



Nurse turnover in substance abuse treatment programs affiliated with the National Drug Abuse Treatment Clinical Trials Network

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Voluntary nurse turnover, which is costly and disrupts patient care, has not been studied as an organizational phenomenon within substance abuse treatment organizations. In this exploratory study, we examined the frequency and correlates of nurse turnover within treatment programs affiliated with the National Drug Abuse Treatment Clinical Trials Network. During face-to-face interviews conducted in 2005–2006, 215 program administrators reported the number of nurses currently employed. Leaders of programs with nursing staff then described the number of nurses who had voluntarily quit in the past year, the degree to which filling vacant nursing positions was difficult, and the average number of days to fill a vacant position. About two thirds of these programs had at least one nurse on staff. In programs with nurses, the average rate of voluntary turnover was 15.0%. Turnover was significantly lower in hospital-based programs and programs offering adolescent treatment but higher in facilities offering residential treatment. Most of the administrators indicated that filling vacant nurse positions was difficult and took more than 2 months to complete. These findings suggest that nurse turnover is a significant issue facing many substance abuse treatment facilities. Efforts to improve retention of the addiction treatment workforce should be expanded to include nursing professionals.

Keywords: Nursing; Turnover; Workforce retention; Substance abuse treatment