

# NURSING AND MIDWIFERY CAREER STRUCTURE REVIEW

## ISSUE ARTICLE FOUR

### Multi-Generations: What are the Career Structure Issues?

This is the fourth in a series of articles to encourage discussion about nursing and midwifery career structures in South Australia. Each article looks at different issues affecting professional career structures. It is hoped that these articles will stimulate workplace discussions, further questions and feedback. Your views are not only welcome, they are crucial.

#### Generations of Nurses and Midwives:

Most nurses are used to looking back into history - both personal family history and the history of nursing.

But what about the future? What might the timeline of nurses and midwives look like? In the timeline (at right) follow the lives of Nurses A and C and Midwives B and D to gain a sense of the lineage of nursing and midwifery.

And, speaking of generations, which generations are currently active in nursing and midwifery? Where are each of these generations placed in terms of their careers?

In the timeline, follow the future for the generation you belong to - and have a look at the generations of your colleagues.

Ages used in Timeline	
21	RN/RM graduates
25	RN/RM has own baby (Matures & Baby Boomers)
31	RN/RM has own baby (GenX & Millennials)
42	Mid career
65	Aged used for retirement
61	Age used for Matures
51	Age used for Baby Boomers
34	Age used for Generation X
24	Age for Millennials (Gen Y)
	<b>Major shortages predicted</b>

PAST	
1921	Nursing registration introduced in Australia
1945	Average Matures born
1955	Average Baby Boomers born
1966	Matures became RNs
1970	Matures had first baby
1972	Average Generation X born
1976	Baby Boomers became RNs
1976	Nursing degree courses began in Australia
1980	Baby Boomers had first baby
1982	Ave. Millennial Generation born
1985	Nurse A is born (RN in 2006)
1986	Fifty day nurses strike in Victoria
1987	Matures at mid career
1993	Gen X became RNs
1997	Baby Boomers at mid career
2000	Matures retiring
2001	Centenary of Australian Federation
2003	Gen X had first baby
2003	Millenials became RNs
NOW	
2006	Midwife B is born (RM in 2027) Nurse A graduates as RN In acute care: 5% Matures; 40% Baby Boomers; 40% Gen X; 5% Millennials
2013	Millenials have first baby
2014	Gen X at mid career
2015	Nurse A has Baby C
2016	<b>In acute care - 5% Baby Boomers; 40% Gen X; 40% Millennials; 5% Gen next?</b>
2020	Baby Boomers retired
2024	Nurse A is mid career Millenials mid career
2027	Midwife B (born 2006) graduates
2036	RN C (son of RN A) graduates
2037	Gen X generation are retiring
2037	Midwife B (b 2006) has Baby D
2047	Millenials generation are retiring
2048	Midwife B (b 2006) is mid career
2050	Nurse A (2006 grad) retires
2057	Nurse C is at mid career
2058	RM D (b 2037) graduates
2071	Midwife B (b 2006) retires
2079	Midwife D is at mid career
2101	Bi-centenary of Australian Federation
FUTURE	

"A generation is the aggregate of people who share birth years, a common location in history, and a collective persona". (Howe 2000)

The information about generational characteristics in this article is

based on the research of various writers. Such generalisations will not apply to all members of a particular generation.

"We don't have to agree with the values of different generations but we can strive to understand the mind-sets of different generations and how each group sees the world based on their experiences". (NOAAD).

We have all had to learn about diversity in religious belief, culture, language and ethnicity. Now we need to add generational diversity to that knowledge.

#### The Generations in Nursing and Midwifery

Running behind schedule, a 40-something charge nurse asked a 20-something colleague, "Would you mind answering Mrs J's call light? I need to start an IV line". She expected her younger colleague to recognise the request as an order, however nicely put. Instead, the younger women said, "Sorry I can't. I'm in the middle of Mr C's morning care".

