

Nurses' health, age and the wish to leave the profession – findings from the European NEXT-Study

H-M. HASSELHORN, P. TACKENBERG, ANGELIKA KUEMMERLING, J. WITTENBERG, M. SIMON, P.M. CONWAY, P.A. BERTAZZI, BEATE BEERMANN, A. BÜSCHER, DONATELLA CAMERINO, J.F. CAILLARD, W. D'HOORE, MADELEINE ESTRYN-BEHAR, MARINA FONTENLA, DINAH GOULD, BEATE VAN DER HEIJDEN, MALIN JOSEPHSON, P. KISS, MARIA KOVAROVA, K. KUHN, MARJUKKA LAINE, O. LE NEZET, P. LINDBERG, HALSZKA OGINSKA, J. POKORSKI, JOANNA POKORSKA, P. RADKIEWICZ, M. RIMARCIK, ESTHER VAN DER SCHOOT, STEPHANIE STELZIG, SABINE STORDEUR, G. WICKSTROEM, MARIA WIDERSZAL-BAZYL, B.H. MUELLER

KEY WORDS

Nurses; health care workers; NEXT study

SUMMARY

Background and objectives: *In many industrialised countries the number of workers with low health is expected to increase in the nursing profession. This will have implications for occupational health work in health care. The European NEXT-Study (www.next-study.net, funded by EU) investigates working conditions of nurses in ten European countries and provides the opportunity to evaluate the role of health with respect to age and the consideration of leaving nursing. **Methods:** 26,263 female registered nurses from Belgium, Germany, Finland, France, England, Italy, Netherlands, Poland and Slovakia were eligible for analysis. **Results:** In most countries, older nurses considered leaving the profession more frequently than younger nurses. 'Health' was – next to 'professional opportunities' and 'work organisational factors' – strongly associated with the consideration of leaving nursing. However, more than half of all nurses with low health wanted to remain in the profession. This group reported rather positive psychosocial working conditions – but also the highest fear for unemployment. **Conclusions:** The findings indicate that 'the nurse with low health' is reality in many health care settings. Both positive supporting working conditions but also lack of occupational alternatives and fear of unemployment may contribute to this. Current economic, political and demographic trends implicate that the number of active nurses with low health will increase. Occupational health surveillance will be challenged by this. But NEXT findings implicate that prevention also will have to regard work organisational factors if the aim is to sustain nurses' health and to enable nurses to remain healthy in their profession until retirement age.*