey (formerly referred to as the New RN Graduate Survey) every other year, beginning in 2011, in an effort to obtain objective data about the actual and potential employment challenges experienced by NLRNs in Louisiana. Findings from the LCN NLRN Survey are shared with nurse educators, employers, policy makers, student nurses, and other interested stakeholders to identify employment issues or concerns that could potentially impact the current and future nursing workforce in Louisiana. It is imperative that nurse educators and employers of NLRNs are informed about the concerns of this very important segment of the RN workforce if we are to ensure that Louisiana will continue to have a thriving nursing workforce that is safe, effective, and qualified to care for an increasingly diverse and aging population with complex healthcare needs.

Methods

In addition to demographic information, the 2019 LCN NLRN Survey included questions about the NLRN's experience in finding initial employment as a RN. The following are examples of some of the questions that were asked of NLRNs: When did you begin seeking employment? How many jobs did you apply for prior to securing a RN position? and, Was your initial position as a RN your job of choice? Additional questions have been added to the survey over the years in an attempt to gain more information about the employment experiences of NLRNs in Louisiana. The following questions were added to the 2019 survey in an effort to better understand why NLRNs leave their initial place of employment early on in their careers: Have you changed employers since your initial employment as a RN? If you answered yes to changing employers, what was the reason for leaving your initial place of employment as a RN?

On September 4, 2019 an email blast with the link to the 2019 LCN NLRN Survey went out via SurveyMonkey to a total of 3,858 new RNs that received their initial RN license between June 1, 2017 and May 31, 2019. Follow-up email blasts were sent at two- and three-week intervals, and again one week prior to the close of the survey. The survey was closed on Friday, October 10, 2019 with a total of 629 NLRNs completing the survey yielding a 16.3% response rate, three percentage points higher than the 13.3% response rate obtained with the 2017 LCN NLRN Survey (Figure 1). Louisiana's response rate is higher than the National Council of State Boards of Nursing 2017 RN Nursing Knowledge Survey which yielded an 11.4% response rate. In an effort to increase the response rate for the 2019 LCN NLRN Survey, an email blast went out on September 3, 2019 to 122 chief nursing officers across the state to inform them about the survey and to request that they encourage the NLRNs they employ to complete the anonymous survey.

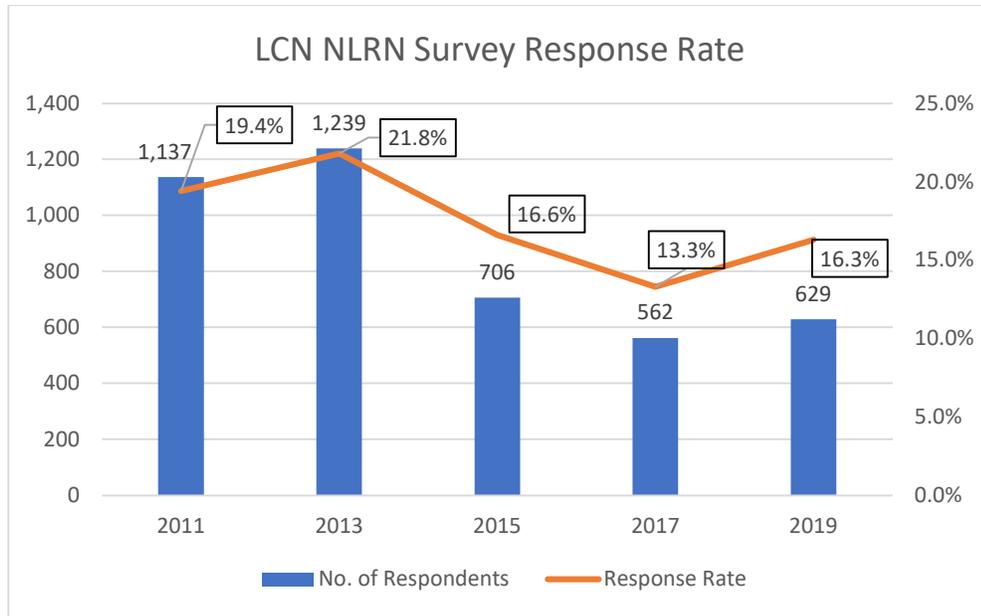


Figure 1. Number of respondents that completed the LCN NLRN Survey.

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 18) was used to conduct the analysis of the survey. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the population and findings. A paired sample t-test was conducted to explore the mobility of NLRNs in terms of their residence while in school and their residence at the time of employment.

Limitations

Valuable information about the employment of NLRNs in Louisiana has been gained from data obtained with the LCN NLRN Surveys over the past ten years. Findings obtained from these types of surveys are used to inform potential employers, nursing faculty, policymakers, and other interested stakeholders. Because of the low response rate, survey findings must be used cautiously, and it should not be assumed that the entire target population of NLRNs in Louisiana would respond in a similar fashion. It is also important to note that findings from this study are in line with other studies that have been done across the country (Orlowski & Berg, J, 2020; Feeg & Mancino, 2018).

Findings

Residence of NLRNs While in School and at the time of Completion of the 2019 LCN NLRN Survey

NLRNs were asked to provide information about the parish in which they lived while in nursing school and the parish in which they lived at the time they responded to the 2019 LCN NLRN Survey. Parishes were then converted to the eight Regional Labor Market Areas (RLMA) designated by the Louisiana Workforce Commission (2018). One hundred percent of the eight RLMA and 81% (52 of the 64 parishes) in Louisiana were represented in the survey. Since 2013, the majority of the respondents lived in the New Orleans, Baton Rouge, and Shreveport RLMA, while in nursing school and at the time that they completed the survey (Table 1).

Table 1. Residence of NLRNs while in school and at the time of completion of the 2019 LCN NLRN Survey according to Regional Labor Market Area (RLMA)

Regional Labor Market Areas	Residence while in School (2019)		Current Residence as a RN (2019)		Residence while in School (2017)		Current Residence as a RN (2017)		Residence while in School (2015)		Current Residence as a RN (2015)		Residence while in School (2013)		Current Residence as a RN (2013)	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
	RLMA 1 - New Orleans	164	26%	186	30%	154	27%	155	28%	190	27%	206	28%	343	28%	356
RLMA 2 – Baton Rouge	113	18%	131	21%	114	20%	117	21%	131	19%	118	21%	239	19%	226	18%
RLMA 3 – Houma	41	7%	27	4%	32	6%	26	5%	40	6%	33	5%	52	4%	40	3%
RLMA 4 – Lafayette	52	8%	57	9%	45	8%	50	9%	66	9%	72	9%	99	8%	121	10%
RLMA 5 – Lake Charles	29	5%	26	4%	28	5%	31	6%	51	7%	49	6%	111	9%	88	7%
RLMA 6 – Alexandria	31	5%	25	4%	30	5%	34	6%	39	6%	42	6%	62	5%	68	6%
RLMA 7 – Shreveport	108	17%	100	16%	97	17%	92	16%	111	16%	105	16%	213	17%	200	16%
RLMA 8 – Monroe	50	8%	49	8%	43	8%	39	7%	46	7%	37	7%	62	5%	63	5%
Not Sure of Region	2	0.3%	4	0.6%	1	0.2%	2	0.4%	4	0.6%	3	0.4%	3	0.2%	7	0.6%
Do not live in Louisiana	39	6%	24	4%	18	3%	16	3%	28	4%	41	3%	55	4%	70	6%
Total	629		629		562		562		706		706		1,239		1,239	

Note: Questions related to residency were not included in the 2011 survey.

In an effort to determine the mobility of NLRNs in Louisiana upon completion of their education, a paired sample t-test was conducted for NLRNs responding to the 2019 LCN NLRN Survey to compare the parish of residence of respondents while they were in school and the parish of residence at the time they completed the survey (Figure 2). There was a significant difference in the parish of residence while in nursing school ($M=32.10$, $SD=17.631$) and the parish of residence at the time they completed the survey ($M=30.89$, $SD=17.309$); $t=2.150$, $p=0.03$.

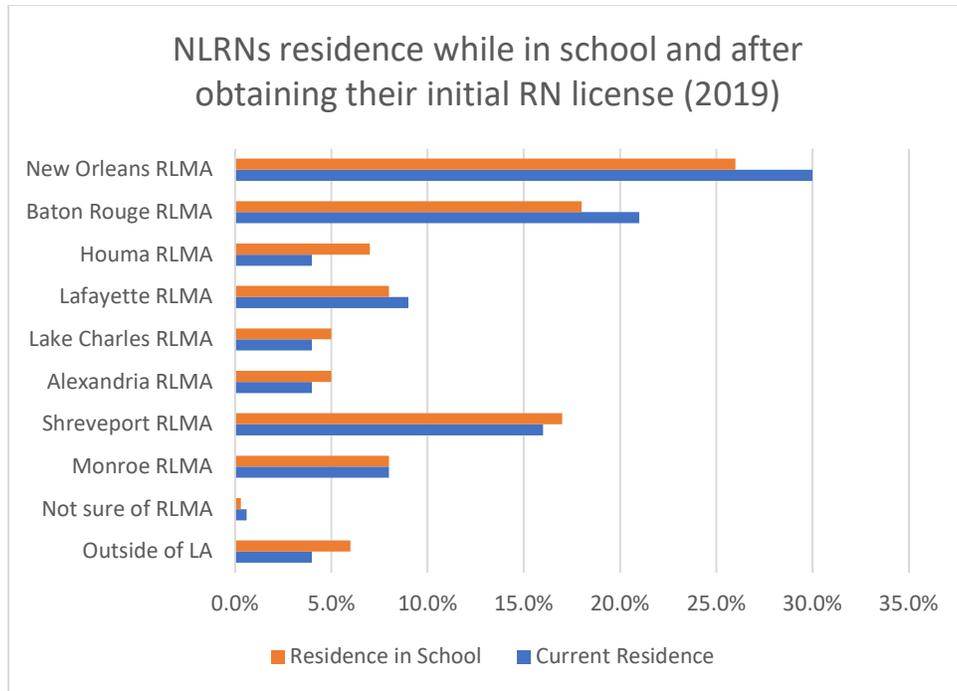


Figure 2. Place of residence for NLRNs pre- and post-graduation in 2019.

Gender

As shown in Figure 3, each year the vast majority of respondents to the LCN NLRN Survey have been females, which is in alignment with Louisiana’s RN workforce (88% female in 2018) and students enrolled in Louisiana’s pre-RN programs (88% female in 2018) (LSBN Annual Report, 2018; LCN 2018 Education Capacity Report; LCN 2018 Nurse Supply Addendum Report).

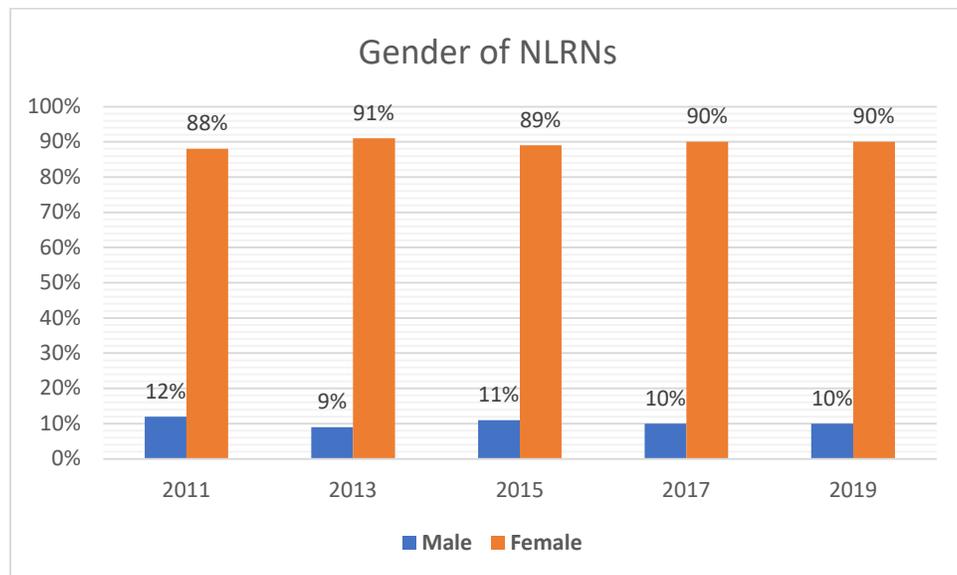


Figure 3. Gender of respondents to the LCN NLRN Survey.