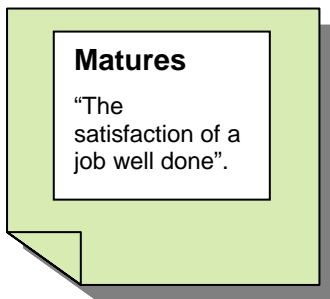
What's going on here? The charge nurse has just had a lesson in intergenerational mismatch of messages.

A Baby Boomer, she was raised to be "nice" (polite and indirect). The younger nurse, a Millennial, was raised to respond to what is actually said rather than what is subtly implied. When her older colleague asked "Would you mind?" she heard a request with options - and one of the options was to say no (Kennedy 2000).

This miscommunication between generations occurs everywhere and often causes conflict. Recognition of generational differences and awareness of diversity go a long way to reducing potential friction.



### What are some of the Characteristics of the Different Generations in the Workplace?

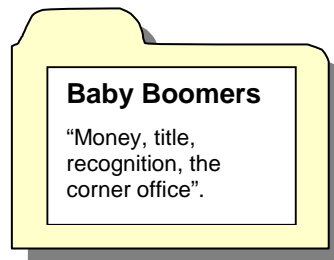


Matures grew up with economic and political instability, living through the Great Depression and World War II.

Employment meant security and stability. Work put food on the table. A work life of conformity and acceptance were keys to success.

In the workplace, the relationship between supervisors and subordinates was formal and impersonal. Respect, appreciation for authority, hierarchy and order were implicit. Matures would typically work their way up within companies by "paying their dues":

Those who have made an effective transition within the current workforce often have undergone a reinvention of their basic identity, involving personal growth and lifestyle changes. Matures view work itself as their actual reward, and are willing to give 100 percent without expecting anything more than a pay cheque and standard benefits package.

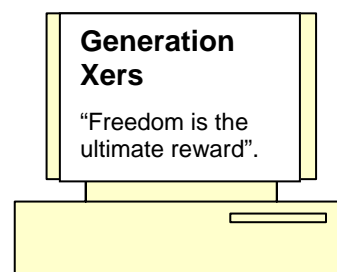


The Baby Boomers are a demographically huge generation who broke out of the mould created by their security-seeking parents. They grew up pampered by parents who wanted them to have the best. As a result the "Me" generation arrived.

Boomers left unsatisfying jobs and relationships and sought personal gratification through goal-attainment. They often sacrifice their personal lives for work, and started the "workaholic" trend.

The large number of people born in this period resulted in more competition for limited openings all the way up in the workplace.

Many Baby Boomers went into nursing because they wanted to do good in the world. Those who survived the downsizing of the 1980s had to rely on each other to cover shifts and work overtime, for the greater good of patient care.



Generation Xers are in a perpetual battle against the stereotype that they are a disengaged, disloyal generation of slackers.

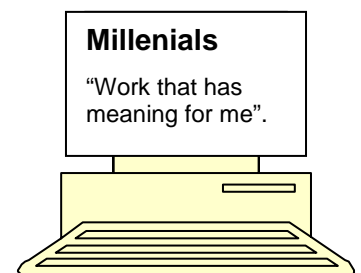
Xers were the first generation who had to deal with high divorce rates, and dual career households.

They grew up as latchkey kids, taking care of themselves. This socialized them to be self-reliant and influences how Xers work. They are unimpressed by authority figures, look out for themselves and are fiercely independent workers.

Economically conservative, they remember double-digit inflation and the stress that their parents faced during times of on and off unemployment.

Generation X employees tend not to trust organisations or the people who manage them. They grew up in the era of downsizing and restructuring. They believe that job security is a myth and that their best chance of survival lies in building and marketing their skills.

As nurses, they work hard and are dedicated to their patients, but they want to be paid adequately and are not afraid to tell employers when they think demands are unreasonable.



Millenials (or Gen Y) have grown up in a world of convenience, luxury, change and speed. Their immersion in technology has made them into smart problem solvers. They know how and where to rapidly find information and solutions.

They have an unprecedented ability to absorb information, make decisions quickly and multi-task. In addition, they come to work with the full intention of making an immediate impact.



