

Transition Supports for IENs in Workplace: Perspectives of IENs in Ontario

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Abstract— There is a nation-wide concern about nursing shortages in Canada. The skills, expertise and experience brought by internationally educated nurses (IENs) are crucial for health human resources sustainability. However, there is a lack of consistency with transition/integration services in place for IENs.

An online survey was sent through email to members enrolled in CARE Centre for Internationally Educated Nurses' bridge training program. The study findings revealed that the most recognized service offered to employed-IENs was 'corporate orientation for all new staff'. IENs-specific orientation and buddy programs were the least recognized available initiatives. Majority of the respondents desire IEN-focused transition programs that can assist them with their professional growth and integration within the healthcare system.

CARE Centre with more than ten years' experience working with IENs is developing a two-pronged Workplace Transition Program to empower IENs and to partner with employers in knowledge transfer activities resulting in greater capacity to facilitate integration of IENs into workplace.

Keywords- *Internationally Educated Nurses (IENs), Health Human Resources, Workplace Transition Program (WTP), CARE Centre, Nursing Career ORIENTATION Initiative*

I. INTRODUCTION

CARE Centre for Internationally Educated Nurses (CARE Centre) is a recognized non-for-profit organization, funded by the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship, Immigration and International Trade (MCITT), that provides a bridging program for internationally educated nurses (IENs) to successfully enter and transition/integrate into the nursing profession in Ontario Canada. The CARE Centre works closely with educational partners and IENs' hiring healthcare organizations to provide IENs and their employers with customized services and supports that are unique to their educational and professional needs.

CARE Centre has supported close to 2000 nurses from more than 140 countries to become registered and find nursing employment in Ontario since its conception in 2001. CARE Centre recognizes the value of nurses with diverse

education and experience and is committed to advocating for IENs full contribution to Canada's labour market.

Healthcare sustainability during a time of financial uncertainty and the growing shortage of health professionals, in particular nurses, continues to be one of Canada's greatest health care challenges. According to the Canadian Nurses Association [1], Canada is facing a national shortfall of 60,000 nurses by 2022. On the other hand, Canada is facing with a growing aging population that requires greater care [2].

The skills, expertise and experience brought to Canada by international educated nurses (IENs) will be crucial in filling the nursing labour shortage across Canada and Ontario [3]. IENs come to Canada from many different countries, but they experience common challenges in adapting to and integrating into a health care system that is structurally and culturally different than the ones they were socialized in. IENs are a talented pool of stable health human resources who are looking forward to settling down in Canada with their families in the long term [4]. Therefore, it is important and worthwhile for healthcare employers to invest towards long term retention and integration of IENs into their workforces [3,5].

During the last decade many research studies have been conducted to identify the common challenges faced by IENs when transitioning into nursing and healthcare in Canada [5,6,7,8,9]. In a recent integrative literature review, [5] have identified the following as the major challenges confronting IENs when entering into Canadian professional practice: the recognition of skills and past experience, differences in nursing practice, differences in technologies, communication barriers, cultural differences, and discrimination by team members, managers, and patients. According to [5], what can enable IENs to successfully overcome the above challenges include: a successful transition and positive workplace integration.

The successful transition of new employees in the workplace is important for any organization and the presence of comprehensive orientation programs, buddy or mentorship programs, along with supportive leadership are key factors that can result in employee satisfaction and intention to stay with an organization [10,11]. Customized

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orientation based on the unique needs of IENs is supported by [12]. By investigating post-hire transitional programs for IENs, they found varying degrees of utilization of the following orientation program components: mentorship (formal preceptor and informal buddy systems), formal language courses, logistics support in settling into new environments, use of single versus multiple component structure, development within or based on a theoretical or conceptual framework, duration of programs ranging from one week to one year, and finally the measurement or evaluation of program outcomes [12].

In a survey of nurses in 752 hospitals in the USA, supportive leadership has been found to be negatively associated with the intent to leave of nurses within 3 years [13]. This finding also resonates in IENs' literature in which supportive leadership was found to be a major facilitator of successful transition and retention of IENs within workplace [14,15]; however nurse managers and mentors require additional training on providing IEN-customized support [2,16]. In order for nursing leaders to adequately support IENs, training to develop coaching and mentoring abilities within the constraints of existing cross-cultural issues including strategies to help IENs overcome competency gaps is recommended [17].

Despite the consensus among stakeholders that IEN-customized supports during recruitment, transition and integration of IENs are necessary, the literature demonstrates a lack of consistency in designing, implementing and evaluating of such programs across different workplaces, and/or these programs are mainly as 'ad hoc' or voluntary in workplaces [5,12,18]. In addition, the perspectives of IENs on their needs and challenges may not always be identified and applied in development of such programs. Hence, the purpose of this pilot study was to examine the perspectives of employed and employment-seeking IENs on the availability and desirability of different programs/supports for their transition and integration into the nursing workplace in Ontario. This study in particular explored the availability and desirability of the programs commonly found in the literature as outlined in Table 1.

