

ORIGINAL RESEARCH

Evaluation of a workshop introducing nursing to school leavers

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Received: August 9, 2023

Accepted: September 4, 2023

Online Published: November 20, 2023

DOI: 10.5430/jnep.v14n3p13

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5430/jnep.v14n3p13>

ABSTRACT

The average age of a registered nurse in Australia has risen in the last 5 years, especially in Tasmania. Indicating that school leavers are not being attracted into this career. The evaluation of a one-day immersive Nurse Taster workshop has indicated that this may assist in attracting school leavers into the nursing profession.

Key Words: High school students, Nursing, Nurse camp, Careers

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Much has been written regarding the looming aspect of mismatch in the nursing workforce and population need.^[1] The population of Australia has almost doubled over the past 50 years, causing pressure on the healthcare system. This issue is compounded by the population becoming older, having a greater number of comorbidities and poorer access to health services.^[2] This will increase the demands for nurses in a variety of clinical specialties including critical care, aged care and midwifery.^[3]

1.2 Search strategy

A systematic search was conducted to investigate the literature on use of workshops to encourage school leavers to attend higher education. This search was undertaken using the databases, EBSCO, CINAHL, ERIC and Medline. The key words used were high school students, career options, nursing, nurse camp. The inclusion criteria included peer

reviewed articles in English between 2000 and 2022. Exclusion criteria included: (1) articles not in English, (2) articles outside the year ranges These articles will be discussed here.

1.3 Literature review

The nursing discipline is the largest single health profession in Australia^[4] and is confronted with significant challenges related to an ever-increasing shortage and the ability to attract nurses to enter the profession. In Australia, it has been identified that there is an overall decline in the number of nurses, causing a predicted shortage of more than 123,000 nurses by 2030.^[3] What is potentially adding to this predicted shortage is the fact that the average age of the registered nurse (RN) in Australia is 43.4 years and the enrolled nurse 45.3 years.^[5] In Tasmania the average age of a RN is higher at 45.7 years,^[1,4] with a large proportion aged over 60 years of age so at higher risk of exiting the workforce within the next few years.^[4] In Tasmania there is a proportionally higher number of nurses aged 60 and over in areas such as aged care, mental health,

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management, research and drug and alcohol.^[4] The International Council of Nurses (ICN) predicts that nurses will be retiring just at the time when an ageing population will require an increased workforce to care for them.^[6,7] This has been identified as a factor worldwide by the ICN 2021.^[7]

A further confounding contributor to workforce issues is the fact that the average age of nursing students has risen over the past 5 years, they are now beginning in their late 30s.^[7-9] Although the age of nursing students in Australia is not centrally recorded, a 2014 report of university data identified that there were three times more non-school leavers, than school aged students who had applied for an undergraduate nursing degree.^[7] School leavers are those students who have finished all of their schooling and are usually aged 18 years. Non-school leavers are those that are considered to be mature age of 25 years or above, having completed their schooling sometime prior. This equates to school leavers not being attracted to undertake nursing as a career option. This is particularly the case in Tasmania where there are less than 20% of students commencing university under the age of 20.^[10] One way for high school students to be attracted to pursue a career in nursing is to learn more about the nursing profession through participation in an immersive nurse taster workshop. An opportunity was identified through dialogue with industry partners and exploring literature on the topic of nurse taster workshops.

Several colleges, medical facilities, and organisations that sponsor summer nursing programs for high school students exist in the United States (US), and the United Kingdom but none have been identified in Australia. The nurse camps in the US have identified that students have a deeper understanding of the nursing profession after the camp.^[2] These programs enable school students to hear from practicing nurses, participate in experiential educational activities and learn about educational pathways to become a RN. Participants are given the opportunity to become familiar with the skill sets utilised in the nursing field and may visit healthcare facilities where nurses work. The Nurse Taster Workshop allows secondary students to explore the nursing profession in a unique and immersive way. The nurse camp programs have been shown to be successful in the US but have not been formally evaluated.^[11]

Similar taster workshops have provided an emerging body of evidence suggesting participation in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) centred experiences, may enhance female motivation to engage in further STEM education. This is conceptualised by an improvement or shift in decidedness on a STEM centred career.^[12,13] University of Tasmania (UTAS) has an immersive course for students

interested in science related areas such as marine biology. There have been no such opportunities provided in nursing except for the ability to visit universities on open day and viewing the teaching spaces/labs. As there are no such workshops in Australia, the nurse taster workshop was piloted at UTAS School of Nursing to introduce school aged students to nursing.

