

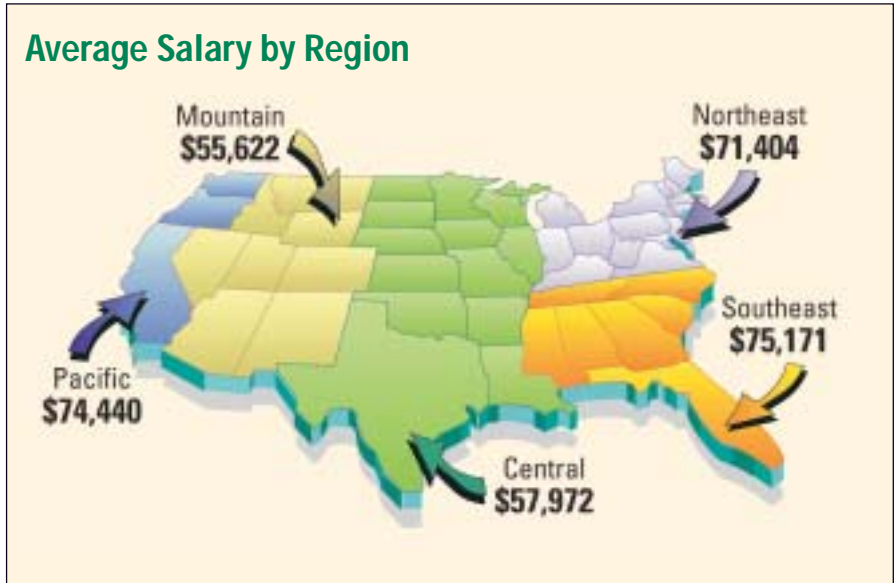
Salaries climb for OR professionals

by Curt Werner

The well-publicized nursing shortage combined with an extremely experienced, well-educated, high-quality community of professionals combined to push salaries of operating room personnel higher in 2003, according to the exclusive *Healthcare Purchasing News* survey of salaries paid to OR personnel. The survey found that the average OR professional, a group that includes a range of job titles, currently earns an average of \$67,733, up 3.2 percent from \$65,568, the mean salary reported in last year's survey.

To compile the survey, *HPN* polled OR personnel via email during a one-week period in late September. The survey drew 84 responses, making it unscientific, but nonetheless revealing. The majority of survey respondents (55 percent) identified themselves as OR directors or OR managers. The next largest category (17 percent) was OR materials managers/coordinators and buyers, about the same mix of respondents as there was in 2002.

A plurality of survey respondents (42 percent) hold bachelor's degrees, while another 32 percent have achieved associates degrees and 15 percent have earned post-graduate degrees. That last group proves once again that education counts. OR professionals with post-graduate degrees earn the most, an av-



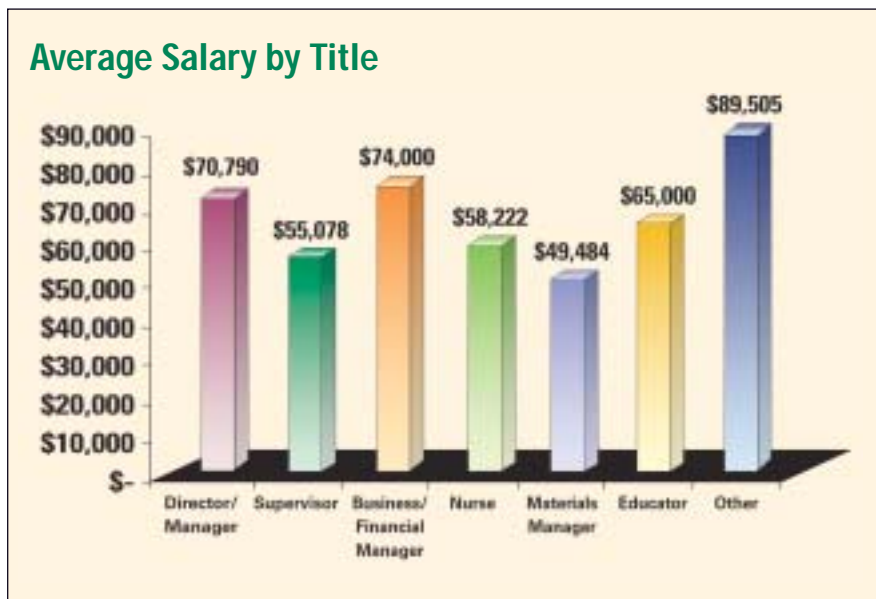
erage of \$91,045, significantly more than the \$71,068 averaged by bachelor's degree holders and those with associate's degrees who earned on average \$61,457. The 11 percent of survey participants who only graduated from high school earn an average of \$39,919.

