

FOLLOW-UP OF THE COLLEGE OF THE BAHAMAS ASSOCIATE OF ARTS DEGREE
NURSING GRADUATES (1987 - MAY, 1989)

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Abstract

The aim of this descriptive study, May, 1990 to November, 1991, via postal questionnaires, was to follow the career path of two (2) groups of The College of The Bahamas Associate of Arts Degree Nursing graduates. The study population was made up of all graduates who had completed a minimum of one year post registration. The findings of the study are limited due to a small size population (15 graduates). However, they do indicate that, so far, the graduates remained in the field of nursing, as all were employed as full-time staff nurses with the Ministry of Health. The majority had entered The College with College Preparatory status, were between the ages of 18 - 20 years, were funded by the Ministry of Health, and lived in the New Providence geographical area. All graduates reported that the programme, in general, prepared them well for their positions as registered nurses.

Introduction

In 1984, the first Associate Degree Nursing programme commenced at The College of The Bahamas jointly funded by the Ministry of Health and The College of The Bahamas. To date, the programme has produced seventy four (74) Associate Degree Registered Nurse graduates (see Table 1). Fifty one (51) of these have successfully completed the Bahamas Nursing Council examination and are practicing as Registered Nurses, the other twenty three (23) are presently on internship.

TABLE 1. TOTAL NUMBER OF THE COLLEGE OF THE BAHAMAS ASSOCIATE OF ARTS DEGREE NURSE GRADUATES (N = 74)

YEAR	NUMBER OF GRADUATES
June, 1987	5
June, 1988	9
June, 1989	17
June, 1990	11
June, 1991	9
December, 1991	3
June, 1992	20

SOURCE: Nursing & Health Sciences Division's List of Students - June, 1992.

Nursing education is a professionally oriented education which prepares students to function as beginning practitioners of nursing. Diploma Schools of Nursing as well as Associate Degree Nursing programmes provide their graduates with varying degrees of preparation for entry into the work setting and for further studies at a tertiary education college or university. Science has confronted Nurse Educators with the need to identify and analyze the realities of nursing practice and translate them into a nursing curriculum which will enable the new graduate to practice with competency. One of the questions that needs to be addressed, therefore, is how effective has the curriculum been in preparing nurses for practice.

The purpose of this study was to trace the career path of The College of The Bahamas R.N. Associate Degree graduates to determine their general trend of employment, demographic characteristics prior to enrollment, professional experiences and activities since graduation, future plans, and opinion about how well the Associate of Arts Degree Nursing programme prepared them for their role as registered nurses. The findings will provide guidelines which can be used for overall improvement of the Associate Degree Nursing curriculum, students' clinical supervision and total experiences at The College of The Bahamas.

Methodology

The study population comprised all C.O.B. Associate Degree Nursing graduates who were successful in the November 1987 to May 1989 Bahamas Nursing Council examination and had completed a minimum of one (1) year post registration experience. All four (4) 1987 and one (1) May, 1988 graduate were followed up two (2) years after graduation. The four (4) November, 1988 and seven (7) May, 1989 graduates were followed up one (1) year post graduation. The study was conducted during the period May 1990 to November 1991. Local employment addresses were obtained for the sixteen (16) eligible subjects. postal questionnaires were administered to all but one (1) of the May, 1989 graduates in the sample population. This subject was on leave, had a recent change of address and thus was not located. The purpose of the study was explained to the subjects (alumni) in an introductory letter accompanying the questionnaire. A separate data form for the subjects to submit their current postal address for further follow-up was also enclosed in the letter. An addressed envelope was included for the return (by hand collection) of the questionnaires.

The first set of questionnaires were delivered June, 1990. They were slow returning and only 33.3%, five (5) of fifteen (15) questionnaires had been returned by December, 1990. Phone calls were made directly to each located graduate as a reminder to submit questionnaires. A second set of questionnaires were delivered, by hand, in the Spring of 1991. A slow return yielded 100% by the Fall, 1991.

Findings

Demographic Characteristics of the Sample Population Prior to Enrollment at C.O.B.

Thirteen (13), 86.7% of the fifteen (15) graduates lived in New Providence. The remaining two (2), 13.3% resided in the Family Islands. The majority, 73.4% entered at the age range 18 - 20 years. Two (2) were under 18 years and two (2) were in the age group 21 - 25 years. All were single. High schools attended varied as seen in section 'D' of the table. Sections 'E' and 'F' of the table cite graduates general education qualifications. The range of B.J.C.s obtained by each graduate was one (1) to eleven (11) (see E ii). The range of G.C.E. 'O' level was one (1) to five (5) (see F ii). Just under 50% of the graduates had pursued further education after completing high school and before enrollment in C.O.B. (see 'G') (Table 2).

