Innovative Strategies for Recruiting Nurses for Research Using Social Media

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Aims: The aim of this secondary analysis was to describe and examine the usefulness of strategies to recruit nurses to participate in three separate research studies, including through social media.

Background: Despite being the single largest group of healthcare providers, nurses have been identified as a difficult population to recruit for research. Barriers to recruitment of nurses include survey fatigue, hospital IRB as gatekeepers to accessing nurse participants through hospitals, and limited generalizability of participants recruited through one healthcare system. Social media presents a quick, effective, cost-free, and innovative method to recruit nurses for participation in research from a variety of work settings and around the globe. However, strategies specific to recruit nurses on social media have not been discussed.

Methods: This secondary analysis explored the recruitment strategies of three studies that recruited nurse participants for survey studies via social media in addition to other approaches. The three studies included in this analysis were: 1) Travel Nurse Onboarding study, which recruited 306 participants from a single closed group on Facebook over 22 days; 2) Presenteeism and Nursing Study that recruited 447 participants over 6 months using nursing association listservs, healthcare organizations, and social media ads and postings on Facebook and Twitter; and 3) The Pain and Nursing study that recruited 3,226 nurse participants over a period of 4 months from social media (Facebook and Twitter), through association listservs, and in-person at a local and national nursing conferences. The strategies used by each study was analyzed for similarities and differences. The limitations and return on investment of each strategy was considered.

Results: Of the strategies analyzed, recruitment posts in Facebook groups of nurses had the best return on investment. Useful strategies for social media posts include where, when, and how often to post as well as how to craft effective posts on social media. Listservs and organizations present recruitment barriers of which the researcher has no control over. Ads on social media can be costly and offer limited returns. In-person recruitment at conferences present difficulties in obtaining permission to recruit and ultimately can result in low participant recruitment.

Implications: This project contributes new knowledge on the recruitment of nurses for participation in research using social media. As we seek to increase the speed of translation of research into practice, conducting research with a representative sample of nurses can help researchers with the generalizability of their findings between groups.

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