Trends in Registered Nursing Graduations in New York, 1996 –2001

NY CHWS

BACKGROUND

To better understand trends impacting on the supply of registered nurses (RNs) in New York State, the Center for Health Workforce Studies at the School of Public Health, University at Albany (the Center) conducts a brief annual survey of RN education programs in the state. The survey includes questions on the number of applicants, new entrants, and graduations for each of the past three years. The most recent survey of nursing programs was conducted in the fall and winter of 2001; 96 of 103 programs responded, a 93% response rate[1].
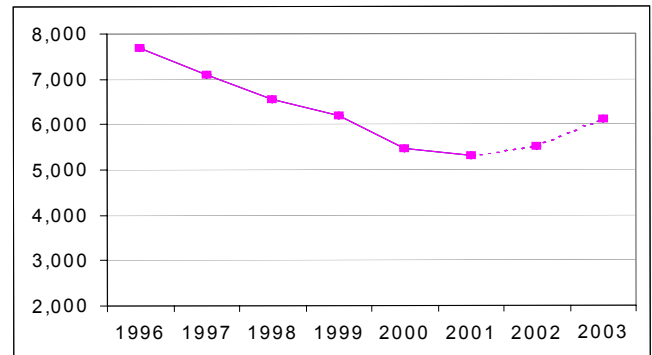
While not every registered nurse educated in the state will become licensed and practice in New York, and some RNs educated outside of New York are licensed and work in New York, RNs educated in New York are by far the single largest source of RNs practicing in the state. A 1999 Center study of newly licensed RNs in New York found that 67% had completed their nursing education in the state[2]. Thus, the trend in the number of RNs completing their education in the state is a good indicator of future supply in the state.

KEY FINDINGS

o **The number of RNs graduating in New York State decreased by 3% between 2000 and 2001; the fifth consecutive year of decline.**

In 2001, 5,302 individuals graduated from registered nursing programs in New York State[3], a decrease of 3% (154) from 2000. The total number of RN graduations declined by more than 31% (2,383) between 1996 and 2001 (Figure 1). This sharp decrease has contributed significantly to widespread nursing shortages in the state. As indicated below, the declines were spread across the state, by region, type of nursing program and by sponsorship.

o **Based on current enrollments, RN graduations in New York State are expected to rise slightly in 2002 (206; 3.9%), and more substantially from 2002 to in 2003 (617; 11.2%). The number of graduates in 2003 is projected to be 15.5% (823) above the number of RN graduates in 2001.**

The end of the decline in the number of RN graduations in New York State is encouraging and reflects a number of factors. However, the projected number of RN graduations in 2003 will still be 1,560 graduations below the number of 1996 graduates.

Figure 1
Trends in Total RN Graduations in New York State, 1996 – 2003

o **The number of RN graduates projected for 2003 is unlikely to be sufficient to meet demand for registered nurses.**

The federal Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) has projected that the nation will need more than one million new RNs over the next decade to fill new positions and to replace RNs leaving the field.[4]
Over 7.5% of all RNs in the U.S. practice in New York. If the BLS estimates of job growth and replacement needs are applied to New York, the expected number of RN graduates in 2003 would be well below the number needed to fill expected future RN job openings in the state[5].

o **RN graduations are likely to continue rising for the next several years: nearly 70% of the RN programs reported an increase in applications and 61% reported an increase in enrollments.**

While the marketplace has been slow to respond, it now appears that the public is aware of the opportunities in nursing. The weakening of the U.S. economy may have also contributed to increased interest in nursing.
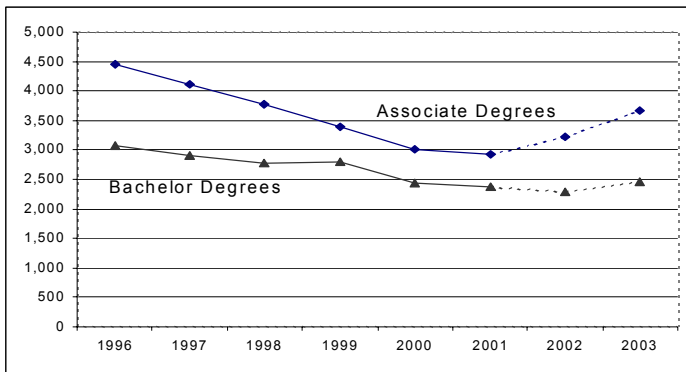
o **Nineteen RN programs (20%) reported turning away qualified applicants.**

Of the nineteen, 10 of the programs (10% of all programs) indicated that the reason for turning away qualified applicants was lack of qualified faculty. All ten were in the public sector (either SUNY and CUNY) and nine of the ten were associate degree nursing programs. This may reflect less competitive faculty wages at public nursing education programs, rather than a shortage of RNs qualified to teach in RN education programs. Of the remaining nine respondents, the majority cited lack of clinical or laboratory space or a limit on the number of nursing program acceptances as the reasons for turning away qualified applicants.

