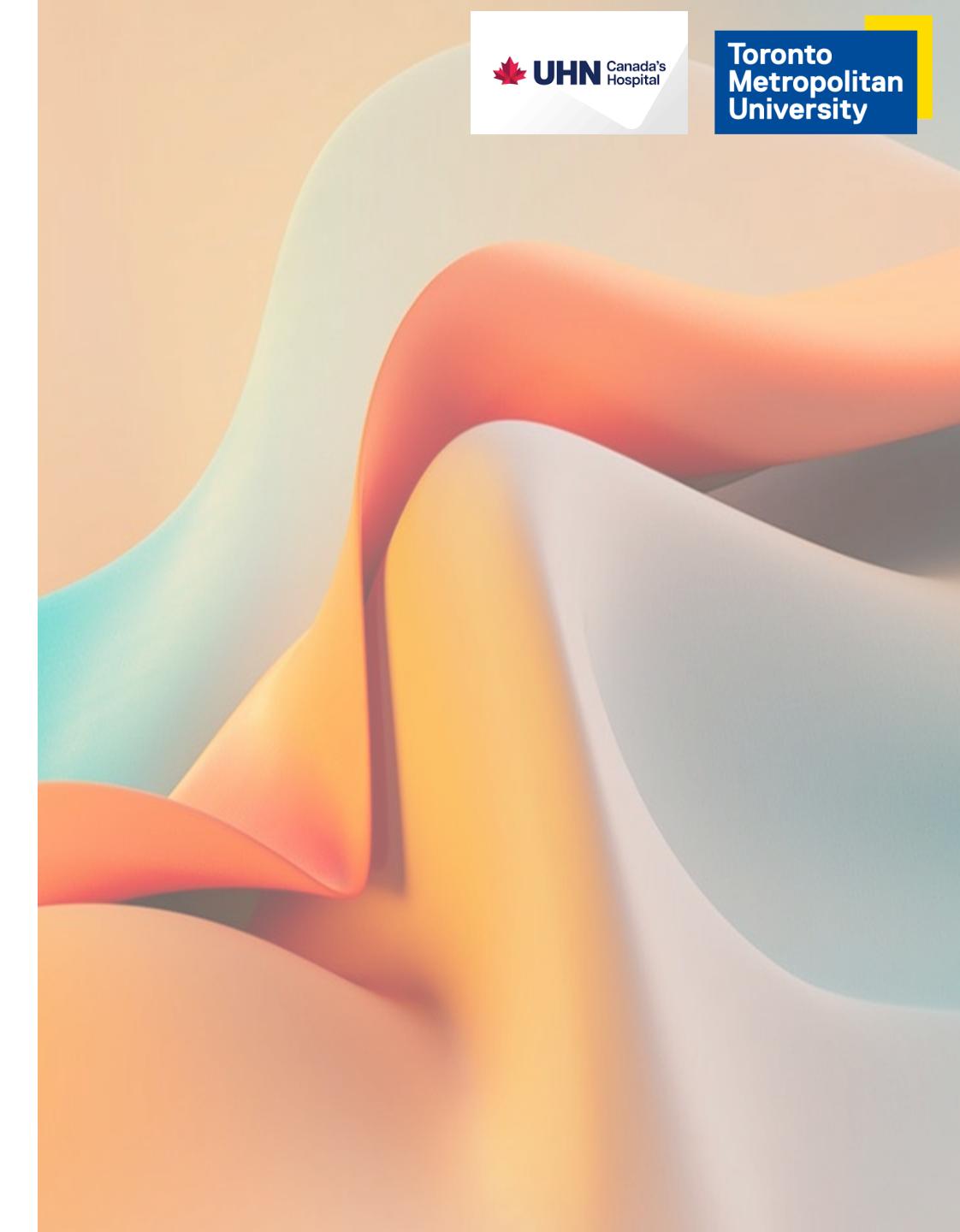


Optimizing the RPN Role in Acute Care: Generating Evidence to Inform Nursing Workforce Retention Strategies

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Research Team

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Acknowledgements

We RPN Registered Practical Nurses
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Background and Context