**TABLE 2: DEMOGRAPHICS OF AA DEGREE R.N. GRADUATES
(1987 - MAY 1989) PRIOR TO ENROLMENT IN
COB AA DEGREE NURSING PROGRAMME (N = 15)**

<u>DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS</u>	<u>NO.</u>	<u>%</u>
A. <u>Geographical Area</u>		
New Providence	13	86.7
Family Island	2	13.3
	<u>15</u>	<u>100.0</u>
B. <u>Age</u>		
Under 18 years	2	13.3
18 - 20 years	11	73.4
21 - 25 years	2	13.3
	<u>15</u>	<u>100.0</u>
C. <u>Marital Status</u>		
Single	15	100.0

D. <u>Name of Last school attended</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>%</u>
R. M. Bailey	3	20.0
A. F. Adderley	2	13.3
St. Augustine's College	2	13.3
Government High	2	13.3
C.C. Sweeting	1	6.7
Bahamas Academy	1	6.7
Prince Williams	1	6.7
St. John's College	1	6.7
Freeport High	1	6.7
Governor's Harbour High	1	6.7
	<u>15</u>	<u>100.0</u>

E. Educational Qualifications

Number of Certificates

i. Bahamas Junior Certificate

English Language	14	93.3
English Literature	14	93.3
Biology	12	80.0
Mathematics	11	73.3
History	10	66.7
Geography	9	60.0
Health Science	6	40.0
Art	4	26.7
Social Studies	4	26.7
General Science	4	26.7
Religious Knowledge	4	26.7
Home Economics	2	13.3

ii. AA Degree Graduates

No. of B.J.C. Certificates

1	1
1	3
2	5
5	6
1	7
1	8
3	10
1	11

F. i. General Education

G.C.E. 'O' level

	<u>No.</u>	<u>%</u>
English Literature	9	60.0
English Language	8	53.3
History	6	40.0
Religious Knowledge	6	40.0
Biology	5	33.3
Math	2	13.3
Chemistry	2	13.3
Geography	1	6.7
French	1	6.7
Food and Nutrition	1	6.7
Commerce	1	6.7
Accounts	1	6.7

ii. AA Degree R.N. Graduates

No. of G.C.E. 'O'level
Certificates

4	1
2	2
4	3
2	4
3	5

G. Education after High School

<u>Before Enrollment in AA Degree</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>%</u>
General Education Evening Classes	4	26.6
Transfer from other C.O.B. Programme	2	13.3
BORCO Training, Freeport	1	6.7
None	7	46.7
No response	1	6.7
Total	<u>15</u>	<u>100.0</u>

The Graduate's Professional Experience and Activities Since Graduation

Only two (2) 13.3% of the graduates reported having experiences at a government clinic. All held Staff Nurse positions. The number of different areas in which the graduates worked in hospital ranged from one (1) to ten (10) areas, (see G. iii). The majority, ten (10), had limited experiences, a maximum of two (2) different placements since graduation (Table 3).

TABLE 3. AA DEGREE R.N. GRADUATES (1987 - MAY, 1989)
EMPLOYMENT HISTORY, FIRST AND CURRENT POSITION
SINCE GRADUATION (N = 15).

<u>BASE CATEGORIES</u>	<u>NO.</u>	<u>%</u>
A. <u>Employment Status</u>		
Employed in Nursing	15	100.0
B. <u>Full or Part-Time Employment</u>		
Full-time employment	15	100.00
C. <u>Length of Time Employed in Last Position</u>		
1 year	10	67.7
Over 1 year	5	33.3
Total	<u>15</u>	<u>100.0</u>
D. <u>Geographic Area of Employment</u>		
New Providence	15	100.00