○ **Graduations from associate degree nursing programs are projected to increase 25% between 2001 and 2003 while graduations from bachelor degree nursing programs are projected to rise only 4%.**

Between 1996 and 2001, associate degree graduations decreased by over 34% (1,522) while bachelor degree graduations decreased 23% (697); The number of associate degree graduates projected for 2003 will be 792 less than the number that graduated in 1996 and bachelor degree nurses graduates in 2003 will be 600 less than the number that graduated in 1996 (Figure 2).[6]

Figure 2
RN Graduations by Type of Degree, 1996 - 2003

○ **Every region in New York State[7] had fewer RN graduations in 2001 than in 1996, but increases in RN graduations are projected for most regions of the state in 2002 and 2003.**

The declines in RN graduations between 1996 and 2001 ranged from a low of 18% in the Long Island region to a high of 43% in Western New York. RN production is expected to increase in 2002 for all regions but the Finger Lakes, Western New York, and Long Island and in 2003 for all regions but Western New York (Table 1).

Table 1
Percent Change in the Number of RN Graduations by Region

HSA Regions	Graduations	Percent Change			
		96 to 01	01 to 02	02 to 03	01 to 03
Western New York	511	-42.60%	-2.00%	-6.60%	-8.40%
Finger Lakes	461	-29.50%	-0.90%	12.30%	11.30%
Central New York	606	-30.30%	11.20%	16.80%	29.90%
NY – Penn	124	-32.20%	10.50%	57.70%	74.20%
Northeastern New York	488	-23.90%	7.20%	13.40%	21.50%
Hudson Valley	769	-27.30%	0.70%	6.20%	6.90%
New York City	1,442	-36.10%	8.50%	12.30%	21.80%
Long Island	765	-18.40%	-6.70%	10.20%	2.90%
	5302 [8]	-31.00%	3.90%	11.20%	15.50%

○ **Both public and private sector RN programs reported significant declines in nursing degrees awarded between 1996 and 2001, with the largest decreases at CUNY. However, CUNY expects a significant increase in graduates in both 2002 and 2003.**

Between 1996 and 2001, CUNY experienced a decrease of 39% in RN graduations. During the same period, independent college programs experienced a 33% decrease and SUNY programs experienced a 26% decrease in RN graduations. SUNY and CUNY graduations are projected to increase beginning in 2002 and independent college program graduations are projected to increase beginning in 2003 (Table 2).

Table 2
Percent Change of RN Graduations by Sector

	# of 2001	Percent Change			
	Graduations	96 to 01	01 to 02	02 to 03	01 to 03
SUNY	2249	-26.20%	4.40%	11.70%	16.60%
CUNY	742	-38.70%	12.30%	10.70%	24.30%
Independents	2175	-32.70%	-0.60%	10.90%	10.30%
Regents College[9]	136	-29.90%	20.60%	11.00%	33.80%
TOTALS	5302	-31.00%	3.90%	11.20%	15.50%

1. The data presented in this report are for all 103 programs; for the 7 programs not reporting in 2001, proxies were developed based on prior year responses.
2. 1999 Survey of Newly Licensed Registered Nurses in New York State, Center for Health Workforce Studies, unpublished data.
3. The number of graduates *includes* some nurses receiving bachelors degrees who were already RNs holding associate degrees or diplomas in nursing. The Center estimates that about 13% of total graduates were already licensed RNs.
4. Daniel Hecker, Occupational Employment Projections to 2010, Monthly Labor Review, Bureau of Labor Statistics, November 2001.
5. While the majority of these nurses will be needed for newly created positions, 44% of these new nurses will be needed to replace those who leave the field. With the average age of working nurses increasing each year, retirements are contributing more and more to the need for new nurses.
6. Since bachelor degree nursing graduates include both generic bachelor degree nursing students as well as bachelor degree completers, some of the students included in the count of bachelor degree graduates are already licensed as RNs and do not represent additional RN capacity. Approximately 30% of New York State bachelor degree nursing graduates are already licensed as RNs, representing 13% of total RN graduations.
7. The eight Health System Agency (HSA) regions of New York State were used for the regional analysis in this study. The HSA regions have been used for health planning purposes in New York State for almost thirty years.
8. Since the Regents College nursing program graduates in New York State are spread across the state, and data by region are not available, their graduations are not included in the regional analysis but are included in the statewide analysis.
9. The figures used for the Regents College nursing program only include graduates in New York State, a small portion of their total graduates. Since the Regents College nursing program graduates in New York State are spread across the state, and data by region are not available, their graduations are not included in the regional analysis but are included in the statewide analysis.