

## PROFESSIONAL FULFILLMENT: IDEAS AND EXPECTATIONS OF PRE-GRADUATE STUDENT NURSES

**Aneliya I. Chifligarska,  
Makreta T. Draganova<sup>1</sup>**

*Department of Surgical Nursing,  
Medical University – Pleven, Bulgaria  
<sup>1</sup>Department of Public Health Sciences,  
Medical University – Pleven, Bulgaria*

**Corresponding Author:**

Aneliya I. Chifligarska  
Department of Surgical Nursing,  
Medical University – Pleven  
1, St. Kl. Ohridski, Str.  
Pleven, 5800  
Bulgaria  
*e-mail: anelijach@mail.bg*

**Received:** April 18, 2018

**Revision received:** June 12, 2018

**Accepted:** January 17, 2019

### Summary

The objective of this study was to investigate the attitudes and expectations of fourth-year student nurses regarding their professional fulfillment after completing basic education. A questionnaire survey was carried out in six higher educational institutions in the Republic of Bulgaria – Pleven, Sofia, Varna, Stara Zagora, Plovdiv, and Ruse. Almost half of the students involved (114, 49.10%), planned to apply for a master's degree in management of health care, and 62 (26.70%) preferred fulfillment abroad. Concerning the place of work, 80 (34.50%) of the respondents wished to specialize in surgical care. Of this latter group, 108 (46.60%) expressed the opinion that they would obtain excellent training in surgical units, and 62 (26.70%) expected to like the specificity of work in such units. The most significant influence on professional orientation in the area of surgical care of the future nurses was that of the tutors from the clinical bases – 90 (38.80%).

**Key words:** professional fulfillment, attitudes, student nurses

### Introduction

Successful professional fulfillment is one of the aims of fourth-year student nurses. Opportunities for development of nurses and guidelines for specialization are factors that increase the motivation for practicing the nursing profession. During their four-year studies, the nurses receive both general and specialized training in the area of health care, which enables them to work in different fields of healthcare. In our country, the opportunities for professional fulfillment of nurses are extremely varied.

The attitudes of pre-graduate student nurses concerning their professional fulfillment have been investigated by a number of authors. According to V. Stoykova and A. Andonova, almost half of the nurse graduate students wish to continue their studies in a master's programme, because of the opportunity the degree provides for hold leading positions, career advancement and more successful realization in our country and abroad. A great part of them has found professional fulfilment in outpatient care and private hospital institutions. The reasons for this are higher pay, calm rhythm of work and better working conditions [1, 2].

The objective of this publication is to present the attitudes of fourth-year pre-graduate student nurses concerning their professional careers after completing the basic medical education.

## Materials and Methods

Sociological and statistical methods were used. A direct group survey was carried out among 232 fourth-year student nurses.

The respondents were students from Medical University - Pleven, Medical University – Sofia, Medical University – Varna, Medical University – Plovdiv, Medical Faculty of Thracian University – Stara Zagora and Angel Kanchev University of Ruse. Sociological information was collected in the form of a questionnaire with 30 questions. For the purpose of the survey, information was sought regarding their career plans. The statistical processing of data was performed with software packages Microsoft Office Excel 2010 and SPSS v.19. Qualitative variables measured on a nominal scale and quantitative variables measured on a scale interval were used in the study. The results were represented by absolute numbers and percent, in the form of graphs and tables.

## Results

Table 1 presents distribution of the respondents by age and sex. The female respondents predominated in the investigation were 215 (92.70%). The proportion of the participants in the investigation from the age group of 21-30

years was highest – 179 (77.20%).

**Table 1.** Distribution of the respondents by age and sex (number and %)

Variable	Number	%
<b>Sex</b>		
Women	215	92.70
Men	15	6.50
Unanswered	2	0.80
<b>Age</b>		
under 20 years	7	3.00
21-30 years	179	77.20
31-40 years	33	14.20
over 40 years	10	4.30
Unanswered	3	1.30
<b>Total</b>	<b>232</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Figure 1 presents the distribution of the respondents according to their desires for professional fulfillment after completing the basic education at the time of the investigation.