More so than other generations, Millennials seek intellectual challenge from work. They want work that fits into what they want out of their lives — be that to do social good, enjoy recreation, or build stronger relationships with family and friends.

Millenials are a holistic-minded generation, socialized to be technologically savvy, intellectually curious, and emotionally literate. They are in touch with and unafraid of their emotions.

This generation wants tangible rewards that help them pay the bills. Just as important, they want to know their work will be meaningful and make a difference to the world. They have a strong sense of civic duty, morality, optimism, confidence and street smarts.

(Henry 2005; Alexander, 2001; McGee 2004; Domrose, 2001; NOAAD; NAA 2001; Rock 1999; Ulrich 2001; Gerke 2001; Kupperschmidt 2001)

### **What are some of the Career Structures Issues with Multiple Generations in the Workplace?**

Many of the issues surrounding multi-generational views in the workplace are more related to work culture than structure.

However, the combination of a mix of generations and the need to develop a structure focused on the future do raise several structural issues.

### **Is it time for new concepts of part-time work?**

There is evidence that part-time work is associated with reduced career opportunities. Some theorists argue that this is because

part timers have less commitment to work. Others argue that it is the structural inequalities in organisations that result in part-timers being concentrated in lower occupational grades.

Most studies of part-timers are of women. The increasing evidence is that to try to explain divisions in the labour market simply in terms of gender is misleading. The current experience in hospitals is that the newer generations of nurses and midwives – both male and female – are increasingly choosing to work part time as part of balancing work and other activities in their life.

A study of 643 nurses in the NHS examined whether part timers invest less in their careers than full timers (Lane 2004). Lane reports no significant difference between part- and full-time nurses in terms of reasons for working as nurses, nor in the balance between desire to provide a service and desire to have a career.

What is assumed to be a lack of commitment, or choice to work part-time, may actually be an acceptance of limitations rather than truly a choice.

Higher grades are primarily occupied by full time nurses. Although there is an over-representation of men in higher classifications (compared to their numbers in nursing/midwifery overall), the main under-representation appears to be for women who have had career breaks.

During Lane's study, managers reported that there was no formal policy preventing part-timers from working in higher grades. However, informally it was general practice not to employ part-time nurses in higher grades. Usually these grades were advertised as

full time, excluding others from applying.

Lane concludes that attention is long overdue to identifying and implementing ways of enhancing career progression and skills development for nurses who will work part-time for at least part of their careers.

This group could expand as Gen-X and the Millenials become a bigger proportion of the nursing and midwifery workforces.



### **How important are continuing education and professional support?**

Generation X, a group that has survived by doing things for itself, may have clashed with mentors because its members are more likely to want to be given a job and to be left alone to do it.

But Millenials have been primed for good relationships with older advisers and are very good at knowing how to use another person as a resource (Lovern 2001).

The younger generations want preceptors readily available so questions can be answered immediately (Cordeniz 2002). They crave development and a work environment that stimulates learning and reflection on practice.

Rather than traditional linear thinking, they appear to use parallel or mosaic processing, both of which lead to faster processing and a better absorption of information (Ulrich 2001).



