

# The Existing Reality

by

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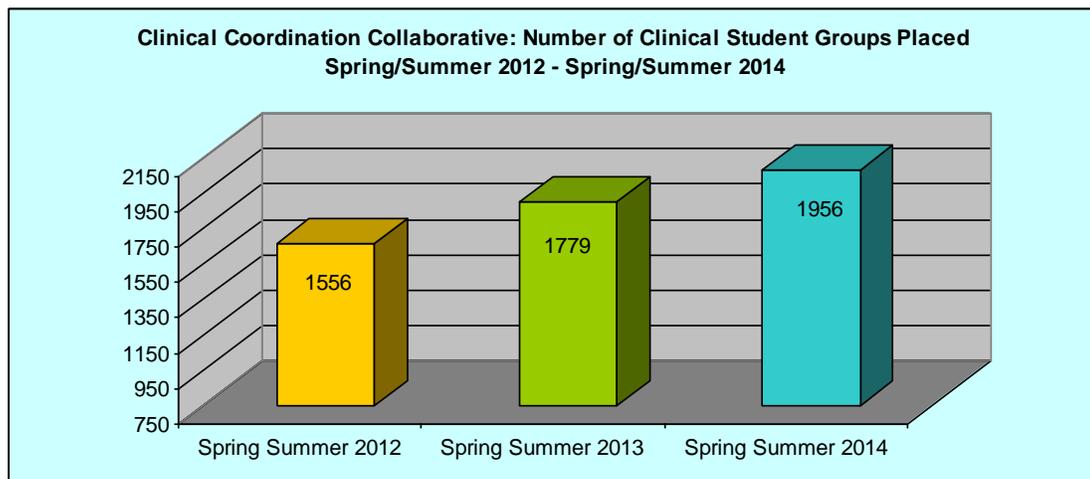
A foundational pillar of nursing education is “hands-on” clinical experiences in hospitals, clinics and long term care facilities (LTC). While many care activities can be taught in simulation lab situations, all students must have access to real clinical settings with real patients. The purpose of this article is to describe the current state of student nurse placement in real clinical settings in Maricopa County, AZ.

The Clinical Coordination Collaborative (CCC) is an online scheduling system housed out of Maricopa Community Colleges. This system facilitates scheduling for students from 28 different nursing education programs at more than 77 hospitals and LTC facilities in Maricopa County. In 2013 the system assisted with placement of over 3000 **groups** of nursing students.

Clinical space is at a premium more than ever due to increasing numbers of students, decreasing clinical spaces available, and decreased allowed size of student groups. The perfect storm.

## **Increasing Number of Students**

When the CCC system first began in 1999, there were nine participating nursing programs. In fall 2013 there were 28 participating programs. Just during the 2 year period between the 2012 and 2014 Spring-Summer cycles, the number of student groups placed increased 26%.



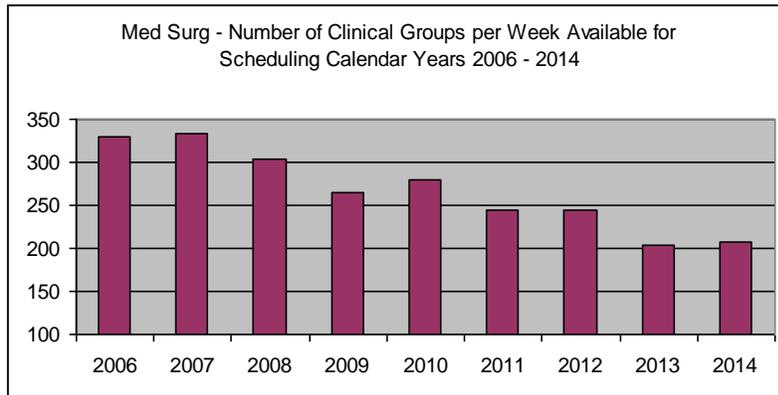
**All data and data displays: Maricopa Clinical Coordination Collaborative, 2013**

## **Decreasing Number of Spaces Available At Local Hospitals and LTC**

Before placement, CCC obtains information from each hospital or LTC facility about how many spaces are available for groups of students each week. Since 2006 there has been a steady DECREASE in available space.