E. <u>Type of Agency of Employment</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>%</u>
Government Hospital	14	93.3
Government Clinic	1	6.7
Total	<u>15</u>	<u>100.0</u>
F. <u>Current Position Status</u>		
Staff Nurse	15	100.0
G. <u>Professional Experience</u>		
<u>General Areas Worked in</u>		
i. <u>Hospital</u>		
General Medical Nursing	8	53.3
General Surgical Nursing	6	40.0
Intensive Care Nursing	6	40.0
Paediatric Nursing	5	33.3
Accident and Emergency	3	20.0
Ambulatory Care Department	3	20.0
Psychiatric Nursing	3	20.0
Special Care Baby Unit	2	13.3
Gynaecology Nursing	1	6.7
Recovery Room	1	6.7
Relief Pool	1	6.7
Geriatric Nursing	1	6.7
Operating Theatre	1	6.7
ii. <u>Community Clinic</u>	2	13.3
iii. <u>No. of AA R.N. Graduates</u>	<u>No. of Areas Worked In</u>	
6 R.N.'s	1	
4 R.N.'s	2	
1 R.N.	3	
2 R.N.'s	4	
1 R.N.	6	
1 R.N.	10	

The majority of graduates had attended some professional development activities. Two (2) subjects did not attend any and had not taken any other educational courses since graduation. Of the two (2) who had taken educational courses, one (1) was toward a degree in another field (Table 4).

TABLE 4. AA DEGREE R.N. GRADUATES (1987 - MAY, 1989)
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES SINCE
GRADUATION

BASE CATEGORIES	NO.	%
A. <u>Professional Development Activities Attended</u>		
Conference	8	53.3
Seminars	8	53.3
Workshops	7	46.7
None	2	13.3
No Response	2	13.3
B. <u>Any Other Courses Taken Since Graduation</u>		
No courses taken	13	86.7
Yes courses taken	2	13.3
Total	<u>15</u>	<u>100.0</u>
C. <u>If Courses Taken Toward Degree</u>		
Toward Degree in another field	1	6.7
For Career Advancement:		
In-Service Education	1	6.7

Table 5 shows that the majority, 66.6%, of the graduates did not have membership in any other professional organization. Only three (3) had membership in The Nurses' Association of The Bahamas.

TABLE 5. AA DEGREE R.N. GRADUATES (1987 - MAY, 1989)
PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIP STATUS

MEMBERSHIP	NO.	%
Nurses' Association of The Bahamas	3	20.0
No membership in any other professional organization	10	66.6
Membership in other organization	1	6.7
No response	1	6.7

Graduates' Perception of the Usefulness of The Associate Degree Nursing Programme

Table 6 depicts the graduates' response regarding the usefulness of the AA Degree Nursing Programme courses in their R.N. position. General education courses which rated highly, 60% and above were, Psychology, English and Communication.

Mathematics and Sociology were rated less than 50% usefulness. All the support courses and nursing courses were rated highly, 60% and above for their usefulness. The Professional Adjustment nursing course was rated the lowest at 46.6%.

The graduates were asked to indicate on a given scale the degree to which they feel the AA Degree Nursing programme prepared them to perform specific nursing process functions. In response to the seven (7) categories in the assessment skills area, categories 3 and 5 were rated highly, 60% (excellent to very good). Areas of weak preparation, under 50% (within excellent to very good scales) were performing physical and psychosocial assessment, determining if patients basic health needs were met, assessing Family Health and Primary Health Care needs of a community. In the ten (10) categories of planning, three areas were highly rated at the 60% level of preparation. Areas rated at 46.4% and below in the excellent to very good scale were categories four (4) through ten (10). Preparing teaching plans was rated the weakest. Four (4) of the eight (8) categories of the implementation skills were rated above 50% in the excellent to very good scales on how well they prepared the graduates. All of the six (6) categories in the evaluation skills were rated less than 50% on the excellent to very good preparation scale. However, if the three (3) scales, excellent, very good and good preparation are viewed together, twenty-four (24) of the total thirty-one (31) categories are at a 60% and above rating. Six (6) categories are just over the 50% rating and only one (1) category - designing a teaching plan for patients and family is at a 40% rating of usefulness (Table 7).

Table 8 shows the graduates' response regarding the influence of their general experiences at The College of The Bahamas. Thirteen (13) of the seventeen (17) categories of general experiences were rated as having an impact (quite and very much) on them. Only two (2) areas were rated under 50% on the quite and very much scale: appreciation and employment of art, music, drama and citizenship; understanding and interest in the style and quality of civic and political life.