Race

In 2019, 67% of the NLRN respondents were White/Caucasian (Figure 4) with 33% of the NLRNs that responded to the survey reporting that they were minorities. This is equivalent to the percentage of minorities that were represented in the 2018 graduates from Louisiana’s pre-RN nursing programs (2018 LSBN Annual Report). In contrast, 80% of the nursing workforce in Louisiana were White/Caucasian in 2018. These findings indicate that NLRNs in Louisiana are more diverse than the current nursing workforce (2018 LCN Nurse Supply Addendum Report). Beginning in 2017, NLRNs were given the option to select ‘Two or More Races’ which may have contributed to the decrease in the percentage of NLRNs selecting White/Caucasian in 2017 and 2019.

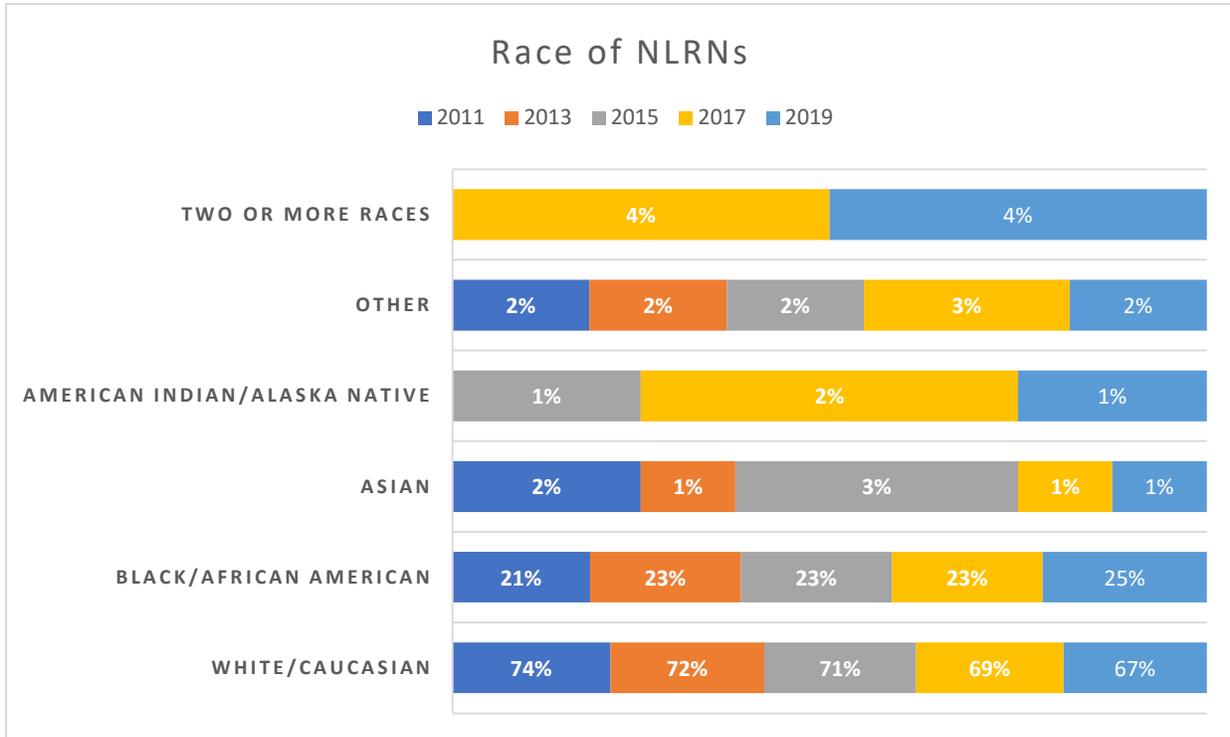


Figure 4. Race of respondents to the LCN NLRN Survey.

Ethnicity

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2018), 18.3% of the U.S. population is Hispanic/Latino, whereas five percent of Louisiana’s population is Hispanic/Latino. Five percent of the respondents to the 2019 LCN NLRN Survey reported their ethnicity as Hispanic/Latino (Figure 5), three percent of Louisiana’s 2018 pre-RN graduates and three percent of Louisiana’s RN workforce are of Hispanic/Latino ethnicity (LCN 2018 Nurse Supply Addendum Report).

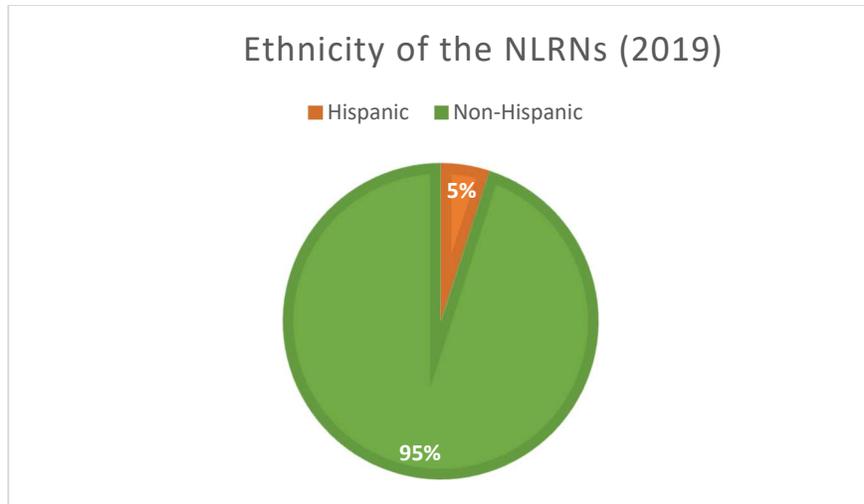


Figure 5. Ethnicity of respondents to the 2019 LCN NLRN Survey.

Age

As seen in Figure 6, over the years, the majority of the respondents to the LCN NLRN Survey were between 20 and 30 years of age (59% in 2019) followed by 31-40 years of age (26% in 2019). Eleven percent of the NLRNs were between 41 and 50 years of age. There continues to be a very small percentage of NLRNs that are between 51 and 60 years of age (3% in 2019).

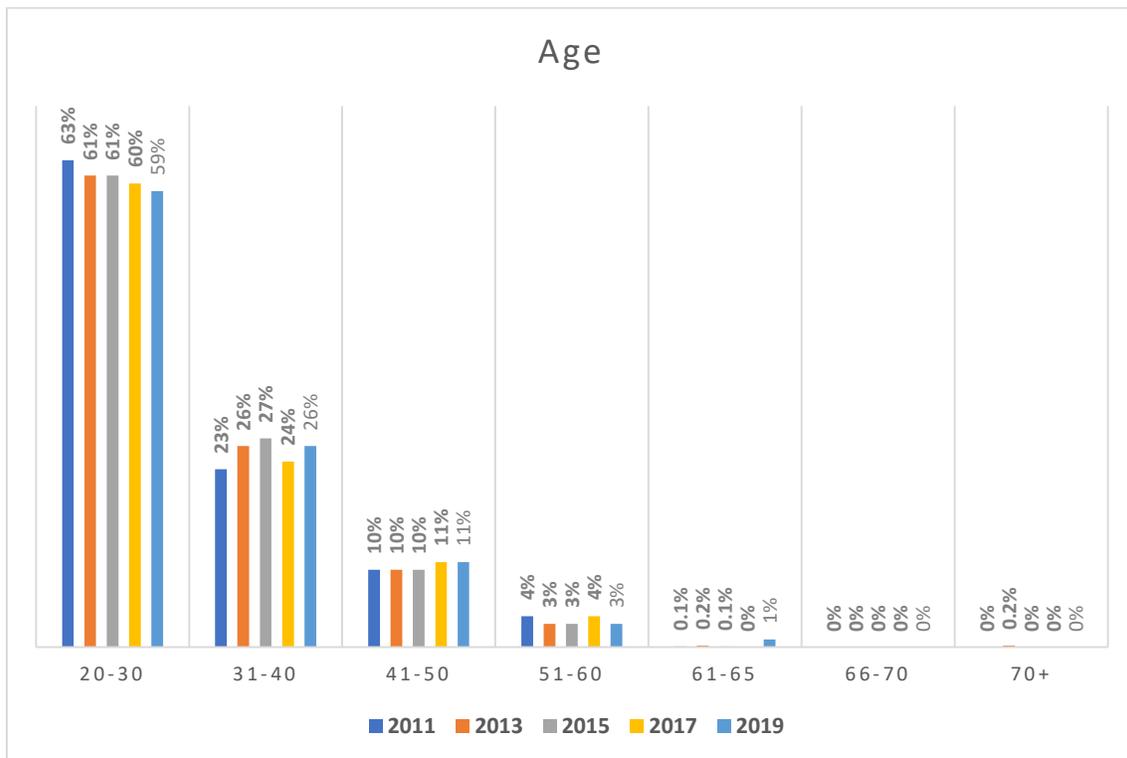


Figure 6. Age of respondents to the LCN NLRN Survey.

Location of Nursing Education

Findings from each of the NLRN Surveys beginning in 2011, revealed that the vast majority of respondents completed their education in Louisiana. In 2019, 89% of the NLRNs responding to the survey completed their education in Louisiana compared to 92% in 2017, a decrease of three percentage points (see Figure 7).

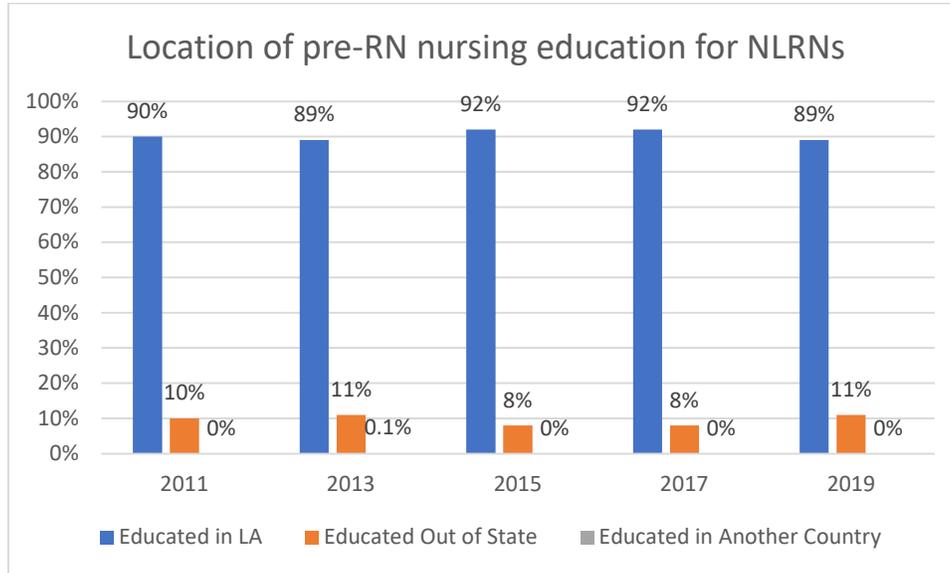


Figure 7. Location of nursing education of respondents to the LCN NLRN Survey.

Educational Preparation

Since 2015, over half of the respondents to the LCN NLRN Survey were prepared at the baccalaureate level which was a shift from 2013 when 53% of the respondents were prepared at the associate degree level (Figure 8). Two percent of the respondents have consistently been prepared at the diploma level since the initial survey in 2011, except for 2013 when only one percent of the respondents were diploma graduates. This may be attributable to one diploma nursing program in the state when compared to multiple associate and baccalaureate programs.

