

## Abstract

The attrition of experienced registered nurses from bedside nursing represents a growing concern in the healthcare industry and compounds a national and global nursing shortage. Experienced nurses possess valuable assessment, communication, and critical thinking skills associated with improved patient outcomes. The problem is experienced registered nurses retiring before the age of retirement eligibility. The gap in the literature provided an opportunity for a descriptive, phenomenological qualitative study to explore the lived experiences of experienced nurses to determine which factors influence the decision to retire early. Constructs of the conceptual framework were identified using the nursing services delivery theory's open system approach. The purpose of the study was to explore the lived experiences of experienced nurses working in hospitals in Virginia to determine factors influencing the decision to retire before the retirement eligibility age. Participants included 16 registered nurses over the age of 45 years having at least 20 years of experience in bedside nursing and working at any hospital in Virginia. Data collection included recorded semi-structured interviews and an electronic journal of notes. A thematic analysis of the transcribed narratives using Colaizzi's seven-step method of inductive reduction revealed seven emergent themes supported by current literature, including a passion for nursing, self-efficacy, rewards, and recognition, generational diversity, physical decline, technology fatigue, and intention to leave. A subtheme of moral distress added to the body of nursing research and warrants future research. The findings and conclusions of the study were included in an organized written presentation.