

**Title:** Hospital-Based Patient Care Assistants' Perceptions of Preparedness to Work and Intent to Stay Study

**Principal Investigator:** Maryellen Potts, PhD, the University of Kansas School of Nursing

**Co-Investigators:** Lisa Guthrie PhD, RN, NPD-BC & Naomi King DNP, RN, CMSRN, of The University of Kansas Health System; Amy G. Garcia, DNP, RN, FAAN, Co-Director of the Kansas Nursing Workforce Center

**Background and Significance:**

The Kansas Nursing Workforce Center funded this clinical/academic partnership study.

Workforce shortages exist at all levels across healthcare organizations. While the focus tends to be on the licensed nurse, a shortage of unlicensed assistive personnel (UAP) also exists. This study aimed to look at the UAP role specifically.

The UAP role of the Patient Care Assistant (PCA) is vital to patient care in hospitals and is a recognized pathway to professional nursing. The concept of intent to stay in nursing involves many factors. Understanding PCAs' feelings towards their job and their training may contribute to their intent to stay in their role or in their organization.

**Purpose:**

The purpose of this study was to explore perceptions of Patient Care Assistants employed by hospitals towards their preparation for practice and feelings about their job.

**Results:**

This study was conducted in an urban hospital setting. We found that the PCAs take their role very seriously and are focused on providing quality patient care. They typically felt prepared for their job, but they recognized areas for improvement in training and in the workplace. PCAs were interested in more real-time learning opportunities, desired patient feedback about the care they provided, and wanted to better understand the care their patients needed. PCAs also wanted to be heard – they had good ideas to share about improving the workplace, their job, and their impact on patients. For example, standardization of training and expectations of the PCA role across units was discussed. Low pay was discussed, but we learned it wasn't a reason to leave employment nor a main concern. When discussing low staffing, PCAs suggested having a "Plan B" to ensure consistently safe care for patients. PCAs also felt that they could not support the nurses as well as they might if more staff were available. Our analysis revealed two types of PCAs – the career PCA and the PCA using the job as a steppingstone to school or other healthcare careers. Finally, although it may seem self-evident, we found a connection between

PCAs feeling respected and valued by coworkers and leadership and their intent to stay in their job.

**Future Research:**

We are currently pursuing a similar study (also funded) with unlicensed assistive nursing personnel working in the rural environment. Recruitment is in process. If you are interested, please contact Maryellen Potts [mpotts3@kumc.edu](mailto:mpotts3@kumc.edu) and Lisa Guthrie [lguthrie2@kumc.edu](mailto:lguthrie2@kumc.edu).