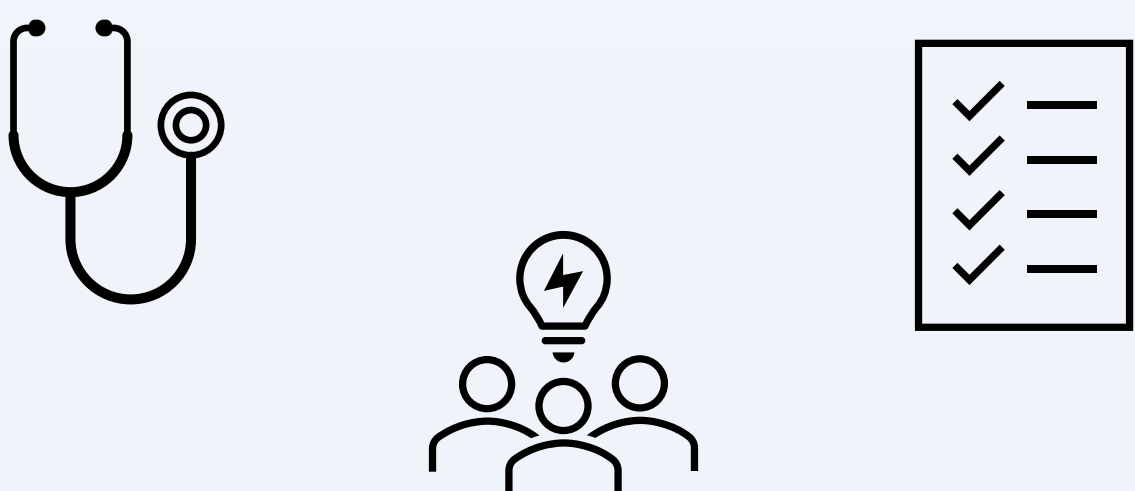


Introduction

- Global nursing shortages, particularly in specialty areas like the operating room (OR), have intensified health human resource challenges, placing immense strain on nurses, including RPNs (OHA, 2022). These challenges can lead to burnout, limited opportunities for career advancement, and underutilization of RPNs’ full scope of practice.
- This study brought together the expertise of a research team from Toronto Metropolitan University and the clinical partnership of Hamilton Health Sciences with an aim to identify facilitators and barriers to RPN utilization in the OR setting and examine career development opportunities that could maximize their contribution.
- The WeRPN call for fellowship proposals facilitated the inclusion of an RPN into the research ream, fostering a dynamic collaboration between a multidisciplinary group of nursing researchers and front-line nurses throughout each study stage.



Fellowship Objectives

- Build knowledge in research designs, ethics, recruitment, and data collection, analysis, and interpretation.
- Engage in all aspects of a qualitative research project, including study design, literature review, recruitment, analysis, and manuscript preparation.
- Develop knowledge and skills in qualitative data analysis and contribute to interpretation of research findings.
- Develop skills in research manuscript writing.
- Participate in knowledge translation activities.

Study Design

- Two-phase qualitative descriptive approach.
- Phase 1 consisted of an online survey.
- Phase 2 included individual, semi-structured virtual interviews.
- Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Toronto Metropolitan University Research Ethics Board (Reference ID 2023-280).

Participant Recruitment

- Participation in this study was voluntary.
- Before participating in either phase of the study, participants were asked to provide informed consent through an online consent form.
- We aimed to recruit participants that met our eligibility requirements: (1) currently registered as a nurse (RPN, RN, or NP), (2) currently working in an operating room [rural, community, or urban hospital and/or private clinic] in Ontario, Canada, and (3) have a minimum of one year of experience working in the operating room.
- Eligible participants were recruited through collaboration with local professional nursing associations in Ontario.



Study Results

Preliminary study findings revealed the emergence of several key themes including:

- Healthcare/Practice Setting – Nature of the Setting
- Workplace Culture – Adverse to Change
- Organizational Leadership and Policy Support
- Career and Professional Development Opportunities
- Professional Nursing Organizations – Role in Influencing RPN Utilization

Fellowship Outcomes

Objective	Action
Build applied research knowledge capacity and capability. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learned from and collaborated with academic mentors. Participated in each step of the research process including study design, data collection and analysis, standards of ethical research conduct recruitment, informed consent, outcomes analysis, and data interpretation.
Develop a further understanding of the principles of research grant and manuscript writing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Actively participated in preparation of draft manuscripts for study findings. Reviewed and synthesized guidelines and tools related to grant and manuscript writing.
Coordinate and engage in weekly research team meetings. creating meeting agendas and meeting minutes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Created meeting agendas and recorded meeting minutes and ensured all meetings were complete within specified time frame. Kept the research team informed and up to date with study progress weekly.
Develop knowledge and skills in data analysis and contribute to interpretation of research findings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Successfully collected and organized study data using descriptive statistics and content analysis. Summarized findings and identified emerging themes in data using inductive coding.
Participate as a co-author in the primary published manuscript for the study and participate in knowledge translation activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Co-authoring results manuscript for publication. Ongoing presentations of findings at provincial and national conferences.

Discussion

- Study outcomes may benefit nursing practice, healthcare organizations, and academic-practice partnerships.
- Findings can inform OR care models, support professional development through programs like clinical placements and practicums in specialized areas such as the OR.
- This study highlights how RPNs can significantly contribute to healthcare leadership in research, education, practice.



Conclusion

- Initiatives like the WeRPN fellowship demonstrate the potential of RPNs when given the resources and support to excel.
- For researchers and organizations, I strongly recommend creating more opportunities to engage RPNs in research with programs that prioritize mentorship, hands-on learning, and a collaborative approach.
- To future RPN researchers: pursue your ideas with passion, embrace the challenges, and never underestimate the impact your work can have. Seek out mentors by connecting with professional organizations, attending conferences, or reaching out to experienced researchers whose work aligns with your interests—they can provide guidance, encouragement, and valuable opportunities to grow in the field.

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