Almost half of the persons involved 114 (49.10%), planned to obtain a master’s degree in management of health care. Data of the respondents who preferred fulfillment abroad, 62 (26.70%) and those who wished to work as nurses in surgical units of the medical institutions, 61 (26.30%), were almost equal. A small part of the respondents, 22 students (9.50%), stated they would prefer to work as university lecturers, 20 students (8.60%) wanted to hold leading positions. It is noteworthy that the relative shares of those wishing to work in surgical wards and abroad were highest.

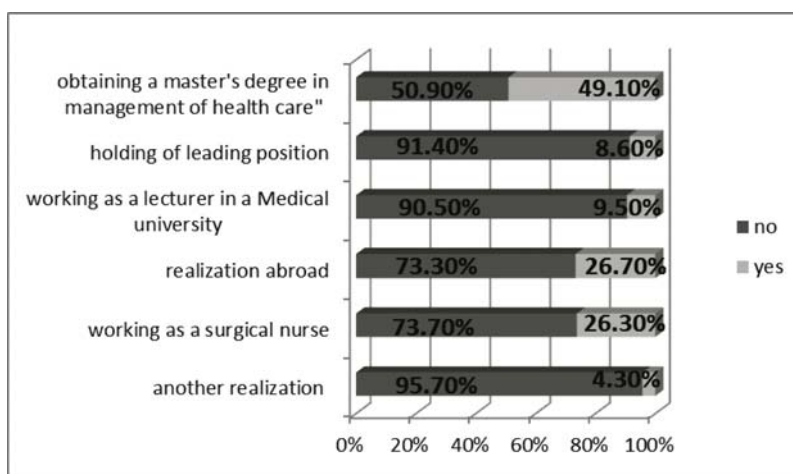


Figure 1. Distribution of the respondents concerning their plans for professional realization (%)

**Table 2.** Distribution of the respondents concerning their orientation to a place of work (number and %)

Place of work	Orientation to a place of work Yes Number (%)	No Number (%)	Total Number (%)
Surgical clinic	80 (34.50%)	152 (65.50%)	232 (100%)
Clinic of internal diseases	43 (18.50%)	189 (81.50%)	232 (100%)
Clinic of children's diseases	15 (6.50%)	217 (93.50%)	232 (100%)
Clinic of anaesthesiology and intensive treatment	38 (16.40%)	194 (83.60%)	232 (100%)
Clinic of neurological diseases	3 (1.30%)	229 (98.70%)	232 (100%)
Clinic of psychiatry	9 (3.90%)	223 (96.10%)	232 (100%)
Emergency ward	27 (11.60%)	205 (88.40%)	232 (100%)
Operating block	40 (17.20%)	192 (82.80%)	232 (100%)
Oncological center	14 (6.00%)	218 (94.40%)	232 (100%)
Diagnostic consultative center	13 (5.60%)	219 (94.40%)	232 (100%)
Children's institution (crèche or kindergarten)	14 (6.00%)	218 (94.00%)	232 (100%)

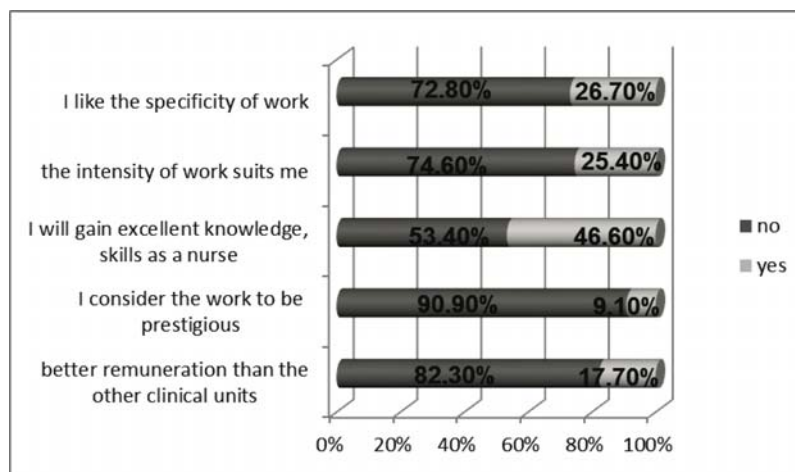
The attitudes of the students concerning the place of work they would choose for their future career was investigated. Table 2 presents data of the investigation distributed by clinical units and medical institutions. The proportion of respondents wishing to work in a surgical clinic – and in an operating block were highest, respectively 80 (34.50%) and 40 (17.20%).