TABLE 6:

AA DEGREE R.N. GRADUATES (1987-MAY, 1989) RESPONSES
REGARDING THE USEFULNESS OF THE ASSOCIATE DEGREE
COURSES IN THEIR R.N. POSITION N=15

COURSES	Excellent Application or use in R.N. Position.	Good Application or use in R.N. Position.	Some Application or use in R.N. Position.	Minimal Application or use in R.N. Position.	No Application or use in R.N. Position.	No Response	Total Responses
1. General Education Courses:							
Library Orientation - use of library	0	1	6	5	2	1	14/15
Student Development Seminar	1	4	3	6	1	0	15/15
College English Skills - Use of English	9	5	0	0	0	1	14/15
Humanities:- Communication	9	4	0	0	0	2	13/15
- Foreign Language	2	4	2	1	3	3	12/15
Natural Sciences:- Chemistry	3	3	8	1	0	0	15/15
- Mathematics	7	5	2	0	0	1	14/15
Social Sciences:- Psychology	10	5	0	0	0	0	15/15
- Sociology	6	7	1	1	0	0	15/15
- Social Psychology	6	6	1	1	0	1	14/15
2. Support Courses							
Human Growth & Development	12	2	1	0	0	0	15/15
Applied Human Anatomy & Physiology	11	4	0	0	0	0	15/15
Microbiology	9	3	3	0	0	0	15/15
Nutrition	9	5	1	0	0	0	15/15
3. Nursing Courses							
Foundations of Nursing Practice Courses	13	2	0	0	0	0	15/15
Pharmacology	10	5	0	0	0	0	15/15
Pathophysiology	12	3	0	0	0	0	15/15
Maternal & Child Health	10	4	1	0	0	0	15/15
Early Childhood Clinical Approaches	9	5	1	0	0	0	15/15
Community Health & Epidemiology	9	5	1	0	0	0	15/15
Medical/Surgical Nursing Courses	14	1	0	0	0	0	15/15
Psychiatric Nursing	12	3	0	0	0	0	15/15
Professional Adjustments - Management	7	4	3	1	0	0	15/15
Clinical Practicum Courses	12	2	1	0	0	0	15/15

TABLE 7:

RESPONSES OF AA DEGREE R.N. GRADUATES
(1987-MAY1989) REGARDING THE DEGREE OF
USEFULNESS OF THE AA DEGREE PROGRAMME
IN PREPARING THEM TO PERFORM SPECIFIC
NURSING PROCESS FUNCTIONS.

CLINICAL KNOWLEDGE/SKILLS NURSING PROCESS FUNCTIONS	Excel- lent Prepa- ration	Very Good Prepa- ration	Good Prepa- ration	Fair	Poor	No Response	Total Responses
<u>Assessment</u>							
1. Perform necessary physical assessments	6	1	6	-	1	1	14/15
2. Perform necessary psychosocial assessments.	2	4	4	3	1	1	14/15
3. Identify patients/clients problems.	7	2	1	2	2	1	14/15
4. Determine whether the patients basic health needs are met.	3	3	3	2	3	1	14/15
5. Integrate knowledge of the etiology of diseases, course and prognosis of the patient's health-problems with the data being collected.	6	3	-	3	2	1	14/15
6. Assess family health needs at a basic level.	1	4	2	6	1	1	14/15
7. Identify essential data to assess primary health care needs of a community.	1	3	5	4	1	1	14/15
<u>Planning</u>							
1. Formulate realistic goals and set criteria for patients.	5	4	-	3	2	1	14/15
2. Develop a nursing care plan based on patient problems (nursing diagnosis) and standards of care.	6	3	-	2	3	1	14/15
3. Establish priorities for meeting the needs of assigned patient group.	6	3	-	3	2	1	14/15
4. Communicate the plan of care to patients and families.	5	2	1	3	3	1	14/15
5. Communicate the nursing plan of care to other health team members.	5	2	1	3	2	2	13/15
6. Collaborate with other health care providers in determining strategies for providing health care.	4	2	3	3	2	1	14/15
7. Participate in developing and revising policies and procedures for the immediate work setting.	2	1	5	5	1	1	14/15
8. Design a teaching-learning plan for patients and families.	3	1	2	5	2	2	13/15
9. Involve individuals and families in identifying their own needs.	1	2	8	2	1	1	14/15
10. Collaborate with other health care providers to determine strategies to meet community health needs.	1	4	3	4	1	2	13/15

TABLE 7: Continued . . .