A. Research Questions

1. What workplace transition supports (WTSs) are commonly available in Ontario based on perspectives of employed IENs?
2. What WTSs are desirable and should be available to IENs in Ontario based on the perspectives of employed IENs?
3. What WTSs are desirable and should be available to IENs in Ontario based on the perspectives of employment-seeking IENs?
4. Is there a difference between employed IENs and employment-seeking IENs' perspectives about WTSs that are desirable?
5. What is the awareness level of the participants about WTSs for IENs?

TABLE I. WORKPLACE TRANSITION SUPPORTS FOR IENs

Program Name	Brief Description
Buddy Program	IEN paired with another experienced IEN of a similar cultural background
Professional Mentorship	IEN paired with another experienced nurse who provides mentorship related to their professional practice and career development
Corporate Orientation for All New Staff	General and clinical orientation to new workplace - same program provided to all new recruits
Corporate Orientation for IENs	General and clinical orientation to new workplace with additional training modules provided for internationally educated nurses
Cultural Awareness Training for Managers	Training to develop awareness and understanding of how a person's culture influences beliefs, values and behaviours for the purposes of enhancing communication skills and promoting a high standard of professional performance
Cultural Awareness Training for Nursing Staff	Training to develop awareness and understanding of how a person's culture influences beliefs, values and behaviours for the purposes of enhancing communication skills and promoting a high standard of professional performance
One-on-One Support From Immediate Supervisor/ Manager	e.g. Progress reports at regular intervals

II. METHOD

A. Design, Participants & Data collection

For this pilot study a cross-sectional study design was used to answer the research questions. In Fall 2012, a survey was developed based on the literature recommendations for IENs' WTS (see Table 1). The survey was distributed through email to CARE Centre members who were employed and those who were seeking employment as either RNs or RPNs at the time of survey distribution. CARE Centre called its IENs clients as 'members'. These members were selected for this study because they were available and also representative of IENs in the province of Ontario.

The survey consisted of four sections: first section included information about demographics such as age, gender, nursing category, employment status. The second section was specific to employed IENs asking to identify (from the provided list) the WTSs offered to them by their employer. The next section inquired all respondents to indicate their desirability of the WTS that they believed should be offered by nursing employers. The last section of the survey asked the respondents about their knowledge and awareness of IENs' WTS in healthcare settings. The survey was anonymous and participants were advised that information would be kept confidential. Ethical approval for the survey was obtained from the University of Liverpool.

B. Data Analysis

The descriptive analysis was used to compare the responses provided by employed IENs and those from employment-seeking IENs. The initial analysis using Fisher's Exact Test revealed no significant differences between RNs and RPNs in their responses in this study.

Hence, in the data analysis IENs RN and RPN are considered as one sample and no further comparison was conducted between RN and RPN in the sample.

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 37 participants responded to the survey. Over 86% of the participants were female IENs between the ages of 30 and 39. Participants originated from 15 countries where they have obtained their primary nursing education; the top 3 source countries were: Philippines (n=7), India (n=6) and Iran (n=3). The sample consisted of 70% employed IENs and 30% seeking-employment IENs. Of those who were employed, 63% worked as RNs and 38% worked as RPNs. Half of the employed IENs were working in Ontario for less than 2 years. For those who were unemployed, 43% were seeking employment as a RN and 57% were seeking employment as a RPN.

According to employed IENs, the most commonly available workplace transition/integration program they recognized was the corporate orientation for all new staff (75%). This was followed by cultural awareness training for nursing staff (38%), one-on-one formal support from a supervisor/manager (31%), professional mentorship (25%) and cultural awareness training for managers (25%). Specialized orientation for IENs and buddy programs were the least available programs identified by employed IENs (Figure 1).

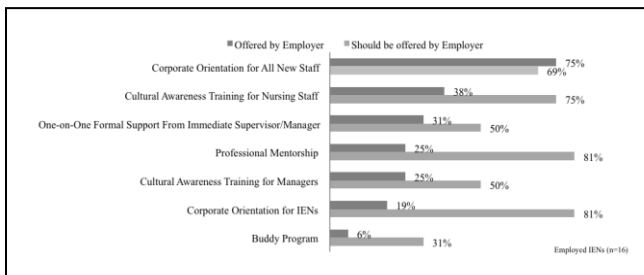


Figure 1: Employed-IENs Perspectives on Availability vs. Desirability of WTSs

With the exception of corporate orientation for new staff, employed IENs felt that all other listed programs should be offered greater than their current availability. The top 3 programs that IENs felt should be available were corporate orientation for IENs, professional mentorship and cultural awareness training for nursing staff (Fig. 1). These three programs are also the programs that exhibited the greatest gap in terms of availability versus desirability. Additionally, longer orientation for IENs was also mentioned as a factor that would help successful IENs transition/integration into nursing employment.

