

Resources for Sustainable Careers in Nursing

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The preservation and generation of resources as well as the career sustainability of nurses is of societal interest, since we are facing a looming nursing shortage globally, with a lack of more than 9 million nurses and midwives in 2030 (Drennan & Ross, 2019). Various European countries have to address this matter, as e.g. in Austria an additional need of 76.000 nurses until 2030 is assumed (Rappold & Juraszovich, 2019) due to retirements and demographic developments. In addition 6% (Switzerland) to 17% (Germany) of nurses aim to leave their profession (Heinen et al., 2013). Higher burn-out rates and the higher average number of days absent indicate issues within the profession (Grobe & Steinmann, 2019). In case of leave, nurses' face individual costs of finding a new job or starting a new education; and organizations face high costs as well, due to knowledge loss and new recruiting costs (Roche et al., 2015) and a negative effect on the quality and safety of care (Hayes et al., 2012) arise.

Acknowledging the three key dimensions of sustainable careers (De Vos et al., 2020), we focus on the field of nursing as an occupational context, nurses as the persons and careers stages as the time dimensions. As health, happiness and productivity are key outcomes of sustainable careers (Van der Heijden et al., 2020) the meaning of these terms within the specific context has to be identified. Health and happiness may be investigated by established measures like physical and mental health [e.g. SF-36 (Ware & Sherbourne, 1992)] and subjective career success scales (Greenhaus et al., 1990). When it comes to productivity, usually proposed measures like strong performance in one's current job or high employability in the future (Heijde & Van Der Heijden, 2006), seem not to be easily transferred to nursing and might encompass direct care hours, turnover, absenteeism, orientation and education, nursing errors, and patient satisfaction (McGillis, 2003). Furthermore, Employability is not a main concern in a labor market characterized by a shortage of skilled professionals.

Previous research provides some insights about resources (Spurk et al., 2019) for sustainable careers of nurses on the individual, job and organizational level. Those who are younger, male, highly qualified (Flinkman et al., 2010) and have less experience in the profession (Van der Heijden et al., 2018) are more likely to leave. So are those with a low job satisfaction and few possibilities for professional development (Flinkman et al. 2010). Participation and leadership style (Heinen et al. 2013) – especially a style that enhances group cohesion – as well as transition programs and support for newly qualified nurses reduce turnover rates (Halter et al., 2017b).

As qualitative investigations are rare in the field (Halter et al., 2017a), we are going to interview 20 experts during a workshop taking place in Krems, Austria in November: (i) program directors from (higher) education in the field of nursing (ii) experts in the healthcare system (iii) actors from politics (iv) practitioners in (HR) management of health care organizations and (v) nurses.

We contribute to the workshop by focusing on career resources and career sustainability of a specific group by examining the meaning of career sustainability for nurses and aim to identify key resources on several contextual levels.

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