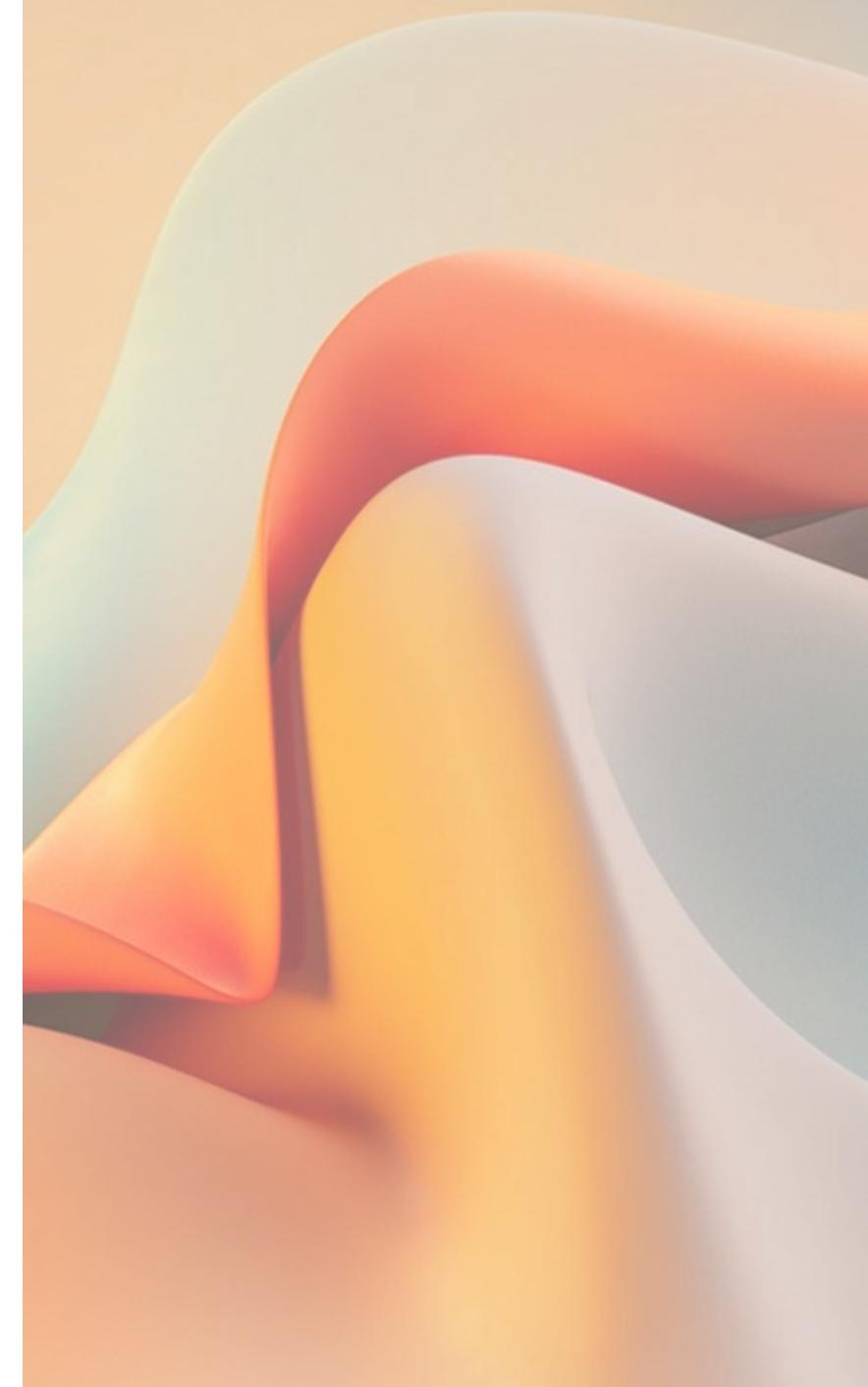
Severe nursing shortages affecting the delivery of high quality, safe, and person-centred care (Jacobs, 2021)



Current evidence suggests that retention strategies should focus on cultivating collaboration and healthy work environments that support the development of long-term, fulfilling careers (Mabona et al., 2022)



More Canadian research is needed to understand RN-RPN collaboration in complex contexts, to improve effective evidence-based retention strategies and practice supports



Study Purpose



To explore the contexts, factors, and practices framing successful RN-RPN collaboration, particularly in complex clinical situations



To explore the unique roles of RPNs

Research Questions



What collaborative strategies do RNs and RPNs leverage in complex clinical situations?



