

Interest in child-specific nurse practitioner programs dwindling

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While the number of graduates from family or adult nurse practitioner

programs continues to rise, student applications to pediatric nurse practitioner and neonatal nurse practitioner programs are falling. Yet there is capacity in PNP and NNP training programs and unmet demand for graduates.

Researchers determined that most of the child-focused programs have vacancies in each class, even when some class sizes have already been scaled back due to the downward trend in applications.

Their findings are based on telephone surveys of directors at all PNP and NNP programs in the United States.

Both studies appear in the July issue of the *Journal of Professional Nursing*.

"In spite of a continuing shortage of pediatric and neonatal [nurse practitioners](#), there is a perception there aren't enough job openings in these fields. We want prospective applicants to know there is a real need for PNPs and NNPs, and that more people need to go into these fields," says Gary Freed, M.D., M.P.H., the lead author on the studies and the Percy and Mary Murphy Professor of Pediatrics and Child Health Delivery and the founding director of the Child Health Evaluation and Research Unit.

Using self-administered surveys, researchers found that

- Approximately 10 percent of PNP programs surveyed were either closed, put on hold, or did not have new graduates within the last three years.
- More than 25 percent of active PNP programs did not fill all available vacancies for the class entering in 2012.
- Approximately 25 percent of NNP programs surveyed have closed in recent years.

About one-third of PNP program directors reported difficulty in hiring or retaining faculty. Most also reported problems maintaining or securing new clinical sites, particularly as they compete to secure such sites with larger and growing family nurse practitioner and physician assistant education programs.

In contrast, most NNP program directors report few problems with hiring or retaining faculty. However, the majority said there is stiff competition for clinical sites for their trainees, largely due to competition from other similar programs.

Both studies conclude that greater awareness through marketing and other forms of communication are needed so prospective applicants know there are employment opportunities for graduates. For now, it looks like PNP and NNP programs are optimistic about remaining open, even with the current negative market fluctuations. But what if the downward trends continue?

"The family medicine nurse practitioner degree theoretically enables graduates to choose children or adults for their practice, but they almost all gravitate toward the care of adults leaving a shortage of nurse practitioners to care for children. More needs to be done to encourage students to pursue careers in the care of children," says Freed.

Provided by University of Michigan Health System

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