Babies and machines that go ‘beep’: First-year nursing students’ preferred areas of future practice

Students of nursing enter their programmes of study with preconceived ideas of what a career in their chosen profession will entail. The literature suggests that images from the media and past experiences contribute to these perceptions. Although it is positive images of the profession that will usually attract an individual to a career in nursing, often more negative perceptions will direct students away from potentially rewarding areas of specialization. This paper describes career projections of nursing students enrolled in the first year of four preservice nursing programmes at the rural campus of one Australian university. Part of a larger study, the data reported here indicate that most respondents intend to practice in the areas of midwifery, paediatrics and emergency nursing. Oncology, community nursing, aged care and mental health nursing all ranked poorly across three rounds of surveys. These findings have implications for practicing nurses and nurse educators who seek to dispel inaccurate images of these important specializations.