Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Employment of Registered Nurses in Oregon

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OCN is a nonprofit organization created by nursing leaders in 2002. Recognized by the Oregon state legislature as a state advisor for nursing workforce issues, OCN fulfills its mission and objectives with help from its dedicated leadership, staff and community partners across Oregon.

OCN facilitates research and collaboration for Oregon’s nursing workforce to support informed, well-prepared, diverse and exceptional nursing professionals.

- Conduct, analyze and disseminate research
- Encourage collaboration and build partnerships with diverse stakeholders to advance nursing
- Promote nursing and healthcare in all settings in which nurses practice
On March 8, 2020, the Governor declared a state of emergency (Executive Order 20-03) due to the COVID-19 outbreak in Oregon.

On March 17, 2020, Governor Brown issued Executive Order 20-10 with the intent to conserve personal protective equipment (PPE) and hospital beds.

EO 20-10 ordered that all elective and non-urgent procedures across all care settings that utilize PPE be cancelled or rescheduled no earlier than June 15, 2020.

The order (EO 20-10) also strongly encourage other industries utilizing PPE to cancel or postpone non-essential use of PPE during the ongoing state of emergency.
Due to the cessation of elective and non-urgent procedures, many health care settings severely limited care provided or closed temporarily.

These limitations and closures likely affected the nursing workforce across Oregon, with the potential of nurses being laid-off or furloughed.

This study sought to assess the impact of these limitations on the nursing workforce across Oregon.
Methods

- OCN worked with the Oregon State Board of Nursing (OSBN) and the Oregon Employment Department (OED) to examine employment department records on the employment status of registered nurses practicing in the state.

- OED pulled employment records of about 35,000 RNs practicing across various health care settings.

- Records from four quarters (4th Quarter of 2019 through 3rd Quarter of 2020) were analyzed.

- The number of RNs employed by practice setting (or setting group) for each quarter and the percent change quarter-over-quarter are reported.
Health Care and Social Assistance

![Graph showing the number of employed RNs and percent change quarter over quarter (QOQ) from 4Q2019 to 3Q2020. The graph displays a decrease in the number of RNs employed from 4Q2019 to 2Q2020, followed by a slight increase in 3Q2020. The percent change QOQ also shows a decrease from -2.00% in 4Q2019 to -0.50% in 3Q2020.]
Offices of Dentists and Other Health Practitioners

The graph illustrates the number of employed RNs from 4Q2019 to 3Q2020, with a corresponding percentage change quarter over quarter (QOQ). The number of employed RNs fluctuates within the range of 400 to 500, with a slight increase from 4Q2019 to 3Q2020. The percentage change ranges from -2.00% to 2.00%, with a peak increase in 3Q2020.
Outpatient Care Centers

Number of Employed RNs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quarter</th>
<th>RNs Employed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4Q2019</td>
<td>2,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1Q2020</td>
<td>2,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2Q2020</td>
<td>2,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3Q2020</td>
<td>2,200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percent Change

-5.00%  -4.00%  -3.00%  -2.00%  -1.00%  0.00%  1.00%  2.00%

4Q2019  1Q2020  2Q2020  3Q2020

# RNs Employed
% Change QOQ
Home Health Care Centers

![Chart showing the number of employed RNs and percent change from quarter to quarter (QOQ). The chart indicates a decrease in the number of RNs from 4Q2019 to 2Q2020, followed by an increase in 3Q2020.]
General Medical and Surgical Hospitals

Graph showing the number of employed RNs and percent change quarter over quarter (QOQ) from 4Q2019 to 3Q2020.

- 4Q2019: 24,000 RNs
- 1Q2020: 22,000 RNs, -1.50% change
- 2Q2020: 20,000 RNs, -1.00% change
- 3Q2020: 18,000 RNs, -0.50% change

The graph indicates a steady decrease in the number of employed RNs from 4Q2019 to 3Q2020, with a corresponding decrease in percent change.
Nursing Care Facilities (SNF)

Number of Employed RNs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quarter</th>
<th>Number of Employed RNs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4Q2019</td>
<td>1,250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1Q2020</td>
<td>1,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2Q2020</td>
<td>1,150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3Q2020</td>
<td>1,250</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percent Change

- 4Q2019 to 1Q2020: -4.00%
- 1Q2020 to 2Q2020: -3.00%
- 2Q2020 to 3Q2020: -2.00%
- 3Q2020 to 4Q2019: -1.00%
Other Residential Care Facilities w/ On-Site Nursing

### Number of Employed RNs

- **4Q2019**: 900
- **1Q2020**: 950
- **2Q2020**: 1,000
- **3Q2020**: 900

### Percent Change QOQ

- **4Q2019** to **1Q2020**: -1.50%
- **1Q2020** to **2Q2020**: -1.00%
- **2Q2020** to **3Q2020**: -0.50%

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**Notes:**
- The chart shows the number of employed RNs and the percent change quarter over quarter (QOQ) from 4Q2019 to 3Q2020.
Summary of Results

- Overall the number of employed RNs dropped by about 1% during the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Quarter.

- Physician offices, outpatient care centers, home health, and nursing care facilities saw larger declines of between 2\% - 4\%.

- The number of nurses employed by other types of residential care facilities showed some growth.

- With the exceptions of hospitals, most settings that saw the declines observed in the 2\textsuperscript{nd} quarter recover in the 3\textsuperscript{rd} quarter.

- The number of RNs practicing in hospitals declined by 0.6\% in the 2\textsuperscript{nd} quarter; the drop continued in the 3\textsuperscript{rd} quarter (-1.3\%).
Conclusions

- These results indicate efforts to conserve PPE and hospital beds by canceling or postponing elective and non-urgent procedures negatively impact the nursing workforce in Oregon.

- Findings show the magnitude of the reductions was different across setting, but most setting showed similar patterns.

- For the most part, the reduction in employment among nurses was short-lived, and many setting experienced employment growth during the 3rd quarter.

- Unlike other health care settings, employment of nurses practicing in hospitals continued to decline during the 3rd quarter, and the rate of decline appears to be increasing.

- This finding suggests some other factor is present in hospitals leading to the continued decline in nurse employment numbers.
Next Steps

- As the pandemic continues, evidence indicates hospitals and other health care settings are struggling to retain their nursing workforce.
- Many are using more travel nurses to augment their workforce.
- The processes underlying the current increase in turnover among nurses is very different than those early in the pandemic as reports show increasing level of stress and burnout among nurses, especially those practicing in hospitals.
- Some evidence suggests the pandemic was a “shock” to the system causing nurses to re-think their future employment plans.
- More research is necessary to understand the breadth of, and processes leading to this increased turnover among nurses practicing in all settings, especially hospitals.