## Issue Article Four continued ...

<b>MATURES</b>	<b>BABY BOOMERS</b>	<b>GENERATION X</b>	<b>MILLENNIALS (GEN Y)</b>
Born: 1922–1945	Born: 1946–1964	Born: 1965–1978	Born: 1979–1995
Who they are: Grandparents of Gen X/Ys	Who they are: Parents of Gen Yers	Who they are: 20 and 30-somethings	Who they are: RN graduates since 2000
Formative life events: Great Depression, World War 2	Formative life events: Moon landing, Women's lib, JFK, Vietnam War	Formative life events: Energy crisis, PCs, Berlin Wall, Challenger	Formative life events: Gulf War, WTC terrorist attacks
Grew up with: Mickey Mouse, Jukeboxes, Flash Gordon, Blondie and Dagwood, Tarzan	Grew up with: "Laugh-In," Peace Sign, Hula Hoops, TV Dinners, "Mod Squad", Tie Dye	Grew up with: "Jaws," "The Simpsons," MTV, VCR, "E.T.", "Sesame Street"	Grew up with: X Games, Cell Phones and Pagers, Pokemon, Beanie Babies, Spice Girls
Formative media experience: Radio	Formative media experiences: TV	Formative media experiences: TV & Computers	Formative media experiences: Internet & computer games
Tend to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Respect authority, even when it frustrates them;</li> <li>- duty before pleasure;</li> <li>- Wait for gratification;</li> <li>- Avoid challenging the system, be disciplined, respect law and order, like consistency; and</li> <li>- Directive, command &amp; control style as manager.</li> </ul>	Tend to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Live to work;</li> <li>- Strive for convenience and personal gratification;</li> <li>- Open minded in their youth, conservative now; and</li> <li>- Focus in workplace on process and output, not implications and outcomes.</li> </ul>	Tend to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- View jobs within context of a contract;</li> <li>- Believe in clear, consistent expectations;</li> <li>- View money as only part of the larger equation in life; and</li> <li>- Focus in the workplace on relationships, outcomes, their rights and skills.</li> </ul>	Tend to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Believe earning money, translates into immediate spending;</li> <li>- Demonstrate respect only after they are treated with respect;</li> <li>- Question everything; and</li> <li>- Be confident, sociable, with strong morals and sense of civic duty.</li> </ul>
Work Fast	Work Efficiently	Eliminate the Task	Do What's Asked
Preferred leadership: Hierarchy	Preferred leadership: Consensus	Preferred leadership: Competence	Preferred leadership: Pulling together
Work ethic: dedicated	Work ethic: driven	Work ethic: balanced	Work ethic: determined
Work themes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Loyalty;</li> <li>- Hierarchy;</li> <li>- Respect for authority;</li> <li>- Conformity;</li> <li>- Discipline;</li> <li>- Duty;</li> <li>- Consistency and uniformity.</li> </ul>	Work themes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Involvement;</li> <li>- Workaholism;</li> <li>- Promotion of equality;</li> <li>- Do what they're told;</li> <li>- Wait for opportunities; and</li> <li>- Ask, "Who's in charge?"</li> </ul>	Work themes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Self-reliance;</li> <li>- "Work to live, don't live to work";</li> <li>- Question decisions;</li> <li>- Tech savvy;</li> <li>- Seize opportunities; and</li> <li>- Ask, "What's the deal?"</li> </ul>	Work themes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Life-long learning &amp; intellectual curiosity;</li> <li>- Smart work/problem solving;</li> <li>- Team work;</li> <li>- Uninhibited communication; and</li> <li>- Emotional literacy.</li> </ul>
Feedback: Seek no applause, but appreciate recognition. Use words not non-verbals. Formal style. Privacy: Don't expect them to share their inner thoughts, or openly reflect or critique.	Feedback: Boomers are often giving feedback but seldom receiving, especially positive feedback. Answer questions thoroughly and expect to be pressed for the details. Non-verbals are important.	Feedback: Xers need positive feedback to let them know they're on the right track. Use short sound bites. Give information and keep them in the loop. Use an informal style. Don't talk down to them.	Feedback: Millennials are used to praise and may mistake silence for disapproval. They need to know what they're doing right and what they're doing wrong. Use an informal style. Don't talk down to them.
Motivators: Explain logic of actions. Traditional recognition e.g. plaques, photo's etc.	Motivators: Need to see steps toward defined goals. Recognition with wide public profile.	Motivators: Give multiple tasks, but allow them to set priorities. Ask for their reactions and opinions.	Motivators: Provide opportunities for learning & building skills. Be more coach, less boss.



While Gen Xers incorporated technology into their daily life when young, Millennials have never been without it. They collect and process information differently to their predecessors.

Millennials possess a new set of skills that fits the needs of the new economy--techno-literate, quick to move to results with minimal instruction, and able to think with a fresh creativity (Lovern 2001).

