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# Record number of new overseas nurses registered, record number of nurses also looking to leave



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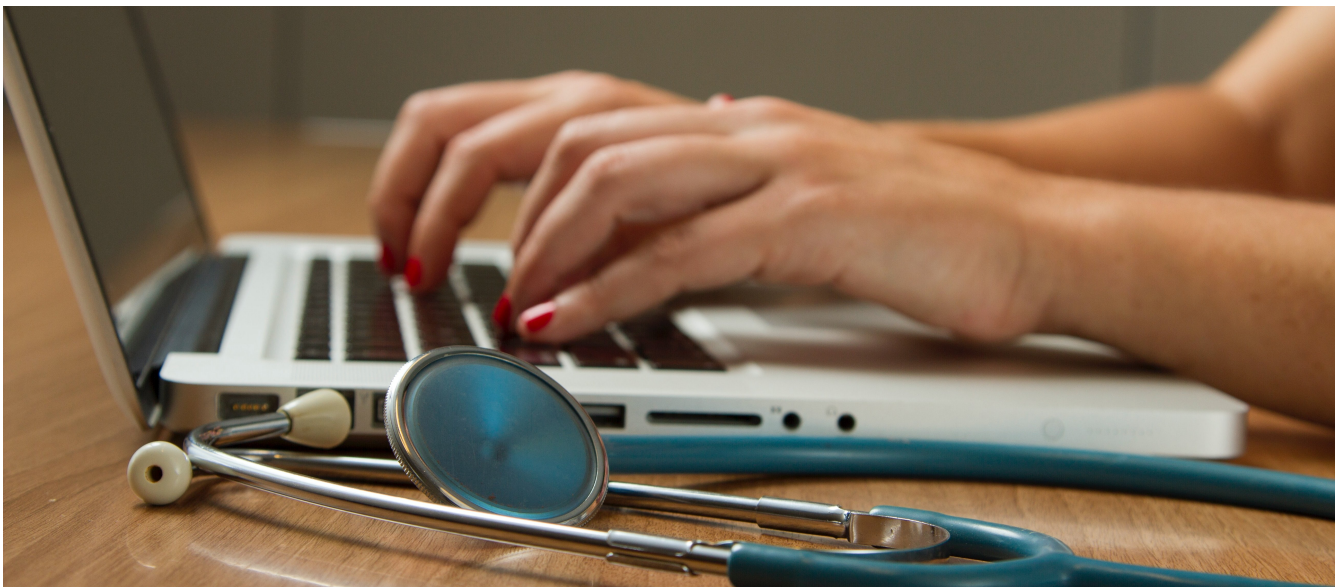
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Latest Nursing Council statistics show a record number of overseas nurses registering to nurse here but also a record number of New Zealand nurses looking to work offshore

In the wake of borders reopening, a record 6000-plus new overseas-trained nurses have registered in New Zealand in the past 12 months but how many are actually practising here is not known.

The Nursing Council this week released quarterly statistics showing 8248 new nurses were added to the register in the 12 months to 31 March of which 6079 (74 per cent) were internationally qualified.

But in the same 12 months, a record 5012 New Zealand-registered nurses applied to the Nursing Council for verification of their registration, which is required for nurses to register and work offshore.

Overall the number of nurses, as at 31 March, holding annual practising certificates in New Zealand was up 4180 to 69,592 or 6 per cent higher than the same time in 2022.

## **Global workforce in flux**

Nursing Council director of policy Nicholas Huntington says it is probably too early to have a clear picture of workforce trends with the after-effects of the pandemic still being felt.

“We’re in a period of flux at the moment,” says Dr Huntington.

He says the closed borders delayed New Zealand nurses planning to travel or leave and also saw a dip in internationally qualified nurses registering in 2020/21. This may have affected the steep rise in applications in the past year.

“To be honest, we are probably not going to have a good handle on what is the ‘new normal’ until probably next year.”

On top of that, the global shortage of nurses is making “an incredibly competitive environment with every country competing against almost every other country for nurses”.

Also influencing migration trends to New Zealand could be the “massive industrial strife” in the UK.

## **IN FIGURES**

### **In the 12 month to 31 March**

69,592: Number of nurses holding annual practising certificates in New Zealand, up 4180 from previous year

8248: New nurses on the nursing register

6079: Of the new nurses 6079 are internationally qualified

5012: Number of nurses applied to Nursing Council for verification of their registration, required for nurses to register and work offshore

36 per cent: Percentage of nurses with an annual practising certificate who originally trained overseas. Up from 32.5 per cent at the same time in 2021.

## **How many new nurses on ground unclear**

The record number of nurses registered in the past year was double the 3013 such nurses who newly registered in 2021/22 and more than double compared with before the pandemic.

The 2169 newly registered New Zealand-trained nurses is also the highest in the past five years.

Dr Huntington says it is not known how many of these newly registered nurses translate into extra nurses working on the ground in New Zealand with the majority still overseas when registered.

“And as recruitment ramps up, and we get more nurses being recruited from overseas, there is going to be a larger proportion of these nurses who haven’t yet arrived in New Zealand, as there is always a lag.”

In March 2023, less than a quarter of the 1885 newly registered international nurses had a New Zealand address.

The biggest source of new overseas nurses was those most recently registered in the UK, more than a third of applicants, followed by Singapore and the Middle East.

Dr Huntington says these statistics reflect where the nurses are currently based and include nurses trained in other countries around the world, including the Philippines and India.

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The opened border has also seen an increase in New Zealand-registered nurses leaving the country.

Dr Huntington says the council knows from its annual workforce surveys that historically about 4 to 5 per cent of nurses with practising certificates are not actively nursing in New Zealand, including nurses on parental leave or working offshore.

Nursing Council chief executive Catherine Byrne says it is difficult to identify exactly how many New Zealand nurses are leaving to work offshore.

“Although you may have a [New Zealand certificate] you could, of course, be in Australia now practising, or not. So it is very difficult to actually draw the line in the sand and give an accurate picture of the numbers.”

RNZ earlier this month quoted an Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency spokesperson saying 4951 New Zealand nurses had registered across the Tasman since August last year.

Ms Byrne said that figure was “significantly higher” than Nursing Council data indicated.

**Overseas-trained nurses dominate those looking to leave**



*New Zealand Doctor Rata Aotearoa* reported in November last year that the verification requests by New Zealand nurses looking to work overseas had slumped in 2020/21 to about 800, risen to pre-COVID levels of about 2000 a year in 2021/22 but was rising steeply after April 2022.

In the seven months to October 2022, there had been 2373 applications and it kept rising to reach 5012 for the 12 months to 31 March 2023.

At the time Nursing Council found that 73 per cent of the 1200-plus nurses who applied between August and October 2022 were internationally qualified nurses. Dr Huntington says an exact breakdown was not available yet for the whole 12 months, but he believes the trend continued that most nurses applying were originally trained overseas.

As at 31 March, these nurses made up 36 per cent of the 69,500 New Zealand nurses with current annual practising certificates, up from 32.5 per cent at the same time in 2021.

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