What is the unique role of RPNs in acute care settings?



How can leadership support RPNs in building skills to flourish in increasingly complex clinical environments?

Study Design



INTERPRETIVE
DESCRIPTIVE RESEARCH
DESIGN



INDIVIDUAL, SEMI-
STRUCTURED VIRTUAL
INTERVIEWS



QUALITATIVE DATA
ANALYZED USING AN
INDUCTIVE APPROACH

Participants and Setting

Eligibility Criteria:

- RPNs, RNs, PSWs and nursing leaders working on acute care units

Recruitment:

- Recruitment message via email sent

Setting:

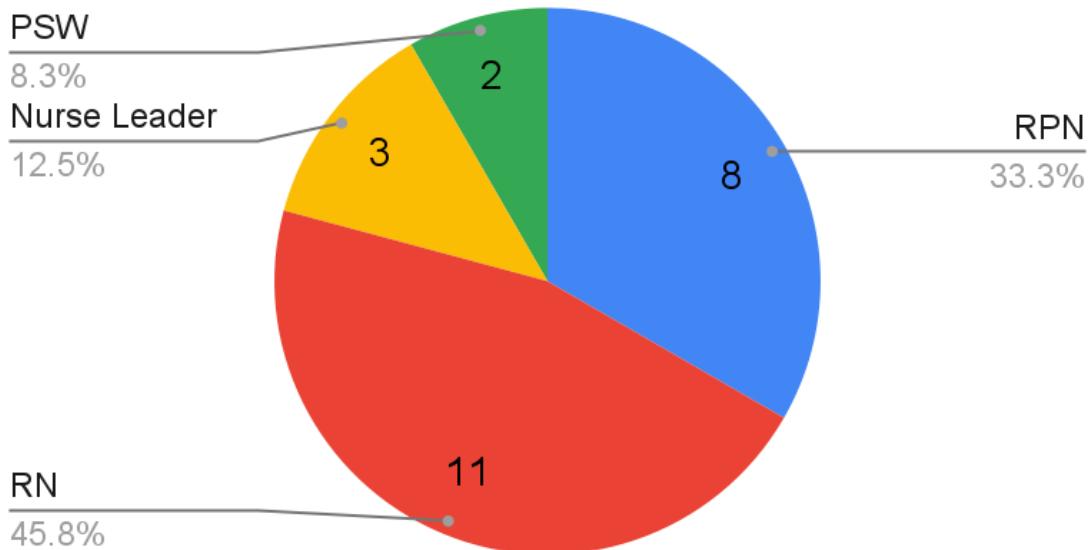
- Large academic hospital network in Toronto, Canada

Participant Demographics

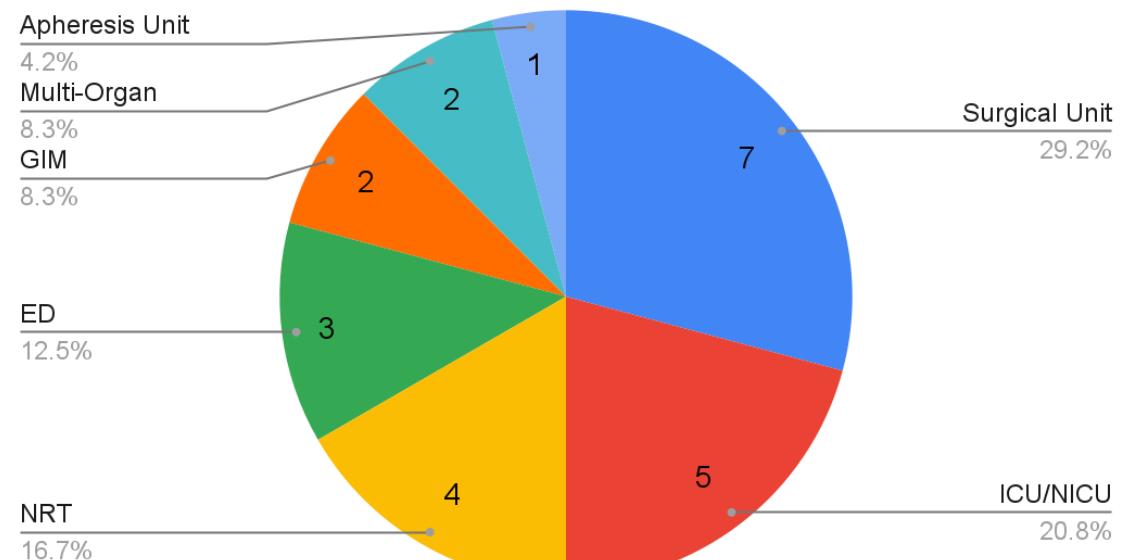
Total Participants: 24 (75.0% female, 25.0% male)