The nurse taster workshop aligns with the strategic direction of the university by working with Year 10-12 students to introduce nursing as an interesting, rewarding, and distinctive career choice.^[10] Encouraging local secondary students to consider enrolling in the Bachelor of Nursing program will deliver graduates that will contribute to a sustainable healthcare system in Tasmania. This nurse taster workshop will give potential nursing students an opportunity to experience the reality of nursing so that they are better placed to make an informed decision to become a nurse. This paper will discuss the evaluation of the pilot Nurse Taster Workshop offered at UTAS in 2021.

2. METHOD

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the Nurse Taster Workshop a questionnaire was developed which included both closed and open-ended questions. These questions were developed from the literature in this area and were validated by a number of key stakeholders. The key stakeholders included academic staff currently involved teaching and assessing in the Bachelor of Nursing, schools engagement team at the University of Tasmania and industry stakeholders. Included in the questionnaire were several demographic questions and then open-ended questions specifically asking participants what they found useful or not in the workshop. The aim was to evaluate the Nurse Taster Workshop from the participants' perspective. Ethics approval was gained from UTAS prior to commencing the evaluation.

Prior to attending the workshop, the UTAS School Engagement Officer organised recruitment of the students from one school in the vicinity of the university to participate and organised consent to attend from students and parents. Content for the workshop had been brainstormed by a committee of academics who had previous experience interacting with school leavers through Open Days or school visits and were aware of activities that would be useful and engaging. The workshop consisted of a range of activities, including participants taking vital signs, undertaking a simple dressing on a wound and basic life support. In addition, an overview of nursing was provided and at the end of the day academics shared their nursing journey with an opportunity for questions at the end. There were 4 academics that were involved with the running of the workshop. Also included were cur-

rent nursing students who shared their story and discussed various aspects of the program from their perspective. Participants were high school/college students and required the presence of someone with a current employee working with vulnerable people (WWVP) card at all times.

The evaluation was undertaken at the completion of a 1 day immersion Nurse Taster Workshop at one of the UTAS campuses in Tasmania. The reason for only having 1 day was in order to trial the workshop in the first instance to ascertain whether this was adequate or not. At the end of the workshop participants were informed about the research and invited to participate in the research. An evaluation form was then distributed to the group. Participants were asked to complete this evaluation and place in a box for collection.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Demographics

Twenty female participants completed the survey, with the majority of participants being 17 years of age, 60% (n = 12), followed by 16 years of age, 25% (n = 5) and 18 years of age, 15% (n = 3). Participants resided in the North-eastern corner of Tasmania in and around Launceston, with many living in the 7248 postcode (35% n = 7), followed by postcode 7,250, (20% n = 4). Participants came from four different colleges, studying either Year 11 (7/20) or Year 12 (11/20). Two participants did not enter current High School Grade and one did not identify the school they were presently attending.

Fifty five percent (n = 11) of participants were born in Tasmania. Of the remaining 45% (n = 9) of participants, three were born in other Australian states; VIC (n = 1), NSW (n = 1) and WA (n = 1). Six participants were born overseas, with 25% (n = 5) born in Nepal and one participant born in the US. This was also demonstrated in the family background with 45% (n = 9) indicating that one or both of their parents were also born in Tasmania, while 55% (n = 11) indicated that their parents were born in other Australian states or overseas countries such as New Zealand, USA, Holland, Timor, Bhutan or Nepal. Seven students indicated they spoke a language other than English, one 'not fluently' and 6 spoke Nepali. There were no participants identifying as First Nations peoples. First Nations are the Indigenous population of Australia.

All participants indicated that they were planning on undertaking further study with 16/20 identifying University study as part of their future plan. See Table 1 for breakdown of demographics.

3.2 Open ended question responses

All of the participants completed most of the open-ended questions though there was some overlap/repetition of com-

ments between different questions. Content analysis of the open-ended questions was undertaken by the researchers. This resulted in the development of four themes: to get a taste of nursing, I liked all things, I'm pretty satisfied, this taster day has inspired me. Quotes are provided to support the analysis with participants being identified by number and whether they were from Australia (Aust) or International (Int).