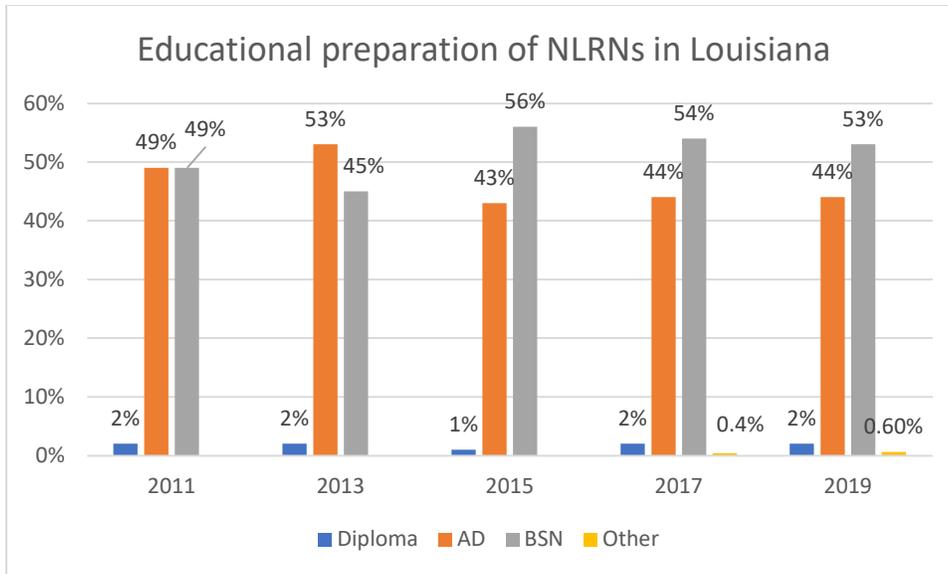


Figure 8. Educational preparation of respondents to the LCN NLRN Survey.

Degrees or Certificates in Other Fields

Beginning in 2013, NLRNs were asked to identify degrees or certificates they had acquired in fields outside of nursing. Thirty-six percent (224) of the respondents to the 2019 LCN NLRN Survey reported having a degree or certificate in another field, with the greatest percentage having a bachelors' degree in another field (49%), followed by an associate degree (18%) (Figure 9). In 2019, 11% (25) of the respondents having a degree or certificate in another field reported that they were licensed practical nurses.

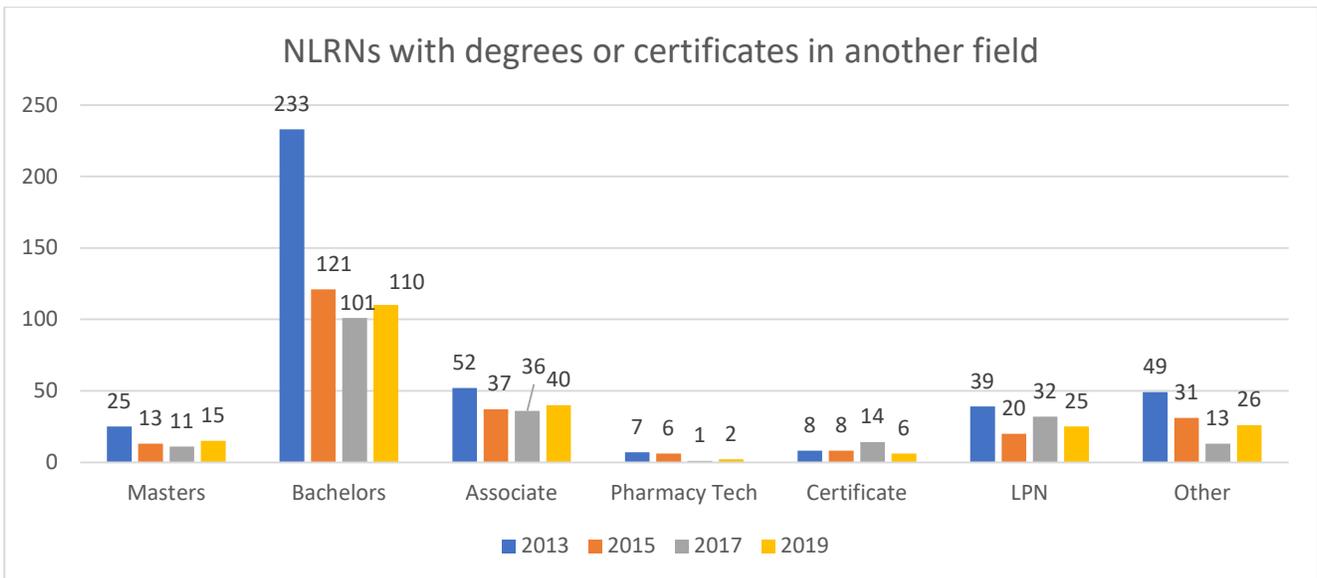


Figure 9. Respondents to the 2019 LCN NLRN Survey with degrees or certificates in other fields.

Graduates from Accelerated Nursing Programs

With an increasing emphasis on preparing nurses at the baccalaureate and higher degree level, one innovative approach to nursing education that has gained significant momentum is the accelerated degree program for non-nursing graduates. These programs build on previous learning experiences and provide a way for individuals with undergraduate degrees in other disciplines to transition into nursing (AACN, 2017). Twenty-six percent (26%) of the respondents to the 2019 LCN NLRN Survey indicated that they graduated from accelerated nursing programs which is in line with previous survey findings (Figure 10).

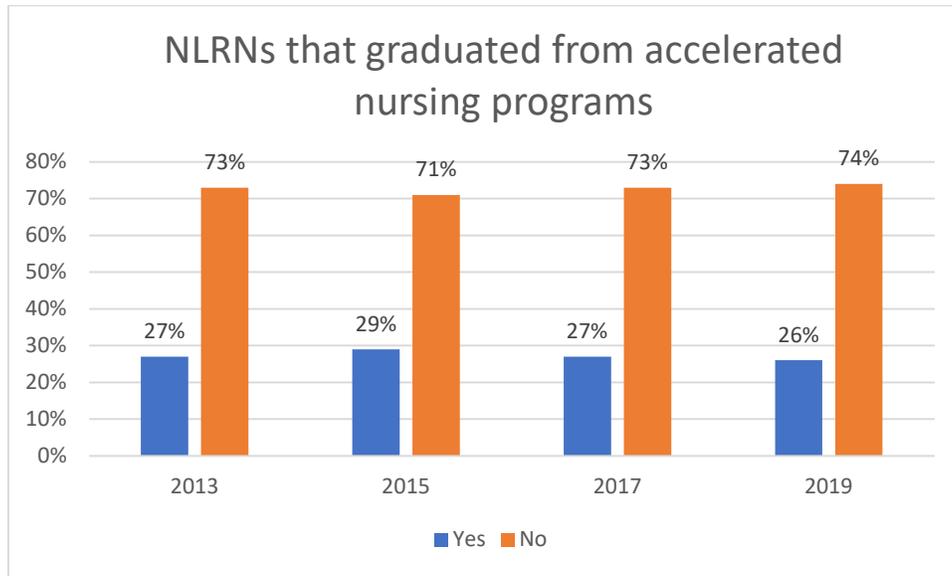


Figure 10. Respondents to the LCN NLRN Survey that graduated from accelerated nursing programs.

NLRNs Plans to Advance Their Education

According to the Institute of Medicine Report on the Future of Nursing (2011), education should serve as a platform for continued lifelong learning and include opportunities for seamless transition to higher degree programs. This concept of continued lifelong learning is evident in the responses from NLRNs in Louisiana (Figure 11). In 2019, 85% of the NLRNs indicated that they plan to advance their education which is consistent with previous survey findings.

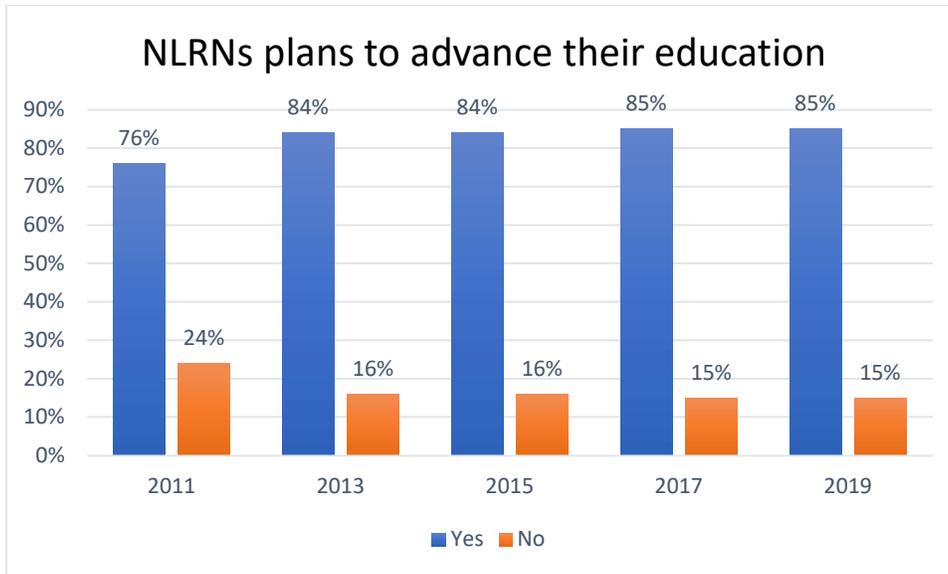


Figure 11. Plans of respondents to the LCN NLRN to advance their education.

In 2019, 32% of the NLRNs planned to pursue a baccalaureate degree in nursing, 41% planned to pursue a masters' degree in nursing, and 14% planned to pursue a doctorate (Figure 12).

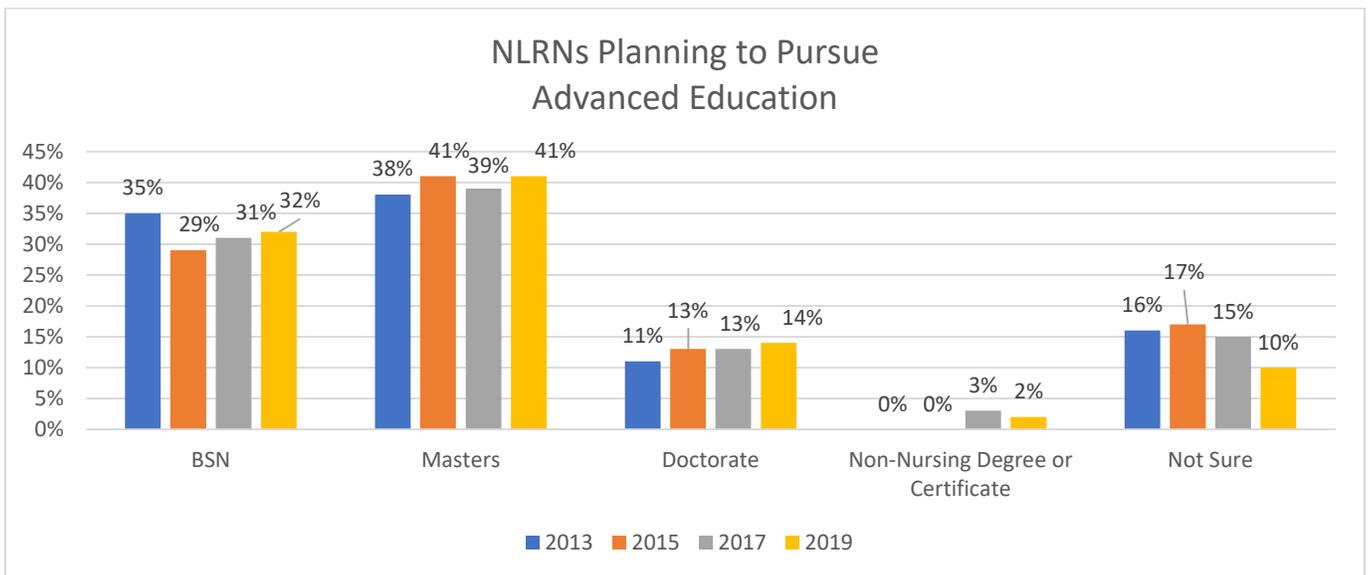


Figure 12. Type of advanced education that NLRNs plan to pursue.