Implementation:							
Provide safe, organized patient care	5	4	2	1	2	1	14/15
Attain a therapeutic nurse-patient relationship.	5	4	1	3	1	1	14/15
Identify and encourage appropriate patient and family participation in care.	6	1	2	5	-	1	14/15
Appropriately utilize other health care providers and resources.	4	4	3	3	-	1	14/15
Use appropriate teaching-learning strategies for the instruction of patient and family.	4	2	4	3	1	1	14/15
Document nursing care given, significant observations, nursing interventions and patient responses.	6	3	-	4	1	1	14/15
Functioning as an advocate for individuals.	3	2	4	5	-	1	14/15
Encourage consumer (client) participation to meet community health needs.	3	1	8	2	-	1	14/15
Evaluation:							
Evaluate the impact and effectiveness of nurse-patient interaction.	4	3	2	5	-	1	14/15
Evaluate teaching strategies and instructional materials.	3	3	4	3	1	1	14/15
Evaluate the nursing care given by others to whom you delegate.	3	4	2	4	1	1	14/15
Participate in nursing audit and other quality assurance activities.	2	3	3	4	1	2	13/15
Determine the effectiveness of health services by examining the roles and functions of primary health care providers.	2	3	6	3	-	1	14/15
Compare outcomes of modes of health care delivery in a primary care.	2	3	6	3	-	1	14/15

TABLE 8:

**AA DEGREE R.N. GRADUATES (1987-MAY 1989) RESPONSES
REGARDING THE INFLUENCE OF THEIR GENERAL EXPERIENCES
AT THE COLLEGE OF THE BAHAMAS.**

GENERAL EXPERIENCES.	I N F L U E N C E D					Total Responses
	Very much	Quite a bit	Some	Very little	No Response	
1. Vocational training-skills and techniques directly applicable to a job.	5	8	1	1	-	15
2. Background and specialization for further education in some professional, scientific or scholarly field.	7	5	2	1	-	15
3. Broadened literary acquaintance and appreciation.	6	4	4	1	-	15
4. Awareness of different philosophies, cultures, and ways of life.	6	5	3	1	-	15
5. Social development - experience and skill in relation to other people.	6	6	1	2	-	15
6. Personal development - understanding one's abilities and limitations, interests, and standards of behaviour.	6	6	2	1	-	15
7. Critical thinking - logic, inference, nature and limitations of knowledge.	7	4	4	-	-	15
8. Aesthetic sensitivity - appreciation and enjoyment of art, music, drama.	1	5	5	4	-	15
9. Writing and speaking - clear, correct, effective communication.	9	3	3	-	-	15
10. Science and technology - understanding and appreciation.	8	6	1	-	-	15
11. Citizenship - understanding and interest in the style and quality of civic and political life.	2	3	6	4	-	15
12. Appreciation of individuality and independence of thought and action.	4	5	6	-	-	15
13. Development of friendships and loyalties of lasting value.	9	2	2	2	-	15
14. Vocabulary, terminology, and facts in various fields of knowledge.	7	5	2	1	-	15
15. Appreciation of religion - moral and ethical standards.	2	5	6	2	-	15
16. Tolerance and understanding of other people and their values.	3	9	2	1	-	15
17. Basis for improved social and economic status.	2	6	5	2	-	15

The graduates professional goals were divided into four (4) categories. Moving up in the administrative structure in the present organization was not a goal for five (5) of the fourteen (14) graduates who responded to this category. Seven (7) others had this as a long term goal. Eight (8) graduates cited looking for other job possibilities in their area of specialization as an immediate goal. Six (6) indicated leaving nursing for a period of time as intermediate and long term goals.

In the scholarship goal category, eight (8) graduates, 53% responded that writing was not a goal, while six (6), 40%, indicated the same regarding a goal, 'engaging in research'.

In the educational goal category, 53% was not interested in taking non-credit courses, 40% did not want to take credit courses that did not lead to a degree and 73.3% had set as a short and intermediate goal, to take courses leading to a baccalaureate degree. Forty percent (40%) indicated that they would like to take courses toward a master's degree as a short term and intermediate goal. Eight (8) graduates did not respond to whether they would take courses toward a doctorate, three (3) did not see this as a goal.

Short term and intermediate leadership goals were rated at 66.6% in the area, 'to participate in other collaborative efforts and improve health care'. Seeking leadership position in a professional organization was not a goal for five (5) of the thirteen (13) graduates who responded to this area. Five (5) indicated this as a short term and intermediate goal, three (3) as a long term goal.