The provision of ongoing education will need to take account of their approach.

Managers of Millennials will need to incorporate more coaching, providing employees with task-specific feedback and offering them an opportunity to talk about their development.

In fact, more discussion may be needed across the board.

Traditionalists and Boomers may have a tendency not to question or challenge authority or the status quo. This may cause confusion and resentment among the Xers and Millennials who have been taught to speak up.

In the new workplace, new frustrations emerge. "The 20 some-things just want to do their own thing, they're so self-centred."

On the other side are the complaints about the 50 some-things: "They're so inflexible and can't make a decision without forming a committee. They hate it if somebody younger than they are tells them what to do" (Rock 1999).

Xers and Millennials who have had different life experiences and communicate with people differently, may fail to actively listen to Boomers and Matures thereby missing valuable information and guidance.

Younger nurses want information delivered quickly without the chit chat so they can get back to work.

They are suspicious of Boomers who don't get to the point immediately or who present it forcefully. Many Boomers perceive the abrupt nature of Gen X as rudeness.

The meeting ground here is for the Gen Xers to cultivate a softer style, and for the Boomers to become more assertive and adopt a "just do it" style (Rock 1999).

Perhaps communication skills will need to become a more important focus of ongoing education for all generations.

### Changing views on promotional roles?

Despite early predictions that Gen Xers would be lazy and uninspired, just the opposite has proved true.

Attitudinal surveys of Gen X and Millennials workers have found they are more concerned than the Baby Boomers were with finding employers who will provide them with meaningful, important and challenging work; assistance to develop their skills; collaborative and flexible working arrangements and transparent processes for career advancement (Shergold 2005).

Wanting expectations to be clearly stated, seeking to participate in results oriented work, freedom to think and explore possibilities, real teamwork (not just team meetings) and opportunities to try new roles are hallmarks of new generation nurses.

These nurses want promotion to be based on ability and achievement of outcomes rather than seniority by age or length of time in an organisation.

Trends toward later retirements mean that many Matures are still working and many Baby Boomers will work for years to come. Gen Xers are quickly moving into

positions of power and influence where they are supervising and educating members of older generations. How will older nurses and midwives respond to the changes these generations will bring to higher classification positions? How will GenX and Millennials manage people over whom they have been promoted?

Will the concept of Level 3, 4 and 5 'jobs for life' give way to outcome oriented indicators being required to stay in a promotional position?

In terms of selection criteria, how will the professions balance past experience and future potential in promoting clinicians, managers and educators?

Cordeniz (2002) asks whether Generation X employees – empowered, self directed, flexible, innovative, risk takers, and problem solvers – are what nursing has been talking about and longing for.

### Changing expectations of leaders and supervisors?

Gen X expect more input into high level decisions than their predecessors. Gen X do not want to be managed by the use of fear, long term rewards, managers who waste their time, and micromanagement techniques.

Gen Xers want leaders who invest in their employees, are willing and able to provide effective feedback, understand work issues and respond to their needs and concerns, and possess and exercise power to access information and resources.

As Gen Xers move into management positions – the culture of the workplace shifts from productivity and punctuality to purpose and passion. Strict behavioural regulations are not done away with but are relaxed and pushed to the background.



The outcome is kept as the focus rather than the processes used to get there (Hutchins 2002).

Younger nurses report that they want leaders who are honest. Their desired traits in leaders – motivational, receptive, positive, good communicator, team player, good people skills, approachable and supportive – all depict an environment in which younger nurses feel nurtured and supported (Wieck 2002).

Younger nurses do not view age, seniority and rank as measures of accomplishment or expertise. In an era of complexity and change, young people look for leaders who work with followers as intimate allies. They want colleagues who will develop relationships that build intimacy and show trust and respect for them, their abilities and their ideas (Alexander 2001).

These views are consistent with statements that younger workers want to be led not managed (Bradford 1992).