Length of Time Between Graduation and Taking the NCLEX-RN

Taking the National Council Licensure Examination for RNs (NCLEX-RN) as soon after graduation as possible is positively correlated with an increased chance of passing the examination on first take (Zerwekh and Garneau, 2018). It is thought that if graduates wait too long after graduation to take the NCLEX-RN, their level of comprehension of critical information will be decreased. Seventy percent of the NLRNs responding to the 2019 survey took the NCLEX-RN between two to seven weeks after graduation; 34% between 2-4 weeks; and 36% between 5-7 weeks (Figure 13). Nineteen percent of the respondents to the 2019 LCN NLRN Survey took the

exam two months after graduation, seven percent took it three months after graduation, and four percent took the exam greater than three months after graduation.

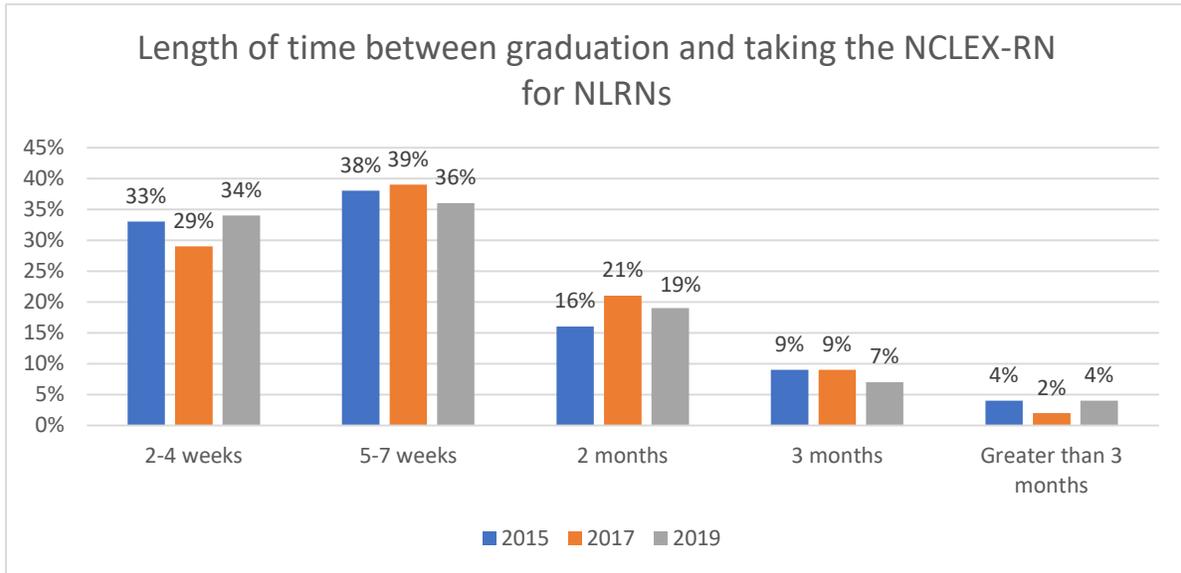


Figure 13. NLRNs report length of time between graduation and taking the NCLEX-RN.

Passage on the NCLEX-RN on First Take

As seen in Figure 14, the vast majority of the respondents to the LCN NLRN Survey were successful in passing the NCLEX-RN on first take. In 2019, 95% of the NLRNs reported passing the NCLEX-RN on the first take which is in line with Louisiana’s overall passage rate of 94.54% in 2018.

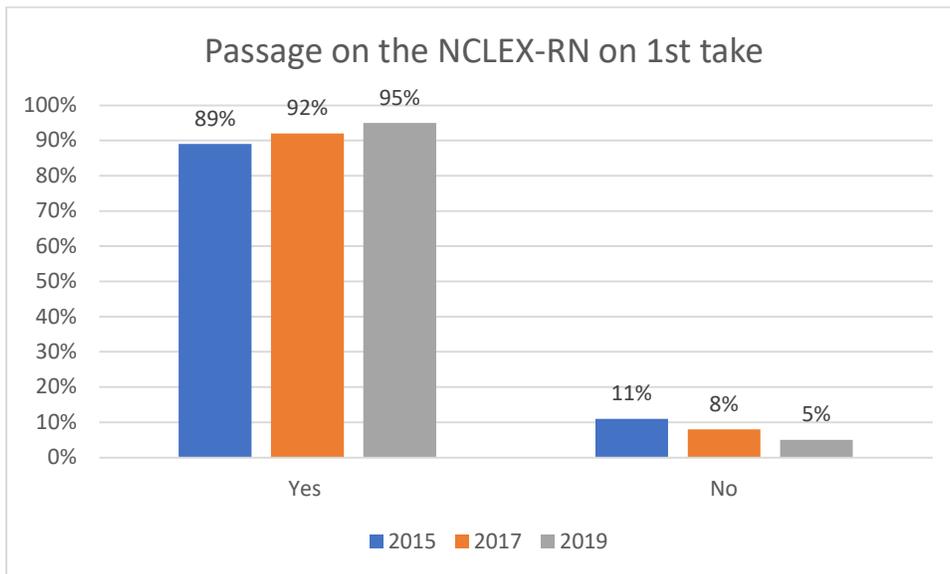


Figure 14. Passage on the NCLEX-RN on first take for NLRNs. This question was not asked on the 2011 and 2013 NLRN Surveys.

Seeking Employment as a RN

The percentage of NLRNs seeking employment prior to graduation went from 57% in 2013 to 78% in 2019, an increase of 31 percentage points (Figure 15). The percentage of new graduates waiting to seek employment immediately after graduation went from 23% in 2013 to 11% in 2019, a decrease of 12 percentage points. Additionally, those respondents waiting to seek employment after passing the NCLEX-RN has decreased with each survey.

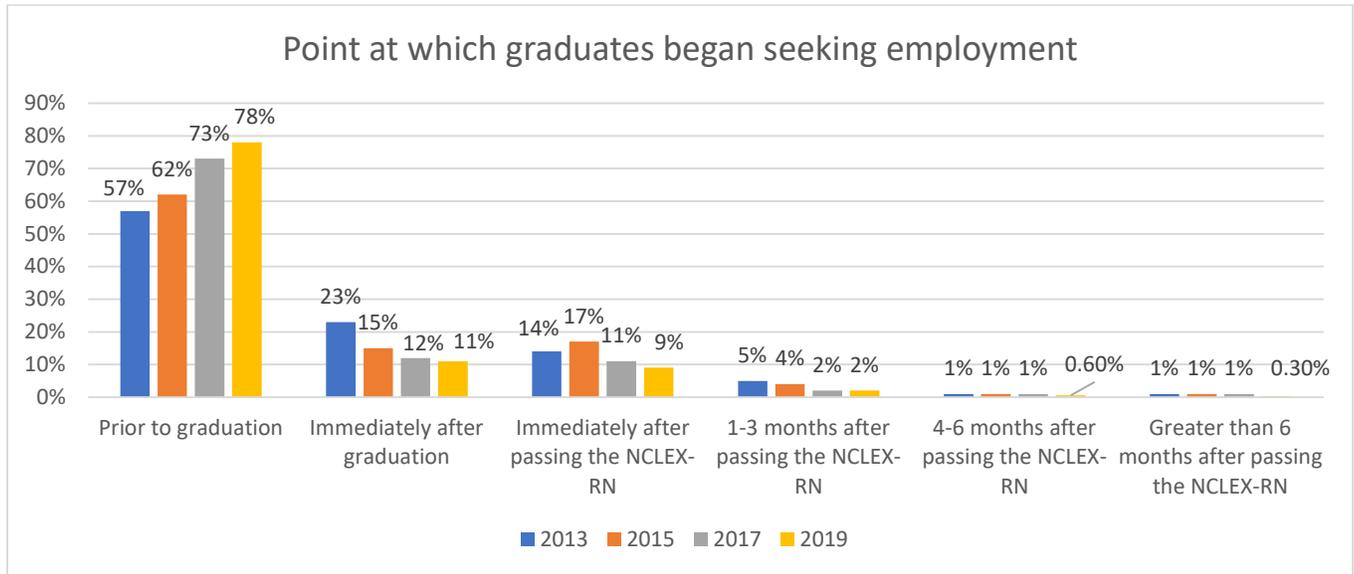


Figure 15. Point at which NLRNs reported that they began to seek employment as a RN.

Participation in a Nurse Residency Program

The implementation of nurse residency programs was one of the major recommendations that came out of the Institute of Medicine Report on the Future of Nursing (2011). In 2017, a question was added to the LCN NLRN Survey in an attempt to gain insight into the participation of Louisiana's NLRNs in nurse residency or transition to practice programs. As seen in Figure 16, in 2019, 38% of the NLRNs reported participation in a nurse residency program compared to 15% in 2017, which represents a 23 percentage point increase in the number of NLRNs that completed a nurse residency program.

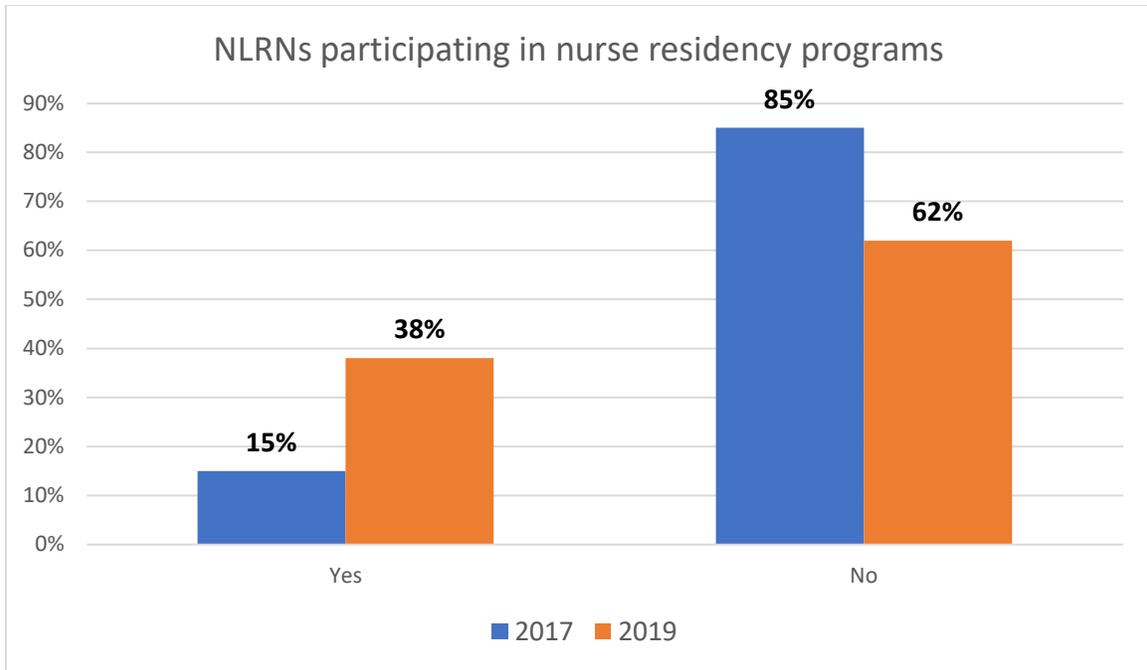


Figure 16. NLRNs report participation in a nurse residency program.

When asked about the barriers that prevented them from participating in a nurse residency program, 64% (252) of the NLRNs that had not participated in a nurse residency program reported that a nurse residency/transition to practice program was not offered by their employer, 22% (86) indicated that there was not a transition to practice program available that addressed the specialty area they were interested in, and nine percent (37) reported that they did not see the value in participating in a nurse residency/transition to practice program (Figure 17).

