



Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

## {Human Capital}

---

The mean age of nursing faculty prepared at the doctoral level is 46.8 years, which means that most faculty will have short teaching careers.

---

Recent efforts to resolve the nursing shortage have generated increased interest in joining the profession, but nursing schools turn away thousands of qualified applicants each year due to a scarcity of faculty. To end the nursing shortage, we need more faculty to teach for more years. Since all nursing schools require their faculty to have either a master's degree or a Ph.D., the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation is working to ensure that more nurses attain graduate education and begin academic positions earlier in their careers.

To improve the health and health care of all Americans, the nation's health care systems must employ a capable and diverse workforce. Since its inception, RWJF has recognized the importance of investing in the backbone of our health and health care delivery system—its people. Our programs have sought to create more generalist physicians, to attract underrepresented minorities, and to help develop leaders in nursing and other health fields. Addressing the crippling nursing shortage—which will intensify in the next decade—is the current focus of the Foundation's ongoing investments in building a sufficient, well-trained workforce. The immediate challenge is to increase the number of nurse faculty, so that nursing schools can accommodate rather than reject the growing number of applicants who wish to pursue nursing careers.

Many factors contribute to the nurse faculty shortage. Nurse faculty in baccalaureate schools are generally required to have a Ph.D. to teach, but only a small percentage of nurses pursue doctoral degrees. Nearly two-thirds of nursing graduates receive their education at community colleges. Less than 20 percent pursue the advanced degrees required to pursue academic careers. As a result, there is a shortage of nurses prepared for faculty roles. In addition, few doctorate-level nurses choose academic careers, citing low salary, desire to retain patient contact and practice ties, lack of prestige for the nursing faculty role, and overwhelming expectations of nurse faculty. Many



nurse faculty members face unusually heavy workloads and burn out after a few years. Faculty regularly devote 54 hours each week to their teaching responsibilities<sup>1</sup> and are therefore less likely to have the time to conduct research and publish in peer-reviewed journals, a requirement to advance to a tenured position. As a result, nurse faculty often struggle to achieve similar status and academic standing in comparison with professors in other disciplines.

Most jobs that require excess effort or require workers to endure challenging circumstances pay workers to compensate for these shortcomings. However, nurse faculty do not receive adequate compensation for the challenging circumstances of their work. The expense involved in becoming a professor of nursing is also prohibitive. Unlike many social science graduate students who receive fellowships and other funding sources to support their studies, most nurses must pay tuition and forgo income during their education—counting on post-graduate employment to address their debt. Because nurses who pursue careers as nurse faculty know they will earn less than clinical nurses and administrators upon graduating, most take classes part-time while continuing to earn an income in clinical practice. This lengthens the amount of time it takes (a median of 15.9 years) for nurses to obtain doctoral degrees. The average age of nurses who complete a doctoral degree is 46 years, compared with 33 years for those in other disciplines. Once nurses complete a Ph.D., and are eligible to fill faculty roles, the pharmaceutical and clinical informatics industries aggressively offer high salaries to recruit them.

Not only do nurses become teachers later in life, but they also retire relatively young, at 62.5 years on average. Because of lengthy preparation and short careers, nursing professors are, on average, significantly older than their peers in other disciplines: the average age of nurse faculty with doctorates is 46.8 years old. The retirement of nurses is projected to peak in 2010—the same year when the demand for newly trained nurses will reach its apex. The situation is critical. Unless we can encourage an influx of young professors to nursing schools and retain them until they retire, we will not be able to reverse the shortage.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation is spearheading several initiatives to address the nurse faculty shortage—the *New Jersey Nursing Initiative*, *Nurse Faculty Scholars*, and the proposed *New Careers in Nursing Scholarship Program*.

The *New Jersey Nursing Initiative* is a Foundation collaboration with New Jersey nurse leaders, the New Jersey Chamber of Commerce and government to address our state's faculty shortage. A successful *New Jersey Nursing Initiative* will develop, implement and evaluate a statewide model for recruiting and retaining nurse faculty. We expect to increase the number of nurse faculty teaching in New Jersey by more than 70 nursing faculty positions by 2012.

---

<sup>1</sup> Reinhart J, et al. *New Jersey's Nursing Faculty Shortage: A Technical Report for the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation*. Princeton: 2007.