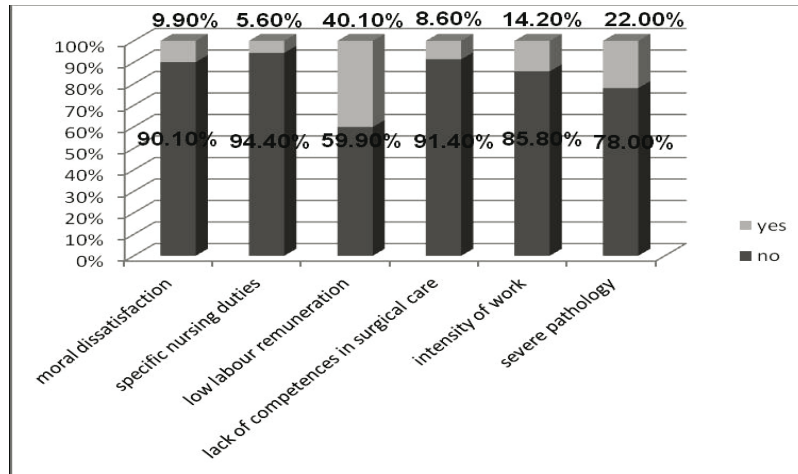
During the academic year 2017/2018 in the Medical University of Pleven, from a total number of 48 nurse students on pre-graduation practice (internship), 22 (46.60%) preferred to carry out their optional practice (internship) in a surgical unit and/or an operating block. The reasons, for which they preferred to work in a surgical ward/clinic, were investigated (Figure 2). The proportion of the persons investigated, 108 (46.60%), who were of the opinion that

in surgical units they would obtain excellent training with regard to the surgical care was highest. The difference in the results of the respondents who preferred the surgical units due to the specificity of care (62 or 26.70%) and the intensity of the working process (59 or 25.40%) was small.

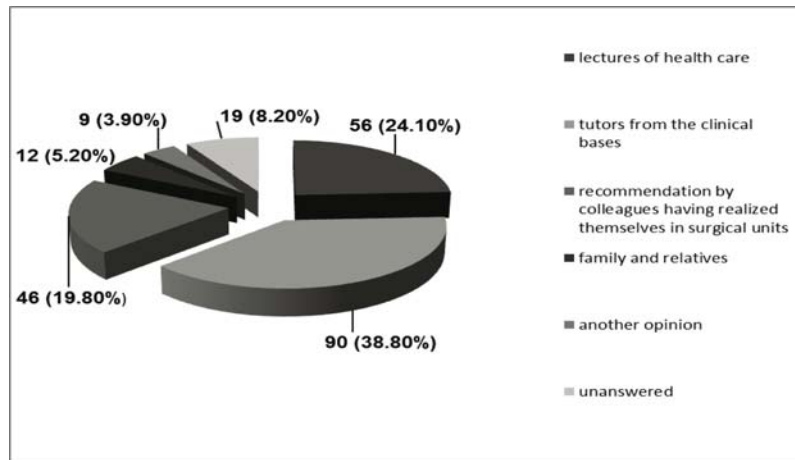
Some of the questions in the questionnaire form investigated the reasons why surgical units were not preferred options for fulfillment (Figure 3). It is noteworthy that the relative share of the persons investigated who did not wish to work in surgical care because of inadequacy financial remuneration in comparison with the other clinical units was high – 93 (40.10%). The respondents stated the severe pathology (51 or 22.00%) and the intensity of work (33 or 14.20%) as other significant reasons.