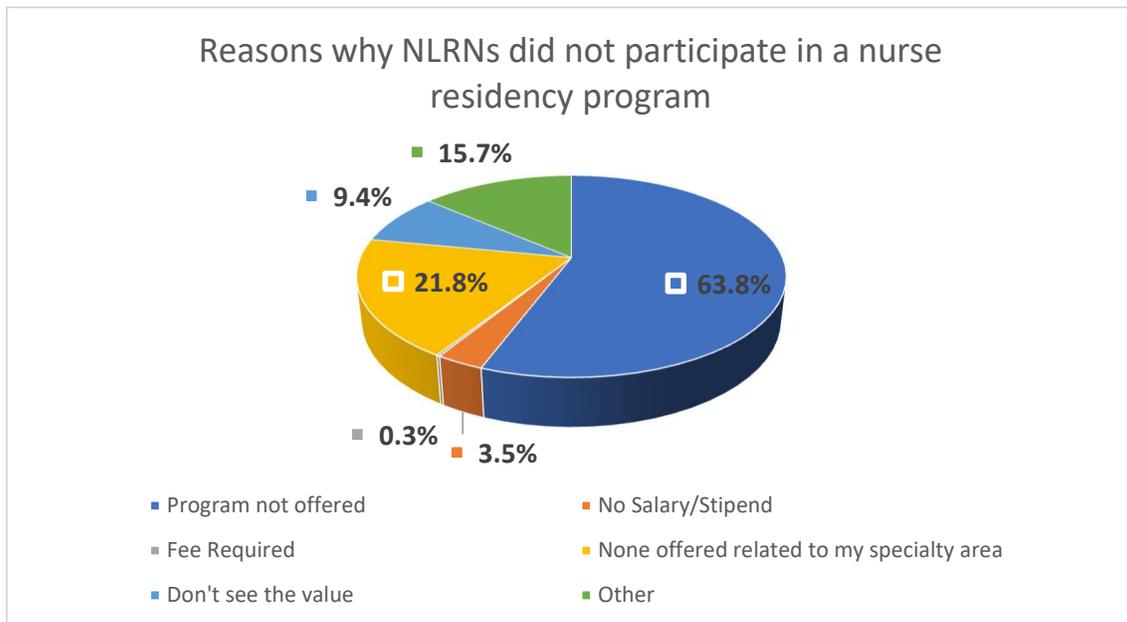


Figure 17. Reasons why NLRNs did not participate in a nurse residency/transition to practice program in 2019.

In 2019, the top two motivating factors for participating in a nurse residency program were increasing skills and confidence (66% of respondents) and receiving a salary/stipend (56% of respondents). Thirty-eight percent of the respondents also indicated student loan deferment as a motivating factor (Figure 18).

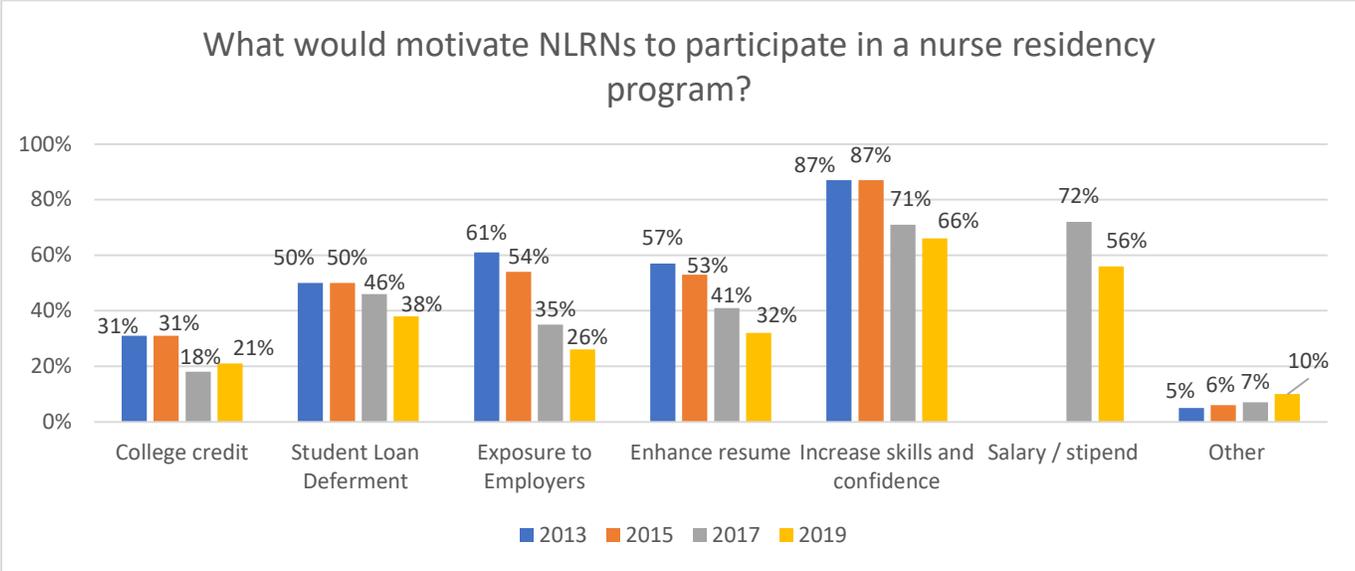


Figure 18. Motivators reported by NLRNs to participate in a nurse residency program.

NLRNs Working as RNs at the Time of Completion of the LCN NLRN Survey

A consistent and extremely positive finding for all of LCN’s NLRN Surveys is that the vast majority of NLRNs were working at the time they participated in the survey; 98% of the NLRNs reported working in both 2017 and 2019 (Figure 19). These findings are in alignment with findings from the 2017 National Student Nurses Association annual survey of new graduates (Feeg & Mancino, 2018) which showed an upward trend for new graduates finding jobs and employment opportunities in all areas of the country with the higher employment opportunities existing in the Central and South regions of the country.

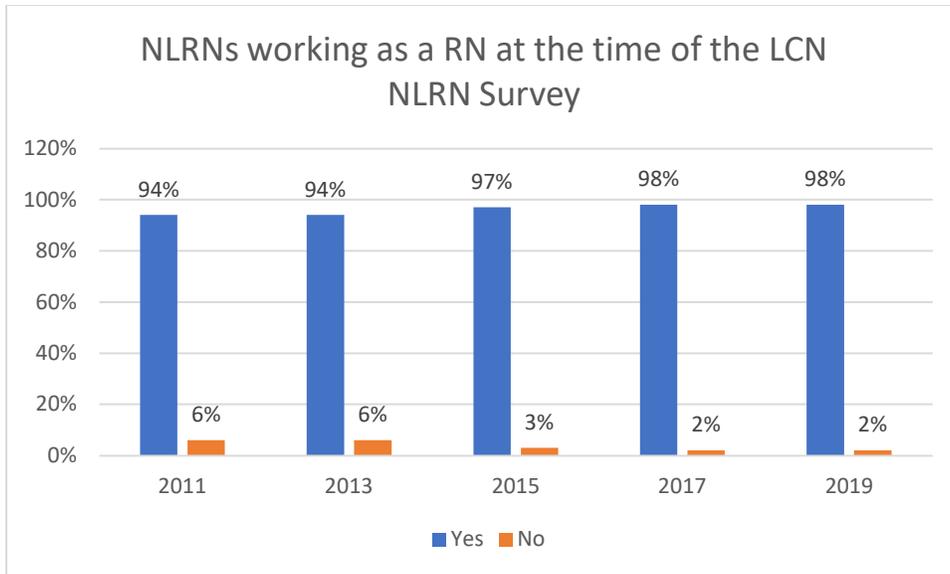


Figure 19. NLRNs that reported working at the time they completed the LCN NLRN Survey.

Length of Employment as a RN

In 2019, the majority (64%) of the NLRNs had been working as a RN for more than a year at the time they participated in the survey, followed by 24% that had been working seven to ten months (Figure 20).

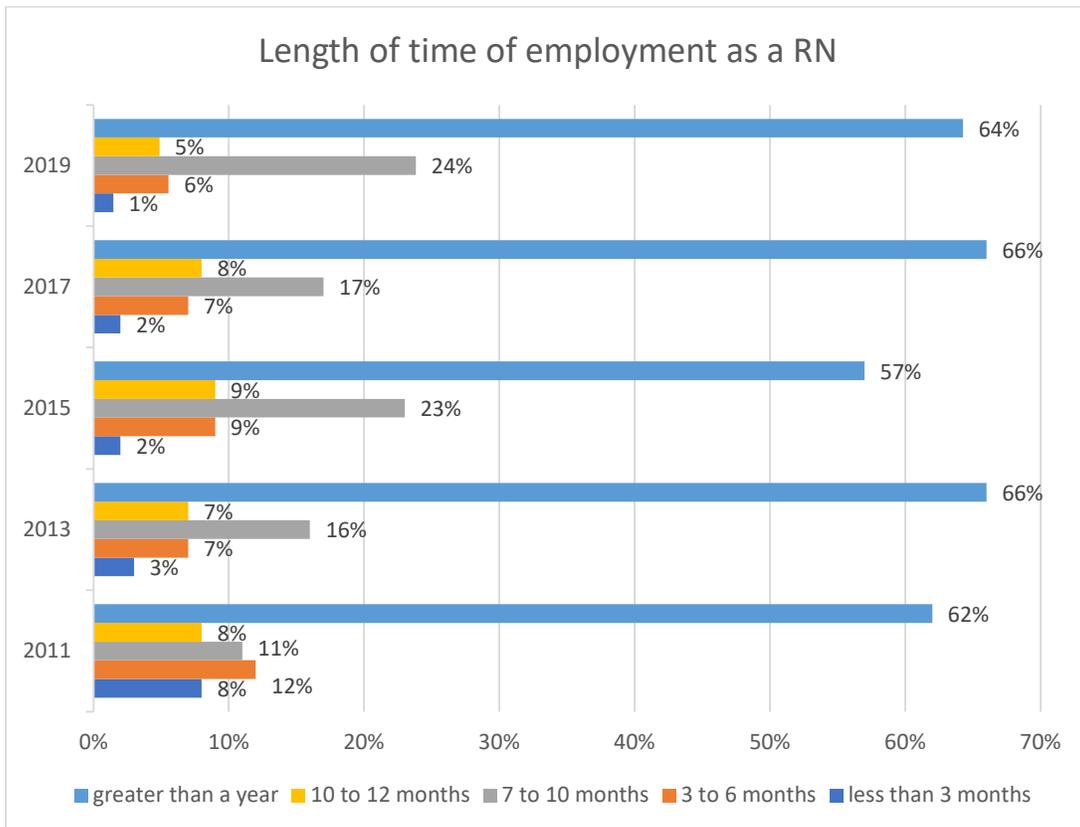


Figure 20. Length of time of employment reported by NLRNs completing the LCN NLRN Survey.

Employment Status as a RN

The majority of employed NLRNs were working full-time as a RN at the time they completed the 2019 LCN NLRN Survey; three percent reported working part-time and two percent were working on a per diem basis (Figure 21). It is interesting to note that in 2011 four percent of the NLRNs reported that they were not working as a RN. This was at a time when the country was beginning to come out of the Great Recession of 2008 and when many retired nurses had returned to work and NLRNs were having difficulty finding positions (Alameddine, Baumann, Laporte & Deber, 2012).