Participants currently on a unit with RPNs: Yes - 16 (66.7%); No - 8 (33.3%)

Nursing Designation



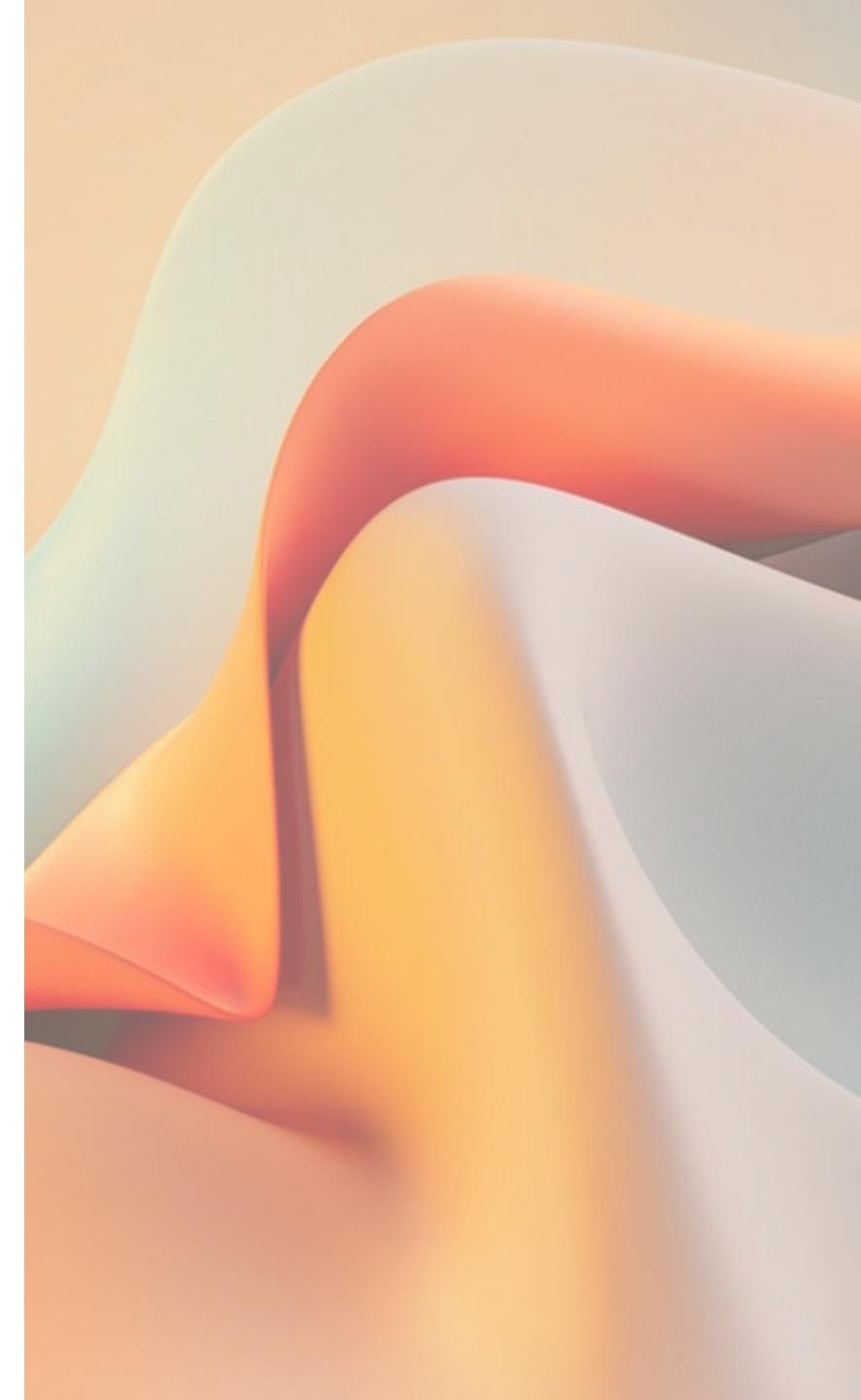
Acute Care Unit Setting



Results

The following themes were identified:

1. Teamwork as a key strength, but RN-RPN collaboration is challenged at decision points
2. Scope of practice – all nurses desire role clarity in the form of macro- and meso-level policies
3. Considering the value of RPNs, from individual and system perspectives
4. RPN growth/retention strategies mirror what is helpful for all nurses



Theme 1: Teamwork as a key strength, but RN-RPN collaboration challenged at decision points

- **Sub-theme #1a: Complexity necessitates collaboration:**
 - Teamwork as strategy to manage rising complexity from
 - Pt factors (e.g., increased comorbidities, age, socioeconomic needs, family dynamics)
 - Changing practice environments (e.g., emergent technology, limited resources),
 - Organizational factors (e.g. high patient acuity due to specialized surgical services)
 - System trends (e.g., changing nursing workforce demographics).
 - Critical role of leadership in fostering collaborative cultures



Theme 1: Teamwork as a key strength, but RN-RPN collaboration challenged at decision points

- **Sub-theme #1b: RN-RPN collaboration challenged during decision points, like:**
 - Determining pt assignments
 - Changes in pt status (e.g., deterioration), which may require transfer of care from RPN to RN
- *"I went to my charge nurse. I was being cheeky. I said, hey, this is an ICU patient. Technically, I'm not supposed to have her, because I'm an RPN. And my charge nurse said, I know this is within your knowledge, skill, and judgment. It was a very busy day, so she said, I will try to make some bed moves, but for now please manage her as best as you can. You have [name] here, who's been helping you. I'm here. We'll help you, and then, when I can move the patient, we'll move the patient. Thankfully she was able to move the patient. Twenty minutes later we did a bed swap."*
