



## Pathways to a Nursing Career: Transitions of Licensed Practical Nurses who become Registered Nurses in North Carolina

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**Introduction/Background:** A more diverse registered nurse (RN) workforce is needed to provide health care in North Carolina (NC) and nationally. Studies describing licensed practical nurse (LPN) career transitions to RNs are lacking. This study explored LPN-to-RN transitions in NC and characterized the occurrence of LPN-to-RN professional transitions.

**Methods:** Retrospective design using LPN licensure data from the NC Health Professions Data System (HPDS) data, 2001 to 2013; cohorts were constructed based on graduation year.

**Findings:** Out of 39,398 LPNs in NC between 2001 and 2013, there were 3,161 LPNs (8.0%) that had a LPN-to-RN career transition between 2001 and 2013. LPNs were more likely to transition to RN if they were male; from Asian, American Indian, or Other racial groups; held a baccalaureate, associate or doctoral degree in their last year as an LPN; worked in a hospital in-patient setting; worked in the medical/surgical nursing specialty; and were from a rural area.

**Conclusions:** Our findings indicate that the odds of an LPN-to-RN transition were greater if LPNs were: male; from all other racial groups than White; of a younger age at first LPN licensure; working in a hospital setting or in the specialty of medical-surgical nursing; employed part-time or working in a rural setting during the last year as an LPN.

**Policy Implications:** These findings suggest that policies are needed to target the acceleration of LPN-to-RN transitions for existing LPNs from racial and ethnic groups that are under-represented in the RN nursing workforce to enrich nursing workforce diversity. Also, incentives are needed for LPN-to-RN transitions to fill gaps in community-based, ambulatory, and primary care, and along the full continuum of care; and for rural LPNs to transition to RN careers to work in rural

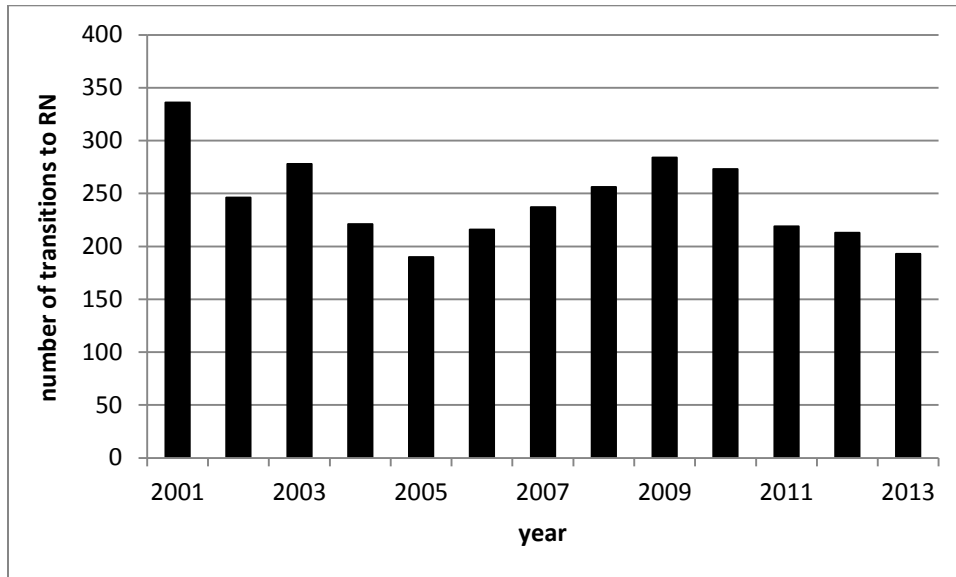
### Conclusions and Policy Implications

- 1) Prior studies have not described the occurrence of LPN-to-RN professional transitions; thus, this study addresses an important knowledge gap.
- 2) Support is needed to provide career counseling for individuals who enter LPN programs, and to the existing LPN workforce.
- 3) Incentives are needed to encourage LPNs to become RNs to: bring diversity to the RN workforce; build local communities; help fill gaps in providing community-based, primary and ambulatory care, along the full continuum of care that extends from home to long-term care services.
- 4) Research funding is needed to determine the viability of the LPN-to-RN pathway as a source for increasing the numbers of RNs and increasing the diversity in the RN workforce of the future.

hospital. Finally, support for research is needed to more closely examine the viability of the LPN-to-RN career ladder, identify and replicate effective LPN-to-RN educational programs, and provide guidance for nurses at the beginning of their careers to smooth transitions, and avoid/eliminate unnecessary transitions.

### Charts/Tables

The Occurrence of LPN-to-RN Professional Transitions over Time



### End notes:

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