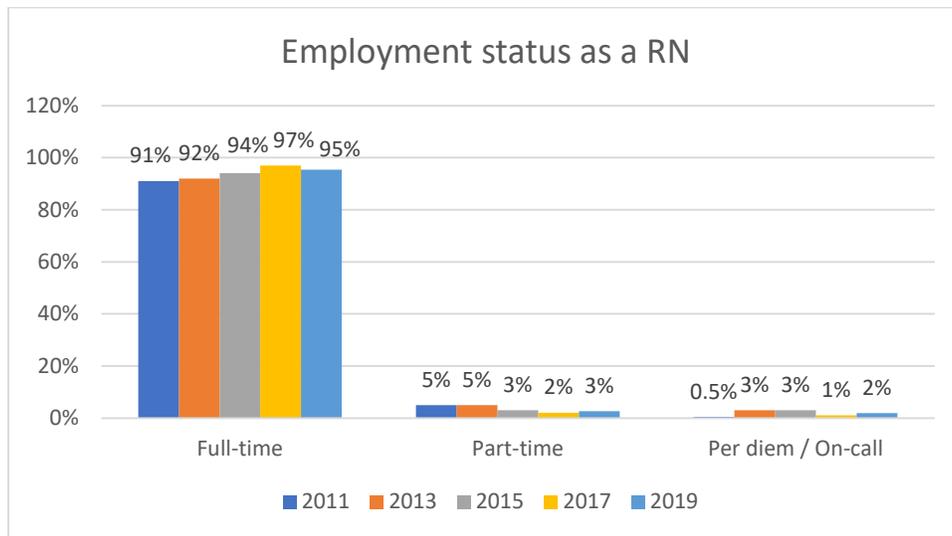


Figure 21. Employment status of NLRNs at the time of the survey. In 2011 there was an option of not working as a nurse and 4% of the respondents selected that option.

Length of Time to Find a Job as a RN

As seen in Figure 22, in 2019, 97% of the NLRNs reported finding a position as a RN in less than three months, which is in direct alignment with what was reported in 2017.

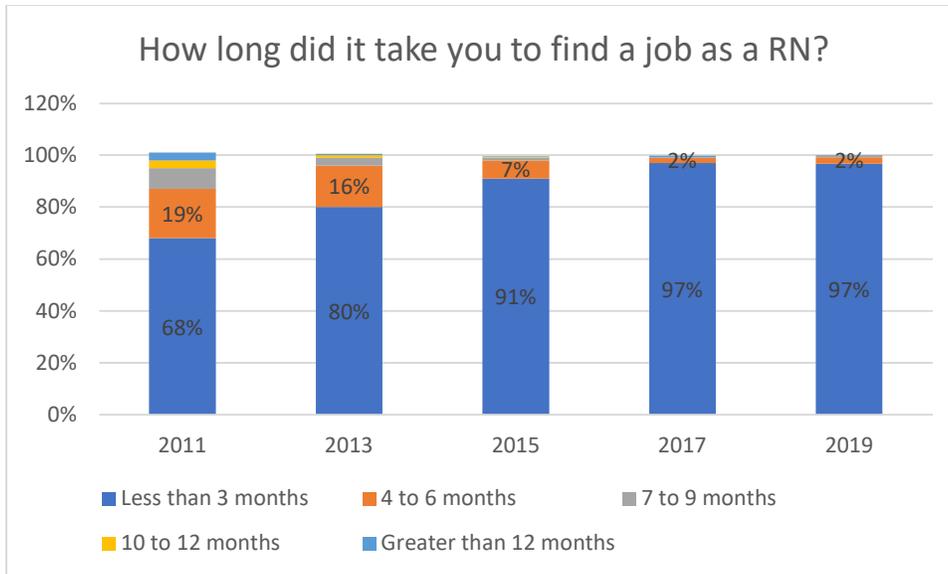


Figure 22. Length of time it took NLRNs to find a position as a RN.

Job of Choice

According to Figure 23, 79% of the NLRNs reported that they were working in their job of choice in 2019 and 20% indicated that they were not working in their job of choice, an increase of two percentage points when compared to 2017.

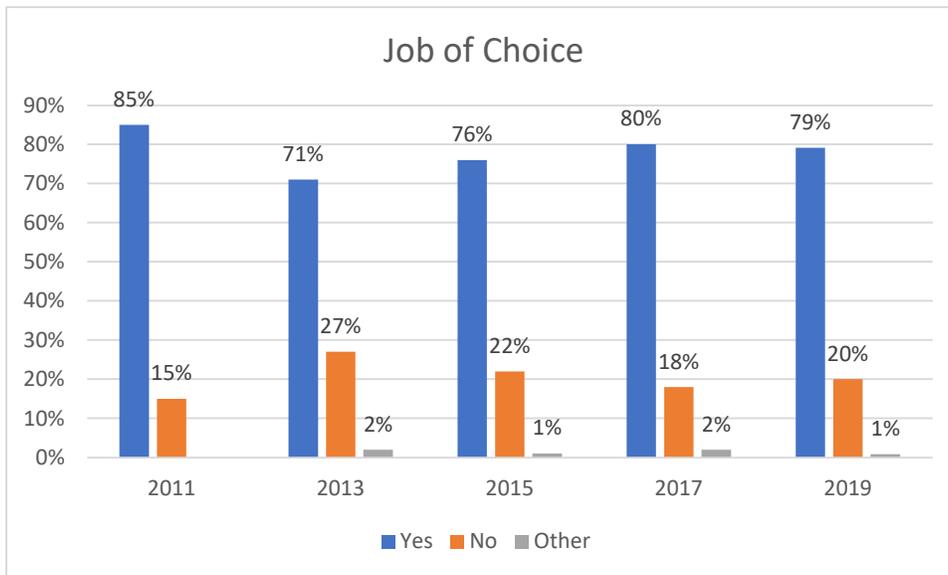


Figure 23. NLRNs reporting working in their job of choice.

Number of Jobs Applied for Before Finding Employment as a RN

In 2019, 87% of the NLRNs reported having to submit less than three job applications before finding a position as a RN compared to 53% of the respondents in 2011, a difference of 34 percentage points (Figure 24).

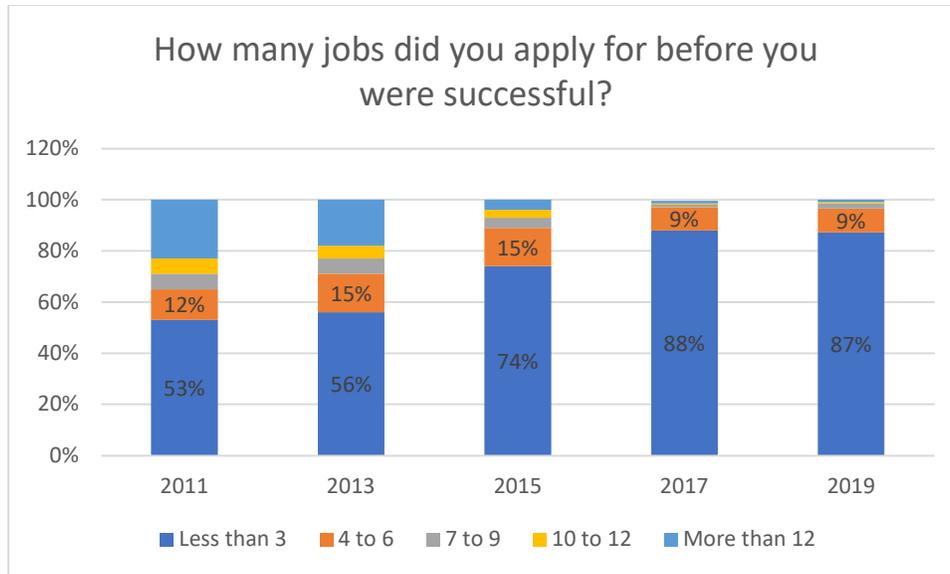


Figure 24. Number of jobs NLRNs applied for before finding a position as a RN.

Methods Used by NLRNs to Find a Position as a RN

A variety of methods were used by NLRNs to find RN positions (Figure 25). In 2019, 38% of the NLRNs reported clinical experiences at healthcare facilities was helpful in finding employment as a RN, 32% reported hospital/health facility websites, 31% reported previous employment, and 23% indicated that knowing someone at the healthcare facility assisted them in finding a position. Job fairs (16%) and referrals (7%) were also identified as methods used for finding a position as a RN.

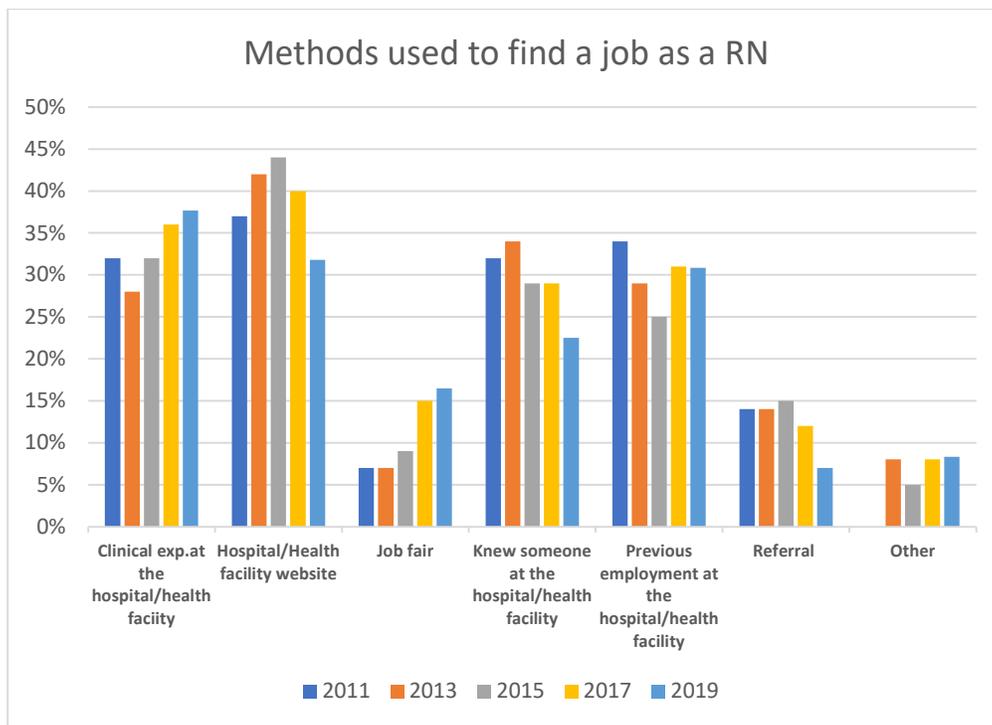


Figure 25. Methods used by NLRNs to find RN positions.

Types of Healthcare Facilities in Which NLRNs Found Employment

The acute care hospital continues to be the employment setting for the majority of NLRNs responding to the LCN NLRN Survey (Figure 26). In 2019, 77% of the NLRNs reported that they were employed in an acute care hospital at the time they completed the NLRN Survey, an increase of two percentage points when compared to 75% in 2017. Five percent of NLRNs reported working in clinic/ambulatory care, four percent reported working in long term care/skilled nursing facilities and three percent were working in home health/community health/public health. The six percent of respondents reporting 'Other' included settings such as critical access hospitals, correctional facilities, staffing agencies, research centers and managed care.