Other goals specified include, to become a nursing lecturer, two (2) graduates; to work in a Family Island area and to pursue the Midwifery and Community Health Nursing, post basic programmes of study was cited by one (1) graduate (Table 9).

TABLE 9:

**AA DEGREE R.N. GRADUATES (1987-MAY 1989)
RESPONSES REGARDING THEIR FUTURE PLANS.**

PROFESSIONAL GOALS	Short Term Goal.	Inter-mediate Goal.	Long-term Goal.	Not a Goal for me.	No Response	Total Responses
<u>Employment Goals:-</u>						
1. To continue in my present position.	3	6	3	3	-	15/15
2. To move up in the administrative structure of the same organisation.	0	2	7	5	1	14/15
3. To look for other job possibilities in my area of specialization.	1	8	3	3	0	15/15
4. To leave nursing for a period of time.	0	2	4	9	0	15/15
5. To re-enter nursing full-time.	N O T A P P L I C A B L E					
<u>Scholarship Goals:</u>						
To write for publication.	0	2	1	8	4	11/15
7. To engage in research.	1	3	4	6	1	14/15
<u>Educational Goals:</u>						
To take courses but not for credit.	3	2	1	8	1	14/15
9. To take credit courses but not necessarily for a degree.	2	4	1	6	2	13/15
10. To take courses leading to a: Baccalaureate Degree	6	5	2	2	0	15/15
11. Masters Degree	2	4	2	2	5	10/15
12. Doctoral Degree	0	3	1	3	8	7/15
<u>Leadership Goals:</u>						
To participate in other collaborative efforts to improve health care.	6	4	3	1	1	14/15
14. To seek a leadership position in a professional organization.	1	4	3	5	2	13/15
15. <u>Other Goals:</u> (Please specify)						

Discussion

The results of this study carried out on fifteen (15) C.O.B. AA Degree R.N. Graduates (1987 - May, 1989) revealed that the majority of graduates lived in New Providence, were within the 18 - 20 age group, attended varied high schools, primarily in New Providence and had entered the programme with College Prep. status. All were single and were funded by the Ministry of Health's Grant. Although a small sample, there is indication that there be a greater focus on recruitment of students from the Family Island schools. It would also be interesting to note from future comparative studies if the present demographic trends exist or differ greatly in students entering the Associate Degree Nursing programme in the '90's.

All graduates, 100%, were employed full-time in nursing as Staff Nurses within the local government Princess Margaret Hospital. This finding has implication not only for recruitment in the AA Degree Nursing Programme but also for manpower needs. It suggests, though a small sample, that the graduates are remaining committed to their funding agency. When asked to check the clinical areas they had worked in, the graduates' response indicated that only 33.3% had gained a wide range of experiences in hospital. The clinical areas most frequently checked were general Medical and Surgical Nursing, Intensive Care and Paediatric Nursing. Less common areas were Accident and Emergency/Ambulatory Care department, Psychiatric and Community Health Nursing. In addition, only two (2) graduates had experiences in Community Health Services, one (1) assigned in the Relief Pool, had worked ten (10) areas, six (6) had only worked in one (1) area and four (4) in two (2) areas. Employers could take a creative look at scheduling to give more newly R.N. graduates a wider range of clinical experiences, as this not only would widen their professional experiences, but would prepare them to be more eligible for entry into the local post basic programmes and other professional programmes of study. These findings, however, correlated with that of Knopf's (1975) study.

Few of the graduates, two (2) out of the fifteen (15), had taken some type of course within the past two (2) years. Only one (1) graduate had pursued a course toward a degree in another field. Reasons for not pursuing courses were not ascertained but one (1) factor that may have inhibited the graduates could be that no baccalaureate in Nursing programme is offered locally. However, there are other general education courses offered at C.O.B. which could have been pursued and later transferred to a B.Sc. Nursing Degree programme. Nevertheless, the majority had attended professional development conferences,

seminars and workshops. Twenty percent (20%) reported having membership in the Nurses Association of The Bahamas. Membership in other organizations was not remarkable as ten (10) out of the fifteen (15) graduates did not have membership in any other professional organization. This finding suggests that the Nurses Association needs to strengthen their membership recruitment as numbers provide strength for the organization and there is a need to generate more participation from the younger nurses.

As a whole, all general and nursing courses were rated as having some good and excellent application in the job setting. The nursing courses were rated primarily within the excellent to good range of usefulness as well as the support courses of Human Growth and Development, Applied Human Anatomy and Physiology, Microbiology and Nutrition. This may be because the concepts and principles in these courses are required in order to provide effective and efficient nursing care.

