



Migration of Spanish nurses 2009–2014. Underemployment and surplus production of Spanish nurses and mobility among Spanish registered nurses: A case study



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ABSTRACT

Background: After the financial crisis of 2008, increasing numbers of nurses from Spain are going abroad to work.

Objectives: To examine the health and workforce policy trends in Spain between 2009 and 2014 and to analyze their correlation with the migration of nurses.

Design: Single embedded case study.

Data sources: We examined data published by: Health Statistics, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (1996 to 2013); Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports (2006 to 2013); Ministry of Employment and Social Security (2009 to 2014); Ministry of Health, Social Services and Equality (1997 to 2014); and National Institute of Statistics (1976 to 2014). In addition to reviewing the scholarly literature on the topic in Spanish and English, we also examined Spanish mobility laws and European directives. **Population:** We used the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development definition of “professionally active nurses” which defines practising nurses and other nurses as those for whom their education is a prerequisite for employment as a nurse. Moreover, we used the term “nursing graduate” as defined by Spanish Ministry of Education to describe those who have obtained a recognized qualification in nursing in a given year, the term “registered nurses” is defined by Spanish law as nurses registered in the Nurses Associations and “unemployed nurses” are those without work and registered as seeking employment.

Results: A transformation of the Spanish health system has reduced the number of employed nurses per capita since 2010. Moreover, reductions in public spending, labour market reforms and widespread unemployment have affected nurses in two ways: first by increasing the number of applicants per vacancy between 2009 and 2013, and second, by an increase in casual positions. However, despite the poor job market and decreasing job security, the number of registered nurses and nursing graduates in Spain per year has continued to grow, increasing the pressure on the labour market.

Conclusions: Spain is transforming from a stable nursing labour market, to one that is increasingly producing nurses for foreign markets, principally in Europe. With its low birth rate, increased life expectancy and increasing rates of chronic disease, it is critical for Spain to have sufficient nurses now and into the future. It is important that there be continued

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study of this phenomenon by Spanish policy makers, health service providers and educators in order for Spain to develop health human resources policies that address the health care needs of the Spanish population.

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What is already known about the topic?

- In Spain, the economic crisis has had a negative impact on the healthcare system. The cuts in spending have affected the quality of care.
- A third of nurses working in Hospitals from the National Health System in Spain are not satisfied with their jobs. High burnout rates and a poor work environment for nurses are associated with intention to leave one's job.
- In Spain the population is ageing and there has been an increase in chronic diseases. The healthcare system requires sufficient nurses to meet the long term needs of the population.

What this paper adds

- The negative impact of the economic crisis was apparent by 2010 by which time the number of employed nurses per capita had fallen. Despite these changes, the number of graduates per year has tended to grow.
- Between 2010 and 2013, more nurses than any other health professionals, have requested approval of their degree to work abroad under the mobility provisions of European Directive 2005/36.
- The reasons why Spanish nurses migrate are related decreased job security arising from reduction of public spending, labour market reforms and health care transformation, along with widespread unemployment in Spain.

1. Introduction

In 2011, in order to plan for human resources in the health sector, the Spanish government compiled a report on the rates of supply/demand for nurses for the period of 2010 to 2025. The report was based on the number of nurses working in regional community health services, as of October 31, 2009. Based on a linear trend of nurse migration, and taking into account demographic changes, the study concluded that the supply of nurses would remain adequate if the present structural features of the health care system were maintained (López Blanco et al., 2011). However, since the publication of that report, there have been significant changes to the structural features of the Spanish health care system, including an increase in the emigration of nurses trained in Spain (MECD, SEI, 2015). This paper examines this trend as well as explores what is known about the factors which motivate nurses to emigrate. We argue that Spanish policy makers and nursing leaders need to understand the changing nature of the nursing labour market and implement appropriate

initiatives to develop human resources policies in the health sector, to address retention issues and ensure the sustainability of the health care system.

2. Background

2.1. International nursing migration

Migration is a phenomenon related to the process of globalization and the development of the world's major economies which seek to ensure their competitiveness (CEPAL, 2006; Díaz Matey, 2007). Since the Second World War, the implementation of agreements between governments has improved the integration of markets of different countries and the cross-border movement of goods and services. These policies have promoted the global mobility of workers between countries (Nelson, 2013). Skilled migration is increasing within the OECD countries, despite the fact that countries are becoming increasingly selective in their choices (OECD, 2015).

In the case of health professionals, there has been a long history of international migration of doctors and nurses (Mejía, 1978; Mejía et al., 1979; Nelson, 2013). Mejía (1978) defined the international migration of health professionals as an uncontrolled and unpredictable movement affecting the ability to estimate future manpower requirements in the health sector.

The shortage of nurses is a cyclical process linked to the policies of the various countries, affecting hiring budgets and investments in education and training (OECD, 2015; Pittman et al., 2007). Thus, while countries such as the UK and Canada depend on nurses from abroad to cover their cyclical shortages, they, in turn, lose nurses who emigrate to the United States (Foster et al., 2013; McGillis Hall et al., 2009; Pittman et al., 2007; Salami and Nelson, 2014; Salami et al., 2014). The Philippines has long led the world in supplying nurses for export. Other countries such as China, Pakistan, Vietnam and India are gaining importance in this type of migration (Brush, 2008; Garner et al., 2015; OECD, 2015; Zhou et al., 2016), as are African and Caribbean countries (Dywili et al., 2013). The "push and pull" theory outlines the combination of drivers, such as poor pay and lack of advancement opportunities, as well as the hope of security and prosperity for one's family, and attractors, such as higher pay and broader opportunities, have long been used to explain the factors that lead nurses to migrate (Kline, 2003; Mejía et al., 1979).

In Europe, there has been an increase in the migration of health professionals as a result of the impact of the economic crisis that began during the period 2007–2008 and with the enlargement of the European Union. In 22 countries of the OECD, the migration of nurses has

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