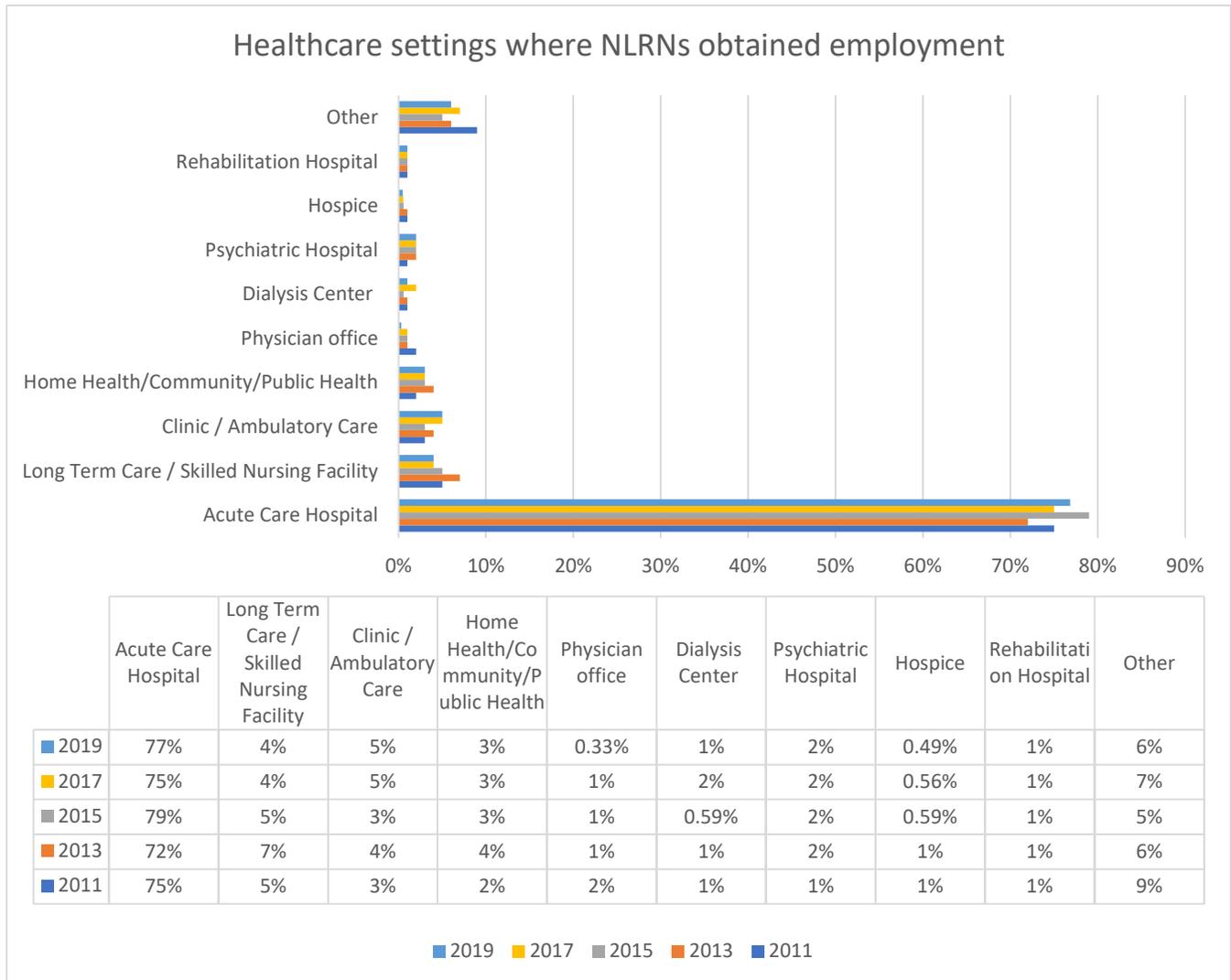


Figure 26. Types of healthcare facilities where NLRNs found employment.

Starting Salaries for NLRNs

In 2019, 58% of the NLRNs reported a starting salary of \$22-\$24 an hour (Figure 27), which represents a decrease of six percentage points when compared to 2017 (64%). Yet there was a ten-percentage point increase

in the number of NLRNs reporting a starting salary of \$25-\$27 an hour and a five-percentage point increase in those with a starting salary of greater than \$28 per hour.

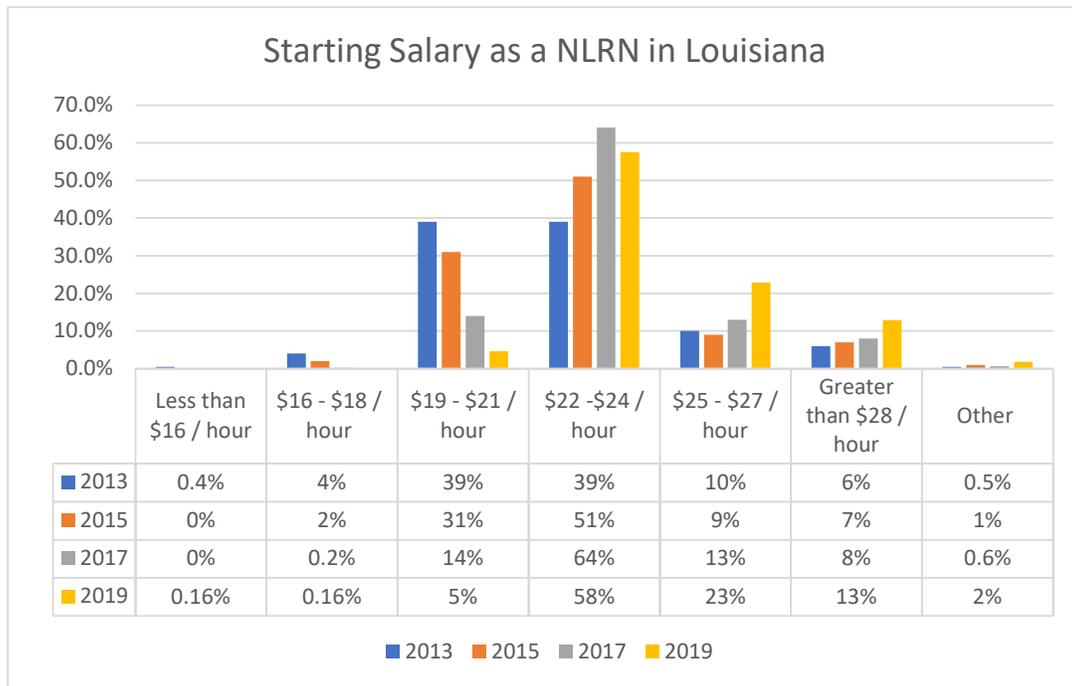


Figure 27. Starting salaries for NLRNs in Louisiana.

Change of Employment Settings

In 2019, NLRNs were asked if they had changed jobs since their initial employment as a registered nurse. Twenty-nine percent (29%) of the NLRNs reported that they had changed jobs at least once since their initial employment as a RN (Figure 28). Reasons given for changing positions included uncomfortable work environment which encompassed bullying, lack of training, unsafe staff/patient ratios and lack of support by management/administration (38, 21%); relocation (31, 17%); need for better pay/benefits (20, 11%); better opportunities (12, 7%); travel nursing (5, 3%); and other (44, 25%). Other reasons given for changing employment included advancing education, the job was not their first choice and personal reasons.

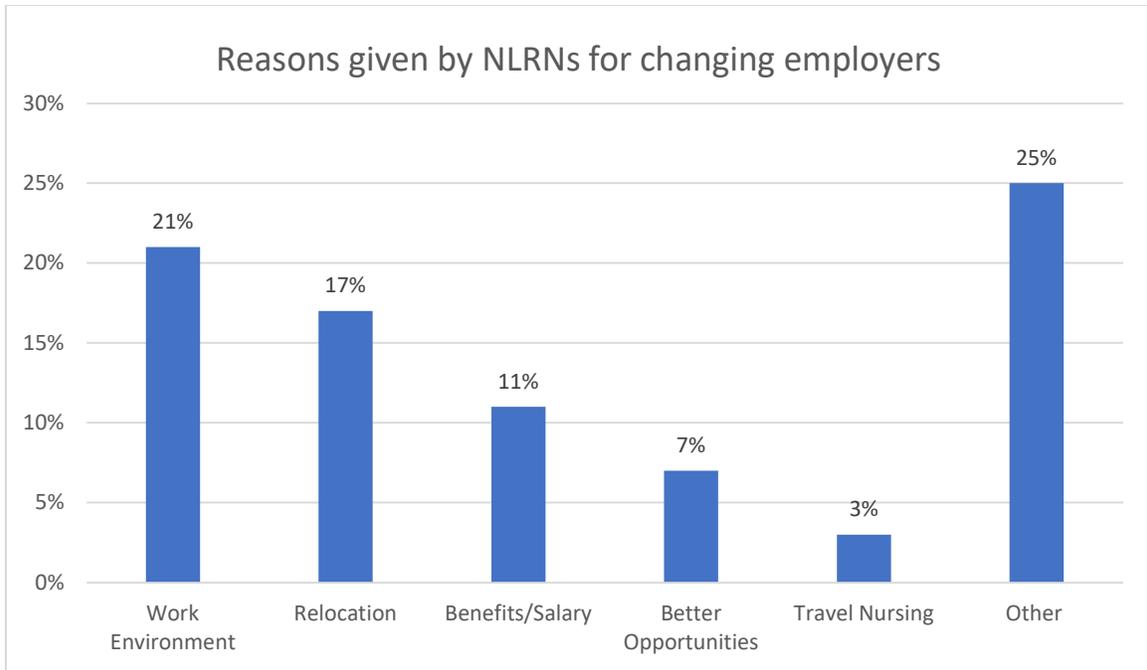


Figure 28. Reasons given by NLRNs for changing employers in 2019.

NLRNs That Were Not Employed

Two percent of the respondents to the 2019 LCN NLRN Survey reported that they were unemployed at the time they completed the survey which is in line with findings from the 2017 survey but remains lower than the six percent reported in 2013 and the three percent in 2015 (Figure 29). Beginning in 2013, NLRNs that were not employed at the time they completed the LCN NLRN Survey were asked how long they had been seeking a position as a RN and what were the reasons given by potential employers as to why they were not hired. In 2019, six NLRNs reported that they were not actively seeking employment and five said they had been seeking employment for less than three months. Reasons given for not being hired included: employers were not currently hiring; lack of experience; and no positions were available for new graduates.

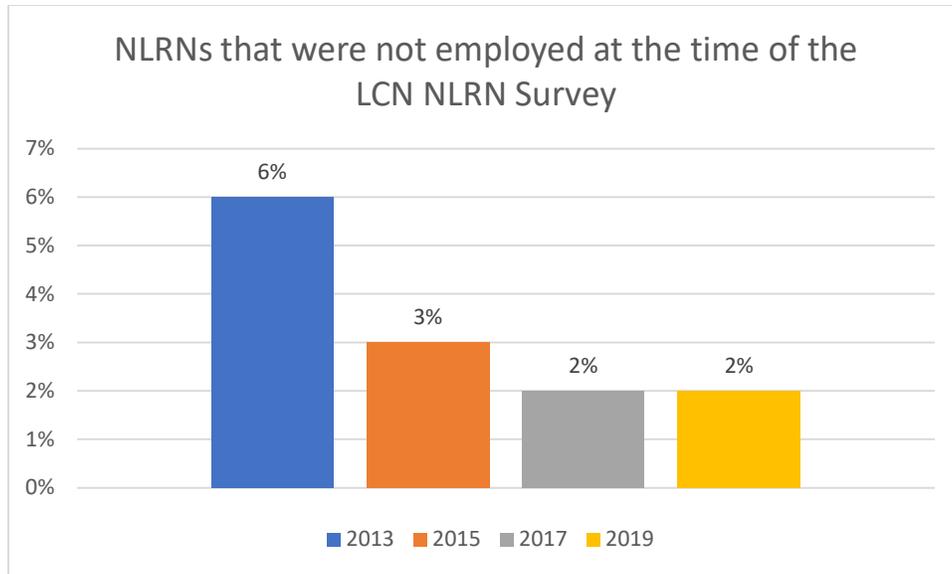


Figure 29. NLRNs that were not employed at the time they completed the LCN NLRN Survey.

Comments from Louisiana’s NLRNs on their Successes and Challenges Pre and Post Employment

Each year the NLRN Survey has been conducted, NLRNs have shared hundreds of comments about their successes as well as their challenges during their pursuit of employment as a RN in Louisiana and their experiences as newly employed RNs. The following are a few of their comments presented in their authentic language without edits. In an effort to maintain anonymity, the letter ‘X’ was used when NLRNs referred to specific health care agencies or cities.

NLRNs that Found It Relatively Easy to Find Employment as a RN in Louisiana

- My experience for finding a job as a registered nurse was very exciting. I did not have any trouble finding a job as a newly registered nurse.
- There is a job for everyone here. you just have to put your name out there.
- I would suggest working as a student nursing assistant at the hospital you’re interested in. The transition to RN was very easy after graduation.
- I had absolutely no problem, but I was in LPN for 10 years before I went back to school. I believe being an LPN helped me find employment faster because I had nursing experience.
- I had no problem finding a job upon graduation. I was employed as a nurse tech on the unit I now work on and was offered a position upon graduation. Very easy transition!
- It was easy to find the job I wanted. I’ve applied for 5 jobs and got every job I applied for. I picked the wrong area to work in at first because I thought it was what I wanted but was not happy. It’s important to follow your heart. Once I followed my heart, I could simply not picture myself working anywhere else. I love my job. It’s so rewarding.
- I was a breeze finding employment, and all of my classmates would agree.