**Medical Surgical Placement**- Since 2006 there has been a **37% decrease** in placement space available. More recently, between

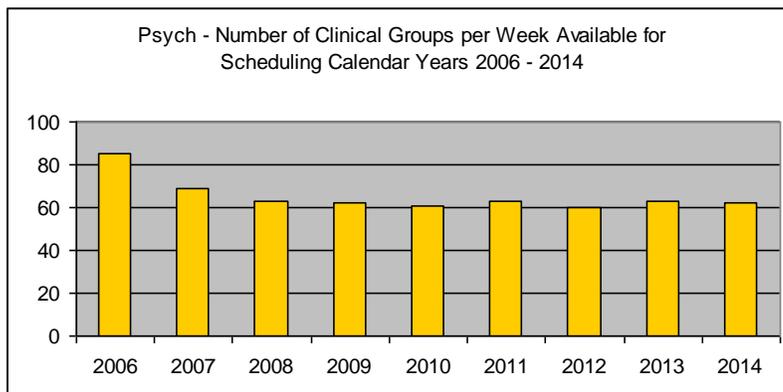
2012 and 2014, there was a **26% increase** in the number of student groups to place and a **16% decrease** in available spaces.



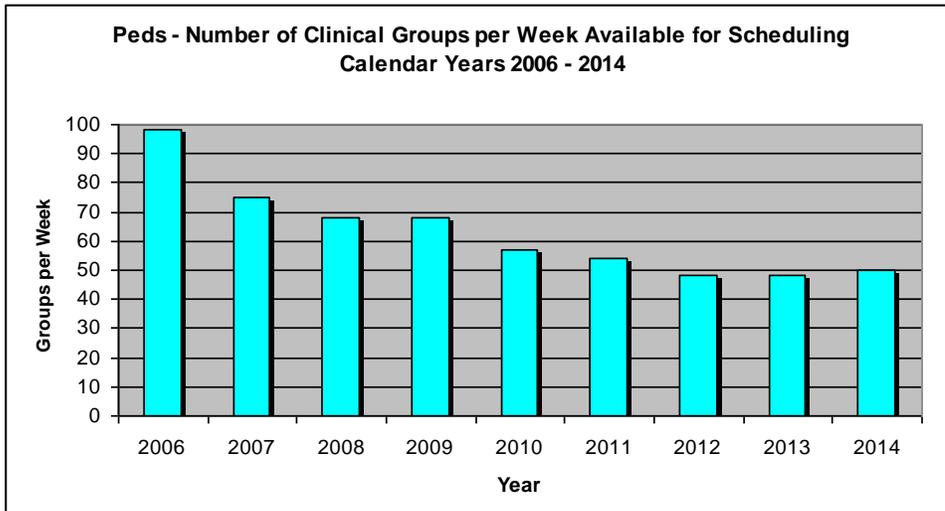
**Long Term Care Placement** -In 2013, four long term care facilities declined to place any more students. Factors include:

- National lawsuits involving unpaid externships resulted in two LTC facilities interpreting nursing student groups to be the same as unpaid externs. As such, they declined any further placement of students.
- In 2012-2013 changes occurred in Director of Nursing leadership at 19 clinical agencies. New leadership often will not continue student placement agreements.
- The added burden of new Arizona Department of Health Services Regulations requiring LTC facilities to maintain student records for two years detailing compliance with training and health and safety requirements influenced some LTC to eliminate placement altogether.

