



# A FLIGHT NURSE'S LONGEVITY IN THE AERO-MEDICAL ENVIRONMENT

Fran Neylon 2012

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# Introduction

- Workforce landscape reshaping economy and society
- Baby boomers
  - o 1/4 of Australia's population
  - o 1/3 of workforce
  - o 45% women
- Less younger people entering workforce

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# Baby Boomers and Ageing

- Baby boomers: born 20 years post WW11
- Advantages and disadvantages in employment
- Financial reasons the single most important decision when to retire
- Other social factors

# Nursing and Flight Nursing

- Health workforce grown > population
- Complex health care system
  - o Ageing population
  - o Escalated diagnosis and treatment
  - o Advanced research and technology
  - o Increased access to services
  - o Increased consumer demands

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- Nursing supply increased by 6.2% from years 2005 to 2009
- Average age of nurse increased to 50-54 years
- Flight nurses fall in “other” category in ABS statistics
- Projected figures from Health Workforce Australia by 2025 deficit of -13,397

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- Flight nursing involves:
  - Skills and qualifications in
    - o Emergency
    - o Critical care
    - o Obstetrics

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- Eight Stressors of Flying
  - o Fatigue
  - o Vibration
  - o Noise
  - o Barometric pressure
  - o Decreased partial pressure of oxygen
  - o Thermal Changes
  - o Decreased humidity
  - o Gravitational forces

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# Flight Nurses Survey

- 14 questions sent to 180 RFDS Australia wide, de-identified and analysed.
- 25% response rate (45)

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# Flight Nurses Survey

- Questions related to:
  - o Demographics
  - o Retirement age from flight nursing
  - o Work related injuries
  - o Exercise routines and barriers
  - o Technological developments, education preferences and learning styles
  - o Comments on the workplace and ageing

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# Results

- Snapshot
- Years in flight nursing 9.2yrs
- Commenced 36.7yrs
- Retirement age 54 yrs
- Sex 20%m 80%f
- Work related injuries 84% no 16%yes
- Type ear/neck/back/knees

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- Health rating 50% healthy and 43% some issues
- Exercise 35% x 2 wkly, 26% daily or erratic
- Barriers rosters 36%, motivation 20%, family/shift work 18%, fatigue 13%
- Technology independent 40%, show first 38%, instant 21%
- Education 34% personal, 28% CNE, 23% career
- Learning Style 35% face/face or seminars, 24% on-line

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# Comments on workplace and Ageing

- Rostering and shorter shifts
- Job sharing, more part-time, FIFO
- Education, mentoring, scholarships, IT support, skills update, acknowledge older staff's experience
- Fatigue management programme

- Gym - either at work or subsidised
- Decrease manual handling, acknowledge physical challenges
- Replace older retirees with younger staff

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# Discussion

- 25% response, ?75% unknown factor
- response may distort results and inaccurate representation
- Findings concurred with research and literature
- Acknowledge ageing workforce and possible industry crises
- Long retention, ? Staff turnover

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- 24 hour emergency service
- Staff prepared to work long, unpredictable hours
- Promote healthy work practices
- Increase flexible work conditions

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- Fatigue management programme
- Education and training
- Assist healthy lifestyle and manual handling practices

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# Conclusion

- Flight nursing needs accurate data
- Form a peak industry body
- Organisational policies for ageing workforce
- Anticipated industry exodus and replacement strategies
- Further research and study

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