- In complex situations, experience > designation and local leaders are important

Theme 2: Scope of practice – All nurses desire role clarity in the form of macro- and meso-level policies



RNs and RPNS struggle with role clarity

"RPNs can do 92% of what an RN can"



Lack of decision support when working through complex situations (e.g., unclear responses from CNO, 3FF); desire for clearer policies



A few participants suggested that APNEs be more present to help work through the 'gray areas'



Scope of practice linked to staffing discussions (e.g., concerns about quotas)

Theme 3: Considering the value of RPNs, from individual and system perspectives

RPNs are cheaper; both groups think that RPNs deserve better compensation (both incurring risk in practice)

RPN license offers lower barrier of entry to nursing (“try before you buy”); emphasized by our ‘nursing as second career’ participants

Some participants mentioned divisive narrative from different PAs and unions; need for nursing unity

Theme 4: RPN growth/retention strategies mirror what is helpful for all nurses

- Compensation, improved work environments, professional development
- Career pathways and opportunities
 - *“I can be a preceptor, and I can be a mentor. And people come to me and ask me how to do stuff...[but] I'm not allowed to be an educator, because I'm not an RN with a fancy title behind my name. And this is what I'm talking about, where RPNs can't use their skill and knowledge, it's restrictive.”* (P17, RPN)
 - Support for bridging – but what are implications for staffing?