For employment-seeking IENs, the professional mentorship program in which IENs receive one-on-one professional support from an experienced nurse was unanimously chosen as what they felt should be offered (Fig. 2). The other desirable WTSs for employment-seeking IENs include: corporate IEN orientation (71%), cultural

awareness for both staff and managers (57%), and buddy programs (57%).



Figure 2: Employment-Seeking IENs Desirability of WTSs

When comparing the program desirability between the two groups of IENs, the study found that the desirability of employment-seeking IENs for the professional mentorship, cultural awareness training for managers and buddy programs is greater than that of employed IENs. Corporate IENs orientation and cultural awareness training for nursing staff was desired by employed IENs more than those seeking employment (Fig. 3). One reason for these differences between these two groups could be that employed IENs are more aware of the reality of the workplace and the feasibility of providing such programs although further investigation is warranted to confirm these findings.

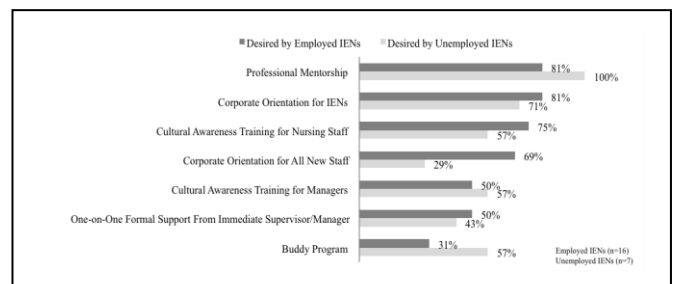


Figure 3: WTSs Desirability of Employed vs. Employment-Seeking IENs

In regards to IENs awareness of WTS, the study findings demonstrated that the majority (88%) of employed IENs were unaware of such programs and services for IENs prior to their employment. For the 12% who were aware, friends and CARE Centre were identified as sources of information on this.

From employment-seeking IENs, 43% responded that they would ask their prospective nursing employers about such programs and services for IENs, and that the availability of these programs would influence their decision on where to apply. Furthermore, over half of the IENs seeking employment planned on identifying themselves as IENs during the recruitment process.

A. Limitations

One major limitation of this study was the small sample size. Caution should be used when generalizing these results to all CARE Centre members or all IENs. Secondly, this study only obtained IENs' perspectives and did not include views of employers of IENs.

IV. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study revealed a gap between the availability and desired WTS for IENs in Ontario. Whilst the 'corporate orientation for new staff' seems to be the most available one to IENs, the study findings revealed that the majority of IENs desire to have an IEN-focused transition/integration program that can assist them with their professional growth and integration into the healthcare system. The study participants expressed their desire to have a customized orientation for IENs, professional mentorship, cultural awareness training for nursing staff and managers, and a buddy program. In addition, IENs desire to have their orientation extended to more than the four to six weeks available for newly hired nurses in most Ontario healthcare settings. This supports the recommendation made by [19] for a longer orientation for internationally educated medical professionals. In fact, the recently launched Nursing Career OriENTation Initiative by Ontario Ministry of Health & Long Term Care (<http://www.healthforceontario.ca>) is providing a great opportunity for employers to not only extend the orientation period, but also to implement appropriate and effective workplace transition/integration supports for their IENs. In providing such supports to IENs, the following needs to be considered:

- Employers need to have some measures in place to identify the IENs in the recruitment/orientation process without stigmatizing them, to assess their IENs specific needs for transition and integration, and to facilitate providing the required WTS in a safe environment.
- There needs to be a balance between IEN-specific programs and those for all nurses in which IENs feel safe and not discriminated to participate.
- WTS for IENs need to include those that provide training - mentors, preceptors, educators – the managers and all the staff.
- Employers need to allocate dedicated resources towards WTS for IENs; funding available through the Nursing Career OriENTation (NCO) initiative could be accessed.
- Employers may have different levels of expertise/experiences in IENs workplace transition/integration. They could, however, reach out to the experts and available resources within the bridge training sector, including programs such as CARE Centre.
- Bridge training programs such as CARE Centre should expand their focus beyond supporting IENs in obtaining their registration/first employment in nursing in Ontario. By engaging employers, they could utilize their capability and expertise to facilitate a smooth and successful transition of IENs into workplaces.

Upon the completion of this study, CARE Centre has recently expanded its focus from assisting IENs obtain nursing registration with the College of Nurses of Ontario (CNO) to supporting IENs' transition/integration into workplaces. Based on the above mentioned desirability vs availability gap, CARE Centre is developing a two-pronged program called Workplace Transition Program (WTP) in

which one stream supports employers in recruiting and facilitating a smoother transition/integration of IENs into their roles and the interprofessional teams and the other stream aim to empower IENs to succeed and excel in inter/professional practice within the workplace. Results from a pilot study of the WTP will provide further insights into the effectiveness of specific transition supports in the workplace, both from the perspectives of employed IENs and employers.

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