Table 1. Participant demographic data

	Count (n = 20)	Percentage (%)
Age		
16	5	25
17	12	60
18	3	15
Place of Birth		
Tasmania	11	55
Other Australian States	3	15
Overseas	6	30
Parent's place of birth		
Tasmania	9	45
Other Australian States	6	30
Overseas (NZ, Holland, USA, Timor, Bhutan, Nepal)	5	25
Current year of study		
Year 11	7	35
Year 12	11	55
Plan for further study		
University	16	80
University and/or TAFE	2	10
TAFE	1	5

3.2.1 To get a taste of nursing

In this first theme participants described why they wanted to attend the workshop. This was mainly focused around participants identifying:

I want to be a nurse ... (6Int)

This would indicate that participants had already decided that they wanted to be a nurse, but in this particular student's case maybe not which university to attend. This was not the case with all participants, however, as indicated here:

I am interested in the nursing course at (specific university) for next year (8Int)

Not all of the participants that attended the workshop were quite as definite as this as to what they wanted to study. In some cases this was more a vague idea, for instance:

I have an interest in the health industry and I am currently studying a health service assistance course (5Int)

These types of courses can be a pathway to nursing if the participant would like to do so. In contrast, nursing was also seen as a pathway by some participants to something else:

In future I would like to attend the nursing course, but would like to go further after and go into sonography (1Aust) (8Aust)

For those participants who were interested in attending the workshop because they wanted to become a nurse, their reasons for attending was to find out more about what nursing entailed. This was because:

... then I can be able to understand more about nursing stuffs (7Aust)

This was not the only reason that participants responded as to why they wanted to attend the workshop. Interestingly, other participants wanted: To get a better understanding of how studying nursing at uni works. And so I can decide what I do want to study and University (11Aust) In addition, the participants commented that they wanted to be provided with:

The opportunity to look around the nursing campus and get further information (4Aust)

This theme of getting a taste of nursing included some of the decision making around whether or not they would like to be a nurse, whether they would like to go to university and whether this university would suit them. Although the theme was specific to nursing participants identified that their decision about which health profession, they would end up in was not yet made. This added to the value of the workshop in identifying its role in their decision-making process.

3.2.2 I liked all the things

The second theme described what the participants liked about the workshop and what they learnt from attending personally.

Overwhelmingly, participants commented that they enjoyed that fact that the workshops were, almost surprisingly:

How hands-on it was (16Aust)

Not only was this about the workshop being very active and ‘hands on’ but also that the participants were:

Learning new things, doing hands-on activities (5Aust) Many participants also identified which specific hands-on experience they enjoyed. For instance, *I really like PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) session about the workshop today (12Aust)*

It would be interesting to know whether this related to the fact that PPE was being discussed a lot in the media in relation to COVID. There is no indication from the data as to whether this was the case or not. There were other aspects of the activities that were noted as well, such as:

About today workshop. I like where we had to do CPR (20Int)

One of the reasons identified as to why they liked these hands-on activities was because:

... it was interesting because I've never done it before

It was, however, not just the hands-on activities that the participants liked about the workshop. Participants also commented about

... and got to know more things about nursing (7Int)

This was obviously the aim of the workshop and pleasing to receive feedback that this aim was achieved. Participants also commented that they had:

All the questions answered... (6Int)

A side and rather unexpected aspect of the workshop that participants commented about was:

... Learning all the different backgrounds of the teachers (19Aust)

At the end of the day the academics organising the day gave a brief overview about why they became nurses and what they had done. In summary participants commented that the workshop:

... it gave me a greater understanding of the uni and the studying of nursing (11Aust)

This theme of I liked all the things was an indication of the content of the workshop being appropriate. It’s hands-on nature and ability to engage the students in learning something new engaged them so that they were more likely to view nursing in a positive light in the future.