Implications



Findings will inform decision-making for organizational leadership and staff



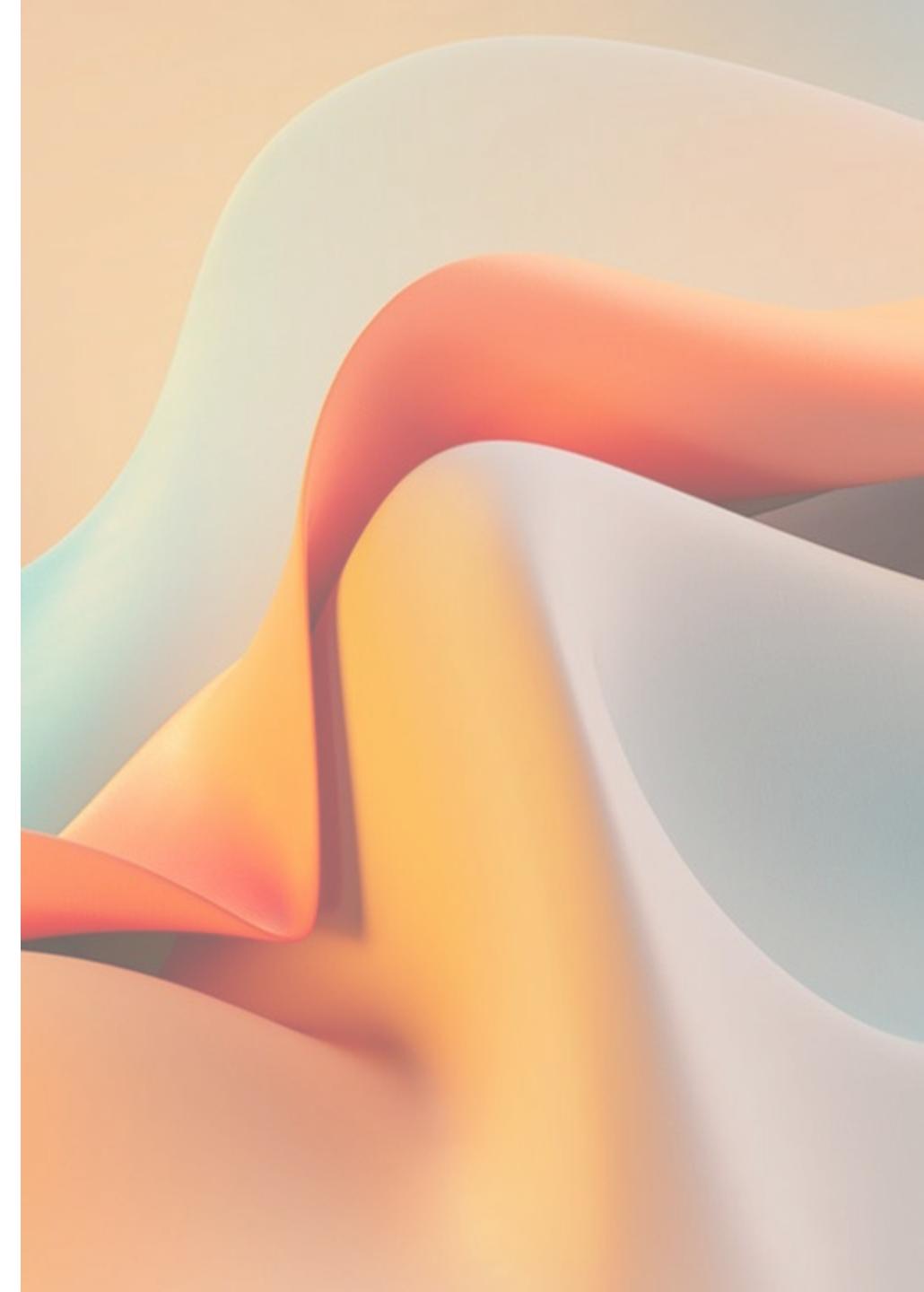
The need for role clarity between RPN and RN roles in complex situations



Findings will inform nursing workforce retention strategies

Reflective Question

- How is collaboration between different nursing categories supported in your setting? (e.g., organizational policies, decision-making frameworks, tools, etc.)





Thank you

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