The planned *New Careers in Nursing Scholarship Program* is designed to alleviate the shortage of nurses with four-year degrees, by funding scholarships for accelerated baccalaureate degree programs in nursing. Because nurses with B.S.N. degrees are four times as likely to go on to graduate school compared with other nurses, we anticipate that this investment will have a positive impact on the nursing faculty shortage.

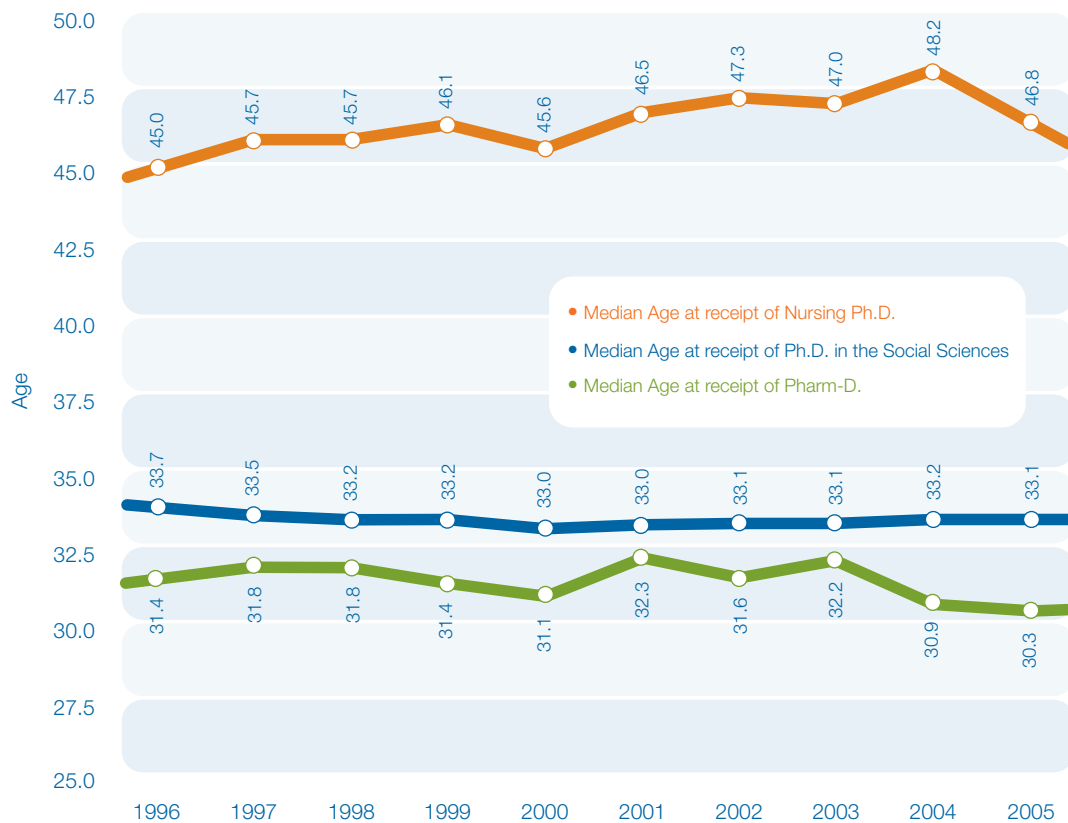
In 2008 we will welcome our first cohort of Nurse Faculty Scholars—a select group of junior nursing faculty who completed their doctoral degree within 10 years of receiving their initial nursing degree. This program will lead the way to developing the next generation of national leaders in academic nursing and raise the academic status of the profession.

The Human Capital Portfolio is committed over the long term to improving nurse education and ensuring a sustainable pool of nurse faculty. We believe that together, these program initiatives will increase the number of nurse faculty while boosting their prestige and academic standing.

For additional information about our initiatives and objectives, visit [www.rwjf.org/humancapital](http://www.rwjf.org/humancapital).



## Median Age at Receipt of Doctoral Degrees



A late start and a part-time school schedule means that graduating nurse PhDs are much older than those who graduate with PhDs in other disciplines. This leaves nurse PhDs less time to use their degrees in academic and other settings before reaching retirement age.

Source: National Science Foundation, National Institutes of Health, United States Education Department, National Endowment for the Humanities, United States Department of Agriculture, National Aeronautics and Space Administration, National Opinion Research Center, 2006.