Lack of Experience

- Many jobs require experience—therefore during school, many students, including myself, are forced to obtain nurse tech positions. This not only creates stress for the student but hinders learning experiences and studying time. I would have not been able to obtain a position in the NICU without experience as a

nurse tech and this is true for many others I graduated with. It is very difficult to obtain experience in nursing while in nursing school and the nurse tech jobs that are offered are few and far in between.

- Obviously, everyone wants experienced nurses, so new grads are not always able to go directly into their job of choice.
- It is difficult to find employment when most jobs list experience as a RN as a preferred qualification.
- It became discouraging to hear that the reason I wasn't being called back for an interview was because I was a "new grad" rather than interviewing me to see if my personality or other attributes might of been worth hiring.
- I feel that more newly licensed RNs would practice here in "X" Louisiana if the specialty areas of the hospitals would hire RNs who do not have experience in that specialty area. To this day, I am still seeking a position in an OB area and most facilities want "someone who has already worked OB". Without training the new generation of nurses in these specialty areas, they will begin to see a lack of nurses in those areas later on.
- Most jobs want you to have experience. Some of the processes by which they contact you following your application are really slow, so showing up and speaking with a manager isn't a terrible idea. It was more difficulty for me being that I did not live close to where my clinicals were performed so I was unfamiliar with staff and they didn't know me as well.

Not Feeling Prepared

- New grad RNs are not prepared enough for employment. More clinical hours should be added to the nursing program with more focus on hands on experience and real patient care rather than paperwork and putting focus on academics. This is not medical school, all this knowledge of the medical aspect is good, but RN need to be able to apply this knowledge better and relate it to their patient care. Most nurses don't learn this until orientation as a nurse in their 1st job. This is a major fail in my eyes of nursing schools.
- There should be a preceptorship that lasts at least 8 weeks or longer.
- New grad RNs should be able to give jobs a trial time in order to determine if they want to continue working there.
- Not enough training.
- The opportunity to shadow shifts would make it much easier to decide what job to pursue.
- Hospitals should be better staffed with more experienced nurses to better facilitate the transition from student to RN.
- Schools should teach more about burn out, mental exhaustion, short staffing.

The Need for Nurse Residency Programs

- The residency program should be available for all brand new RN grads. There is too much that gets left behind or out in a three month orientation with different preceptors.
- Not many residency programs offered that are AACN approved.
- A nurse residency program is really important and should be included if possible. Would have made transition to practice a lot less stressful.
- Need more RN residency programs. Consideration to nurses who were LPNs for acceptance into said programs.
- I feel that all nurses should go through a residency program to transition better into the nursing field. Also I feel that nurses are not paid high enough for the work that we do.
- Finding a job a new nurse is difficult because transition programs were not available in my areas of interest and other jobs all wanted experience or had unsafe patient to nurse ratios. Even the job I did take had an 8:1 ratio and it was extremely overwhelming as a new nurse.

- The transition from school to work environment is not easy, even with the residency program. The res. program I had to complete was unnecessary because it was just school all over again. I did not benefit in the least bit from it.
- I was a LPN before I became a RN. With the LPN experiences in the acute care setting, I still think the residency program prepared me well to be a competent ICU nurse.
- More hospitals in “X” Louisiana should offer the residency transitional program for nurses. I did not have a hard time finding employment. I work in the ICU. I feel the only reason I was able to obtain the job with an associates in science of nursing degree is because of networking.
- Most positions are usually only open to seasoned or experienced nurses. We need more Graduate or residency programs in Louisiana.

Salary/Benefits

- Louisiana nurses don’t get paid enough it’s best to move out of state and find employment The pay for RNs in our area is very low.
- In Louisiana the work/pay ratio does not balance out. Nurses are overworked and underpaid. We are not compensated nearly enough for the time we spent in nursing school or for the many duties we perform daily as our role as a nurse. This is why there is a nursing shortage nationwide and incoming college students will not choose nursing as their major. Even though It is sad that we are not compensated for the work we do, the job is rewarding emotionally. I would not trade my career choice for anything, but overworking, underpaying, and overwhelming nurses can cause anyone to have a change of heart.
- There really is no concern for finding employment, the concern is finding the right employment. There are jobs for nurses, but being a “new” nurse the benefits and pay are not as great as they should be.
- The under-staffing and lack of employers to increase pay will never help new nurses. I have only been working as an RN for a little over a year, and I am doubting my choice in this profession. Why is nursing the one job that is not paid based on supply and demand? The supply is low, and the demand is great—yet, nurses are being paid insultingly low salaries in this state. This only drives nurses to seek other types of employment, leading to further staffing shortages in our hospitals.
- Employers are not valuing LPNs transitioning into RN. Former LPNs are being offered the same pay rate or less than \$1.00 more. However, many come with previously acquired skills.
- I think it’s ridiculous that agency nurses are paid double what a full time nurse makes in a hiring hospital. It makes me feel less valued as a nurse to know that they could pay more but don’t. Finding employers who will pay the most was a big decision as to where I would practice. It seems like there is a definite shortage of nurses in Louisiana, yet we are one of the lowest paying states. There should be a pay increase to keep nurses here. Finding a job isn’t hard. Having one that pays fair is! Starting salary is too low!!! Low salary. Too many patients. Poor benefits. Underappreciated by management. Very slow progression up the career ladder. Many of the jobs are the same, in regards they are dead ends with little to no advancement. I believe its beneficial to gain education locally, then quickly transition out of state for a better salary and opportunity given the level of responsibility as an RN.
- Louisiana needs to become more competitive with salaries. The staffing levels (5:1 or 6:1), especially for a new nurse, are stressful and dangerous. If LA wants good nurses and to retain them, it must offer more money to attract more nurses.

Work Environment

- We are desperately short of nurses and new grads are being shoved through orientation and then expected to pick up 60+ hours a week “to help the unit.” Expect to learn to say no because your

empathetic personality as a nurse will be heavily played on “for the needs of the unit”, forget about your own needs.

- The nurse pt. ratio is ridiculous. Pay is so far below the national average that leaving the state is always an option. Administration that has no clue as to what the nursing process is. They form all decisions/opinions from a financial stand point, not matter the detriment to the nurse or pt. Violence against nurses is out of control. Psych/drug addiction pts are 75%+ of all pts being treated now. There are no safe guards in place anywhere. It’s a dump and run scenario that is burning nurses out at an exhausting rate. CHANGES NEED TO BE MADE!!!!

Hiring/Interview Processes

- All applicants, if qualified, should receive same opportunity in the interviewing process especially in certain areas. Labor and Delivery is not as open as it should be to black or “minority” interviewees.
- More entry level positions should be available in specialties!
- New grad RNs should be able to give jobs a trial time in order to determine if they want to continue working there.

Nurses Eating Their Young

- The options in ‘X’ are limited and experienced nurses cause new nurses to leave a program due to bullying.
- Some nurses have a competitive attitude toward new nurses. This creates frustration in the workplace and puts patients in danger. They fail to inform nurses about policy and procedure and show frustration when questions are asked.

Nurse Patient Ratio

- I am concerned about the safety for patients when nurses in Louisiana facilities are required to care for a max of patients greater than five on most med-surg floors. New nurses are faced with the overwhelming responsibility of caring for a great number of patients with a high acuity within a short amount of time. Aside from this, I have had no difficulty finding employment at the facility of my choice.
- Unsafe staffing and increasing patient ratios is harming patients and will result in many intelligent and talented newly licensed nurses leaving the profession after a very short amount of time.

Other

- Encouragement/pressure from nursing school and peers to rush into becoming an advanced practice nurse right out of school. It’s alarming how many brand-new nurses are working as an RN for the minimal amount of time required in order to apply for graduate school (there is hardly even a time requirement anymore). It’s unfortunate to see these fresh RNs viewing their position as nothing more than a steppingstone to becoming an NP. There is immeasurable value in actually practicing as an RN and acquiring critical thinking skills before ever considering taking education to the next level. I find more students and new graduates are looking down on the RN profession as a whole because they believe that it’s only a position for those who aren’t smart enough to further their education immediately after graduation, and that’s not the case. If new graduates were required to work longer before attaining further degrees, there may be less shortage in the field and less unprepared NPs in practice. In order to improve newly licensed RN employment in Louisiana, we must first emphasize the importance and purpose of working as an RN at all instead of glamorizing the next step and the dollar signs that come with it.
- The pay grade is not standard across major hospitals. Also, programs without a preceptorship may not adequately prepare students for real world nursing, and programs that do not offer a critical care

rotation and/or ER rotation are not truly giving nursing students adequate experience to choose a field of practice post-graduation.

- More job shadowing opportunities should be available to new graduates during the interview process.
- A shadow shift before accepting a position should be an option at more hospitals. Work environment is very significant in determining job satisfaction.

Recommendations

Today's health care environment is complex and creates demands requiring the professional nurse to be an astute critical thinker, confident and competent when caring for patients and families in multiple health care settings. Operating under the premise that the NLRN entry into practice nursing preparation cannot alone meet the requirements for the NLRN to be confident and competent as they transition into his or her professional role, it becomes the inherent responsibility of the nursing profession—along with health care organizations—to define and implement strategies to create a learning and supportive professional environment that will position the new graduate nurse for success (AONE, 2010). Commitment for NLRN transition into practice occurs across all levels of the organization: senior leadership, nursing leadership, peers, medical staff and interdisciplinary colleagues.

Findings from the 2019 LCN NLRN Survey are in line with national studies that have been conducted across the country. Although the vast majority of NLRNs in Louisiana were able to find jobs, there are definite trends related to the frustrations voiced by NLRNs related to what appears to be overwhelming expectations when they enter the workforce. This is evident in the relatively high turnover rates among NLRNs across the country within their first year of employment (Welding, 2011). In a study conducted by Blegen, Spector, Lynn, Barnsteiner & Ulrich (2017), the low retention rate of NLRNs is a major concern because not only does the loss of a nurse affect the quality of care given, but each nurse who leaves their employing agency costs the institution up to 1.3 times their salary to replace.

New graduates are the largest source of RNs available for recruitment each year. As we prepare these new graduates to enter the workforce there must be partnerships between academia and practice to equip them with the myriad of skills that will be needed for a successful and fulfilling career as a RN. NLRNs are the workforce of the future and if they are not properly prepared to function in the health care system of the future, the citizens of our country will be detrimentally impacted (Little, Ditmer & Bashaw, 2013). NLRNs must be given the opportunity to work in an environment that equips them with the necessary skills needed to become a safe and effective provider of nursing care in a very complex healthcare environment.

Recommendations that stem from this report include but are not limited to the following:

- Implement collaborative innovative academic-practice partnerships between pre-RN nursing programs in universities and community colleges and healthcare systems that will create an environment that allows the NLRN to attain the critical thinking, clinical, communication and professional skills that are needed to become a safe, effective, compassionate member of the nursing profession.
- Develop accredited comprehensive nurse residency programs across the state that will allow for a seamless transition from academia to practice for NLRNs.
- Develop nurse mentoring / coaching programs for NLRNs that will allow them to achieve competency, confidence, and autonomy as a RN.
- Create a work environment that is supportive, safe, and provides opportunities for NLRNs to increase their skills and advance professionally within the organization.

- Utilize innovative strategies such as flex scheduling and decreased nurse patient ratios on large units, such as medical surgical units, to create an environment where NLRNs can enhance their skills, feel valued and productive, and grow as leaders.
- Explore the role of repayment of student loans as a deterrent to NLRNs advancing their education.
- Repeat the NLRN Survey every two years to continue to monitor trends in hiring practices experienced by NLRNs as changes occur in the state's health care system, economy, and nursing workforce, in order to better inform policy makers, schools of nursing, prospective nursing students, and other interested stakeholders.

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