3.2.3 I'm pretty satisfied

The majority of the participants felt that there was definitely nothing else that they would have like more of in the nurse taster workshop. When being asked ‘why’ this was the case the response was:

Everything was good about the workshop (17Aust)

Such was the enthusiasm of one participant that they added further comment:

... Like all of the activities we did today including CPR and other stuff. Especially got to work with new teachers in new group (7Aust)

It was unclear whether this last statement was because they attended the previous nurse taster workshop held earlier in the year or not. Though this may be a reflection of the fact that this participant was in a different group of students for the activities, as illustrated in the ‘why’ part of this question: *Because as I say I got to know more thing and got to work with new people as a team (7Aust)*

Though there were some participants who were not quite as definite about whether they would have liked more of anything in the workshop, with comments such as:

Not really it was all covered (8Int)

Some participants made some suggestions as to what they would have liked more of. Only the local/Tasmania born participants made comments on this aspect. Participants commented that they would have liked more of was:

A larger variety of small activities (2Aust)

For another this was more about their personal preference from someone who obviously had some health professional experience of some sort, being aware of the terminology, as illustrated:

Paediatrics/neonatal. Just what I'm into personally (15Aust)

It was interesting to note that there were some participants who would have liked to have had a tour around the campus, specifically:

A tour around the nurse part (4Aust)

Both participants who made this comment also described why this would have been useful for them, saying:

To get a better feel for the environment (4Aust)

More specifically:

... Really get a feel of uni life (11Aust) There were also suggestions on how the running of the workshop could have been improved by focusing the content of how one of the sessions was run. Specifically:

1st section (obs) could have been more structured/situational (13Aust)

The reason provided for this was that:

Got lost – went for too long (13Aust)

There were also suggestions made on how the focus of the workshop could be changed from all group activities to:

Bit more one on one times with teachers (19Aust)

The reason provided for why this would be good was that this would result in:

Get more of an understanding on different aspects and asking more questions one on one (19Aust)

This theme of being pretty satisfied did indicate some changes that could be made to the taster workshop format. Generally, it indicated that some students had more knowledge or background in nursing or health care or university life than others and would have liked a different level of engagement based on this.

3.2.4 This taster day has inspired me

Participants were asked if they were surprised about what nursing had to offer as a career. It was clear that most of the participants were in fact surprised about the variety of areas that are available in nursing that they could work in:

It is amazing to see that there are lots of areas in nursing (10Int)

There were even comments expressing surprise regarding specific nursing areas they had not even considered apart from the clinical setting. For instance:

Especially options of educators or research roles (13Aust)

This may have been highlighted for these participants as a result of various academics discussing why they became nurses and what their career trajectory had been. Not all of the respondents, however, were as surprised about the many areas that are available in nursing. This possible indicates that they already knew a lot about nursing:

I'm not surprised because I understand that there [is] many areas in nursing (17Aust)

Despite already knowing about the range of nursing options in which to work, participants commented that they did find it useful to have them discussed:

... it was nice to learn more about them (2Aust)

In addition, participants commented about how useful it was to have outlined the range of options to work in because:

Its [broadened] my opinion of what area I may want to work in (16Aust)

Many of these respondents indicated that the Nurse Taster Workshop had in fact positively influenced their decision to undertake nursing as a career option, as illustrated here:

I was not completely sure if I want to study nursing before but after the Nurse Taster Workshop, I am very positive about undertaking nursing as a career (10Int)

One of the reasons identified for this were:

The career seems more interesting than I thought (18Aust)

The workshop though had also helped influence the speciality areas they would like to pursue:

I feel more interested in the field especially orthopaedics and midwifery (4Aust)

There was no indication in the data as to why this might be the case but could reflect the academics overview of their career trajectory and passion for different areas in nursing. It was interesting to note that participants commented that while their decision to be a nurse had not changed, the reason for their choice of career had:

All I knew was that I wanted nursing as my career. But now I want my career as nursing because it makes me happy thinking that I will save people lives in future (20Int)

Even though this participant did not identify why this was the case, it does illustrate the impact the workshop has had in increasing their enthusiasm to pursue nursing as a career option. There were comments from other participants however that could indicate why they became committed to pursue nursing after the workshop. One of the participants specifi-

cally commented on the student ambassadors who supported the participants in the simulated lab activities:

Listening to the ambassadors inspired me to join the industry (5Aust)

The ambassadors were current students in the course who worked with and talked to the small groups of students as well as outlining how they got into nursing. Ambassadors were involved in the day and talking to the participants and answering questions. An additional advantage to the workshop that was not anticipated was participants feeling more confident about attending university:

I wasn't sure what uni would be like, but I feel more confident (15Aust)

This final theme of being inspired by the Nurse Taster Workshop was important to address the aim of the workshop in increasing the motivation of participants to enter nursing as a profession. Being inspired demonstrated an increased interest, an increased motivation to do so. Although there is no guarantee that these students will go on to be nurses, they seemed to have increased motivation to do so when the workshop concluded.