It was interesting to note, however, that the Chemistry course was rated more in the some application scale as this science area is inherent in all aspects of general nursing. This finding, however, correlated with the faculty's review of the Chemistry courses offered in the Associate of Arts Degree Nursing programme which showed that they did not include Biochemistry, and probably accounted for the students' rating. This deficit has been corrected with the use of an additional Biochemistry course. The same rating (some application) was given for Mathematics, Sociology and Library Orientation, and perhaps more emphasis should be given to application of these areas during class discussions. Professional Adjustment Management course also needs strengthening. Although rated forty-six percent (46%) it got the lowest rating out of all the nursing courses. Perhaps, nursing managers also need to assist new graduates with greater assimilation in this area. Community Health and Epidemiology and Early Childhood Clinical Approaches courses took the second lowest rating in the excellent application scale. For community, only two (2) graduates had this experience and thus the lowered degree of application noted may be due to the graduates non-placement in this area. This explanation may be somewhat true for Early Childhood Clinical Approaches as only five (5) out of fifteen (15) graduates had experiences in Paediatrics since graduation.

The findings, related to the usefulness of the programme in preparing them to perform specific Nursing Process Functions, suggest that although the overall ratings are acceptable, there is room for re-examination of teaching techniques and clinical practice time in order to promote a higher degree of usefulness (excellent preparation) in all the Nursing Process Functions.

Particular emphasis should be directed towards improving AA Degree R.N. students assessment skills as beginning practitioners in all areas except identifying patient problems and knowledge of the disease process as most of the graduates in the sample felt they were well prepared in this area. Emphasis is also required in further development and strengthening of all categories of the Nursing Process, planning, implementation and evaluation skills. The graduates' comments about the weaknesses of the programme does to some extent substantiate these findings. Over fifty percent (50%) said there was not enough clinical experiences. Thirteen percent said the practicum should be more organized and 6.7% said the place for teaching the lab was unsuitable and there was a lack of supervision during the internship. Most of these areas cited by the students have been corrected. The new Bahamas School of Nursing now renamed The Grosvenor Close Campus, Nursing and Health Sciences Division, has two fully equipped Practical Lab rooms. The practicum courses have all been reorganized and revised and there is a nursing lecturer who coordinates the students' internship experiences. However, more time in the clinical areas need addressing and will be examined closely in the new Associate of Science Degree programme.

All graduates reported that C.O.B. 'life' highly influenced them in the areas of critical thinking, writing and speaking, understanding and appreciation of science and technology, appreciation of individuality, and independence of thought and action. Generally, all other categories were rated as being useful except two areas, aesthetic sensitivity and citizenship. The College administrators should feel a sense of accomplishment by these results, even though it is a small sample. The suggested latter two weak areas should be addressed.

The majority of graduates' responses regarding their employment goals, was that they planned to stay in nursing. Most of them indicated that an intermediate and long term goal was to look for other job possibilities in their area of specialization. Moving up in the administrative structure in the organization was more or less a long term goal or not a goal for the majority. Employers need to take note of this and encourage graduates to want to remain in their present areas of employment. Opportunities for greater participation in the administrative aspect of nursing care should be promoted to overcome the apparent lack of interest in this area. The area of scholarship goals needs promotion generally in nursing. The nursing faculty could and should be pace-setters in this area. The nursing students are exposed to research but at the very basic levels. The B.Sc. in Nursing programme will

have a greater focus in this area. However, it is encouraging to see from the graduates' rating regarding continuing education activities, that they plan to pursue courses toward baccalaureate, master's and doctoral degrees, to a lesser extent. Efforts to collaborate with others to improve health care was a priority for most graduates. On the contrary, seeking a leadership position in a professional organization was not necessarily a goal for the majority. Education about the Nurses' Association and the impact of participation in other professional organizations in development of leadership skills may need to be re-emphasized to students and new R.N. graduates.

This study's findings reveal that there is a need to conduct further follow-up replicated studies on a larger population group as well as on more current graduates to determine changing demographic trends and degrees of usefulness of the Associate Degree Nursing programme in preparing its graduates for practice. The data in this study, although generated from a small sample, provide guidelines for improving the Associate Degree Nursing programme curriculum content, teaching, and students clinical supervision. It can also give direction to employing government or other agencies as well as professional accrediting bodies.

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Notes

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