**Figure 2.** Distribution of the reasons determining the desire for work in the area of the surgical care (%)





**Figure 3.** Distribution of the respondents concerning the circumstances leading to unwillingness to work in a surgical clinic/ward (%)



**Figure 4.** Factors influencing the professional realization of the graduating nurses (%)

The participants in the investigation were given the opportunity to indicate the major factors in the choice for professional fulfillment. It is evident from the results presented in Figure 4 that a significant influence on the attitudes to professional fulfillment of the graduating students was exerted by three factors distributed, as follows: the tutors from the clinical bases (90 or 38.80%); lecturers in health care (56 or 24.10%) and graduates working in the surgical units (46 or 19.80%).

## Discussion

It is noteworthy that the proportion of respondents wishing to work in surgical wards and abroad was highest. Most of them wanted to continue their education.

Surgical care is generally preferred, due to its growing importance during the last years in both pre-hospital and hospital care. Minimally

invasive, robotic, as well as one-day surgery are only few of the innovations in surgical care that are a professional challenge for graduating nurses. Intensity and dynamics are the main characteristics of the surgical care, which attract nurses for professional fulfillment. The results from this confirmed the preferences of the graduating nurses to work in the area of surgical care.

In a similar investigation, Grozdeva et al. (2014) found that “... the surgical ward is a clinical base, in which the work has increased intensity ..... and [the ward] is one of the most difficult training bases that causes trouble to the trainee nurses“ [3]. The same author emphasized that “... an extremely great part of the students consider that the difficulties in performing the practical tasks in a surgical ward are due to the insufficient experience in working with patients when providing health care, the low level of knowledge, skills and in communicating with

patients. Although surgical units are difficult to work in, a great part of the graduate students choose to work in these units“ [3].

The development of surgery as a science, as well as the high proportion of the graduating students who prefer the surgical units, are attributed to their desire to obtain excellent training with regard to surgical care, are objective prerequisites for updating and extending the training of the nurses students in surgical care in this country.

The results we obtained are supported by the data from similar investigations. According to P. Asparuhova (2015) [4] and N. Vasileva (2014) [5], the factors influencing the attitudes to professional fulfillment of nurse students include family traditions, parental roles, mass media, and the personal contacts with the medical specialist, and consultation on professional orientation at the medical institutions. The students are motivated by their personal experience and observation of the health specialists in clinical conditions, as well as by friends. In the process of training, the lecturer-student interaction is an extremely important factor [4, 5].

Our results proved that the personal example of the nurses working in the surgical units was a strong motivation factor. The high proportion of the respondents, who answered that a significant influence on their professional realization was exerted by their tutors from the clinical bases, increases the responsibility of the acting nurses and necessitates their continuous development and perfection.

## Conclusions

The innovations in surgical care and extension of opportunities for their application are factors increasing the interest of students graduating in nursing.

The graduating students have positive attitudes to working in surgical units because they believe that in these units they can acquire specific competences with regard to surgical care.

The expectations of the students to acquiring specific competences in surgical units are a serious prerequisite for future investigations in the area of basic training in surgical care.

The greatest influence on the professional

realization of the student nurses is exerted by the acting nurses from the different clinical units.

The challenge in front of the graduating nurses is to realize themselves in conditions of changes, competition, shortage of resources, continuously increasing expectations and necessities on the part of the patient and their relatives, and advances of science. According to T. Deliyski (2017) “The contemporary complicated conditions in surgical practice require “A new model” of professionals in health care, who have the necessary knowledge and skills and adequate personal qualities and desire for uninterrupted continuing training [6].

## Acknowledgements

This study has received no financial support.

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