4. DISCUSSION

There was very positive feedback from the Nurse Taster workshop. There was nothing that the participants did not like or find useful. Some suggestions were made of how the allocation of time for some activities could be improved. For instance, they identified they wanted more time with nursing academics one on one. Participants having one on one conversations have been shown to make the biggest contribution to a positive outcome,^[14] which identified that the professional career of the nurse academics was closely associated with their career planning.^[15] Staff talking about their careers and their stories of nursing have been found to make an impression on younger family members and impact career choices by being present with the next generation.^[16]

Participants commented that they thought that a tour of the facilities would be useful to get the feel for university life. This has been identified as the most important aspect of students process of choosing which university they would like to attend.^[17] Furthermore, a study by Fleming and Grace^[18] at the University of Canberra researched students from a variety of backgrounds. This study included students from a financially disadvantaged background and found that spending a day on campus helped the students envision themselves as university students having experienced what their lives might be like if they enrolled there. In other words, this helped take the anxiety away with going to a new place. This has been found to be because it provides a personalised approach and

allows students to perceive how they may fit in.^[17] Being able to visit a university campus, therefore decreases the anxiety and hesitancy about attending a university to study.

The most positive feedback from this workshop, identified that having a 'hands-on' approach to the workshop provided an excellent experience. Participants were given the opportunity to practice nursing skills in an environment where they were given access to student ambassadors and academic staff. A 'hands-on' approach to this workshop allowed the participants to become more comfortable with the skills and processes of what will possibly become their careers, rather than simply watching or reading about them.^[19] Liaw et al.,^[20] also identified from their research, that interacting with other nurses and participating in co-curricular activities significantly encouraged students to pursue nursing as a career.

Ultimately these participants commented that they felt more comfortable about how university functions and that going to TAFE or university was more achievable than they originally thought. Participants identified that they were more confident that they wished to pursue nursing after attending the workshop. Similar findings have been reported from the workshops or camps in the US.^[21] The Nurse Taster workshop was useful in confirming with these students that they wanted to undertake a nursing career and cemented their enthusiasm for the career choice. Participants also felt more comfortable about attending university.

The research team is planning further workshops for 2023 at multiple campuses. In addition, interviews of the nursing academics and student ambassadors would be an adjunct to these findings. It would also be useful to undertake a longitudinal study of the school students who attended the workshop to see if they enrolled into a nursing program and stayed in the profession. There is anecdotal evidence that students from this first workshop have indeed enrolled in the nursing program at UTAS.

Limitations

There were a number of limitations identified from this research. This was a small sample size and consisted of students who were already interested in attending TAFE or university to undertake nursing. It would have been useful to include a question on whether these students would be first in family to attend university. This has been incorporated in the questionnaire for the next workshop. There are also strengths from this research as this is the first Nurse Taster workshop that has been conducted and evaluated in Tasmania if not Australia.

5. CONCLUSION

It is crucial to recruit and retain school leavers as nursing students, to become the next generation of nursing professionals in order to address the nurse shortage issue across Tasmania and indeed Australia. One way for high school students to be potentially attracted to pursue a career in nursing is to learn more about the nursing profession through participation in an immersive nurse taster workshop. An opportunity was identified through dialogue with industry partners and exploring literature on the topic of Nurse taster Workshops and a workshop developed and implemented. The current study has indicated that running a program such as the Nurse Taster Workshop, helped the participants feel more comfortable about how university functions and that going to TAFE or university was more achievable than they originally thought. Participants also identified that they were more confident that they wished to pursue nursing after attending workshop. By providing an opportunity for students to understand what nursing involves, doors may open to people who never pictured themselves entering this profession or attending university. The evaluation of the Nurse Taster workshop has indicated that this may indeed assist this process of attracting school leavers to become nurses.

Recommendations include planning more workshops and undertaking a longitudinal study to see if participants subsequently enrolled in tertiary studies and continued in these programs.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Not applicable.

AUTHORS CONTRIBUTIONS

Not applicable.

FUNDING

Not applicable.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST DISCLOSURE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

INFORMED CONSENT

Obtained.

ETHICS APPROVAL

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Sciedu Press. The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

PROVENANCE AND PEER REVIEW

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer reviewed.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

DATA SHARING STATEMENT

No additional data are available.

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