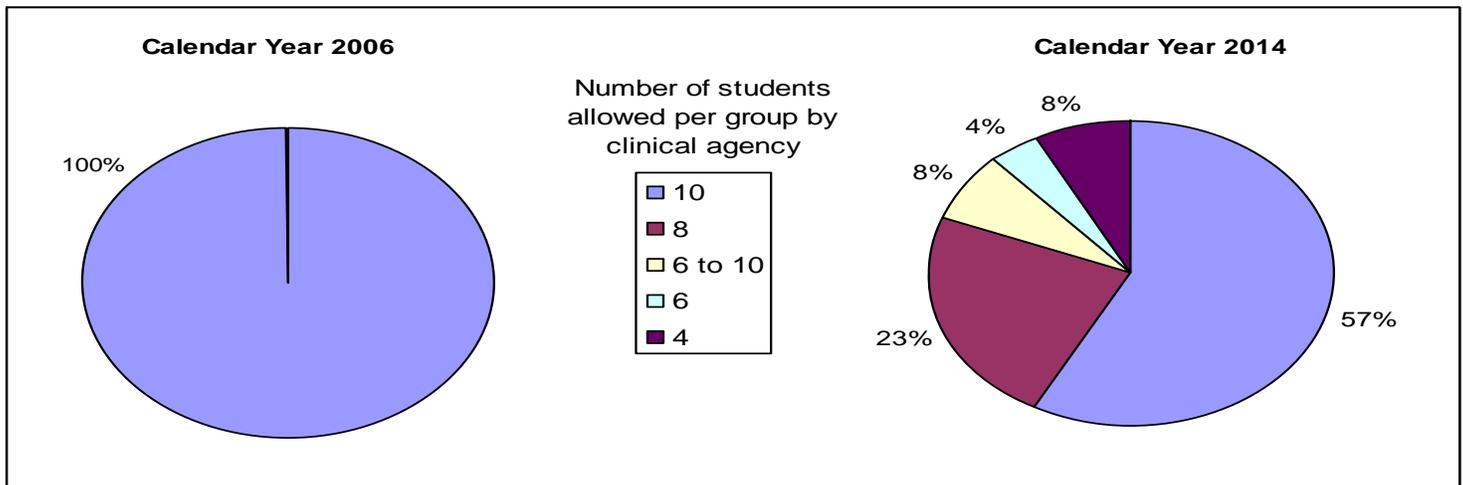
**Psych placement**-Since 2006 there has been a **27% decrease** in spaces available. In 2012-2014 there was a **26% increase** in the number of student groups to be placed, but only **1% increase** in available spaces



**Pediatric Placement-** In 2006-2014 available space **decreased 49%**. 2012-2014 saw a **26% increase** in the number of groups to place, but only a **1% increase** in space available



**Decreasing Allowed Group Size for Student Groups-**A significant number of agencies **DECREASED** the acceptable group size. While in 2006 100% of clinical agencies allowed groups of 10 students, in 2014 **only 57%** allow groups of 10, with many agencies allowing only 4-8 students in a group (see chart below)



**Hospitals and LTC agencies report the following reasons for decreasing available spaces and restricting the allowed size of groups.**

- Need to use staff, who would assist with student rotations, for training of the clinical facilities own employees
- Extreme “fatigue” felt by staff in having students present as much as seven days per week
- Ongoing decreases in patient census, unit closures, total facility closures, and cross training of staff all necessitated by the economic downturn in past years

- Feedback from patients that constant presence of different student groups is confusing and frustrating
- Implementation of Electronic Medical Record
- Pending State and accreditation visits
- Health Care system preferential ranking of types of nursing student groups they will accept, including BSN preference and partnership agreements between nursing programs and healthcare agencies.

**Providing student nurses with clinical experience that offers access to patients in real life situations is an absolute necessity to adequately prepare students for their future work in nursing. In recent years the changing healthcare and economic environments have created challenges for clinical agencies to provide these experiences in the numbers needed. We hope all practicing nurses will see student clinical rotations as an opportunity to mentor the next generation of nurses. We all need to focus in our areas of practice and spheres of influence to work toward meeting that goal. Please e-mail ideas and success stories to us at [info@aznurse.org](mailto:info@aznurse.org). Include “*Clinical Placement*” in the subject line of your e-mail. We want to share strategies that work with our readers and support the learning of student nurses in our state.**