Gen X and Millennials do not accept the old command and control leadership approach. The top down leadership style that grew from a military model is not effective in today's world of rapid change. Today's young leaders act first and evaluate later, because a leader cannot afford to carefully evaluate first in the high-speed environment of today.

This rapid response decision-making is a characteristic of today's young people. They have been taught to act fast (Merrill 2004).

It is sometimes hard for older generations to respect the quick, decisive leadership style seen in young people. Older nurses may tend to question how much young nurses really know, and thus de-value their ability to make decisions based on limited experience.

Older staff grew up in a time when you worked your way up to leadership roles. Often they don't think of younger staff as colleagues, because they are assumed to be inexperienced.

But young people today know more than older people knew at their age. The Internet and instantaneous access to news and information has made knowledge much more available at an earlier age (Merrill 2004)

### What is considered fair?

Boomers who have worked in a hospital for a long time think it's unfair that young agency nurses come in and make twice as much as they do. Gen Xers don't understand why co-workers are rewarded according to seniority instead of performance.

Many Millennials, accustomed to working in teams, are highly sensitive to poor treatment of co-workers by an organisation (Domrose 2001).

Unlike many workaholic baby boomers who define themselves by what they do and how much they work, younger generations tend to see work as only a part of their lives. Balance is a fundamental value in the younger generations.

In the workplace young people have been termed slackers because they don't work late or refuse to attend that extra meeting. They expect time off for family functions and don't understand why they have to stick around if they've finished all that was expected of them.

But it is not an aversion to work that prompts their actions. It is a commitment to family and friends – a commitment to having a balanced life in which work is only one segment of a full life.

Millennials demonstrates less tolerance for seniority than previous generations and demand pay that is equivalent to performance (Cowin 2003).

How could work roles be organised to meet this range of views? What rewards and conditions of employment would be seen as attractive across these generations? How might the Career Structure need to change to be more responsive to each generation?

### Changing options for older nurses and midwives?

Attitudes to older nurses may be ambivalent, apathetic or welcoming. Some older nurses report ageist attitudes towards them by employers but this was not overt. More often, they felt pressure from other colleagues, young and old, to retire soon and open up a job for a younger person (Watson 2003).

Physical limitations or family caring responsibilities mean that some nurses would like to have less heavy duties but this is not easy to achieve in current clinical work arrangements.

Many older nurses admit to feeling "worn out", and cite this as a significant influence on retirement decisions (Watson 2003).

The pace and demands of technological change often do not allow time for older nurses to adapt and incorporate new technologies into their practice.

Financial issues may deter nurses from taking less demanding jobs or from decreasing their hours. Where superannuation is based on final salary, this can be a disincentive to older nurses in reducing hours (Watson 2003).



How might we make better use of the knowledge and skills of older nurses and midwives with lower levels of physical work burden and less stress? How could some of the disincentives of part-time work be minimized?



### Into the future

The concept of **career** has changed. Increasingly young people talk about having parallel careers. They expect roles that are less defined and to learn through experimentation. And if it doesn't work, you reboot and start again.

Life in the new millennium is all about **speed**. Young people not only live with speed and chaos, they thrive in it. The Information Age has taught a generation that you never have to wait for anything. They are looking for opportunities to gain twenty years of experience in two years.

Computer simulations allow them to formulate ideas, test them, retest, refine and move forward. They believe in just doing it.

**Loyalty** has new meaning among young people who saw their parents downsized, reengineered and laid off. They know the days of corporate loyalty to employees are long gone. Loyalty is highly valued, and given only to a few friends and colleagues after they have earned it. When they feel respected and valued they will be loyal to the cause or organization and become great assets and advocates (Merrill 2004).

The future will be in the hands of Gen X and the Millennials but Baby Boomers and Matures also have much to offer. How can we create a Career Structure that respects the needs of older staff as well as respecting the 'new kids on the block'?

**HAVE YOUR SAY ...**  
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Published by the Nursing Office  
Department of Health  
South Australia  
May 2006

Also published on [www.nursingsa.com](http://www.nursingsa.com)

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South Australia 2006



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