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Career Pathways and Destinations of Bachelor of Nursing Graduates from a Higher Education Institution in Kwa-Zulu Natal in Relation to National Health Priorities: A Cross Sectional Study

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Education is a mechanism to empower graduates with the knowledge and skills relevant to pursue the career paths of their choice and cope with the workplace demands. Even though Nurses play an important role in the delivery of healthcare system, very few studies have been conducted in the Sub Saharan region to track career pathways and destinations of graduate nurses. Graduate surveys enable education institutions to plan their programmes strategically in response to market demands. Literature reflects growing concerns over the mismatch between graduates produced and workplace demands. Furthermore, the healthcare system in South Africa is under tremendous strain because of the excessive burden of disease amidst a rapidly growing population and the shortfall of Nurses to meet health demands. The study aimed at tracking professional academic career paths of Bachelor of Nursing graduates from the School of Nursing, the 2010-2014 cohort. A quantitative and descriptive approach was adopted. Data was collected through a survey after obtaining ethical clearance from the University Ethics Committee. A sample comprised of 126 graduates. Data was analyzed on SPSS, descriptive statistics were used. The findings revealed that the majority of graduates were working in the public sector. Their work experience was predominantly in Primary Health Care settings, Maternal and Child Health Care, HIV management and Research Institutes. In terms of furthering their studies a number of them had additional qualifications in leadership and management, primary health care nursing, advanced midwifery, public health and community health nursing with a few having a specialization in Trauma and Critical Care Nursing. The similar interest was observed to those who were still planning to further their studies. Study participants pursued uncommon career paths, including research institutes. Findings reflected majority of graduate's interest areas of practice, which were in line with the national health priorities.