A clear majority of OR professionals expected and received pay raises in 2003. According to the survey, 87 percent of

respondents took home more money this year than last, about the same as the 2002 response to that identical question. Moreover, 74 percent of respondents both this year and last received bonuses, with the mean bonus jumping to \$5,519 in 2003 compared with \$3,318 last year.

The demographic of survey participants shows how experienced this group truly is: The average OR professional in the survey has worked in the OR for just over 20 years. What's more, that same OR professional has worked for nearly 11 years in their current facility. The mean age of survey participants this year (49.4) closely matches the average age in last year's poll (49.1). But with that vast experience comes an older group – the average respondent is 49 years old – statistical evidence attesting to the growing nurse shortage in the nation's operating rooms and the fact that the shortage won't end quickly. It's no small task to reverse a trend that has taken years to develop and virtually demands that less experienced people staff critical positions in the interests of professional regeneration.

To the surprise of no one, the survey found that women dominate the profession. Nearly three-quarters of this year's respondents (74.7 percent) were women compared with 73 percent in the 2002 survey. However, the minority of males in 2003 earn a slightly



higher average salary (\$68,316) compare with their female colleagues (\$66,612). It should be noted that the small number of males in the survey renders that differential less meaningful, although it appears that even in the face of a lengthy downturn in the national economy which has produced enormous numbers of layoffs in many sectors, few men seem to be gravitating in the direction of nursing as a profession, at least in the early going. It would not be a surprise if that percentage change in the coming years to favor more male nurses as more men find new careers such as OR nursing and OR management in the wake of those layoffs.

OR personnel who practice their profession in suburban facilities take home the most pay, according to the survey. In 2003, suburban staffers earned an average of \$73,685 compared with \$69,023 earned in urban hospitals and \$63,473 in rural institutions.

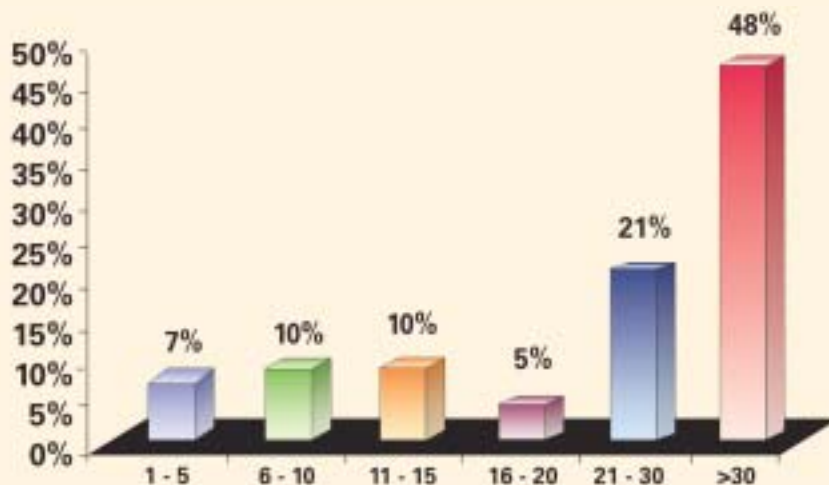
One surprise is that OR professionals in the Southeastern states earned more than their colleagues elsewhere in the country in 2003. Those in Southeastern facilities averaged \$75,171 in 2003, slightly ahead of their colleagues in the Pacific states who took home an average of \$74,440 this year. Not every state was represented in this year's survey, however.

Here are some other survey responses in non-salary categories:

- Nearly half (48 percent) of OR departments had over 30 employees, and 69 percent have more than 21 employees.
- More than two-thirds (68 percent) of respondents say that their responsibilities and workload in their hospitals have increased because of the nursing shortage. The result is about the same as last year when 66 percent traced more work to a personnel shortage.

See OR SURVEY on page 28

Average Salary by Number of Employees



Average Salary by Years in Operating Room



Average Salary by Education



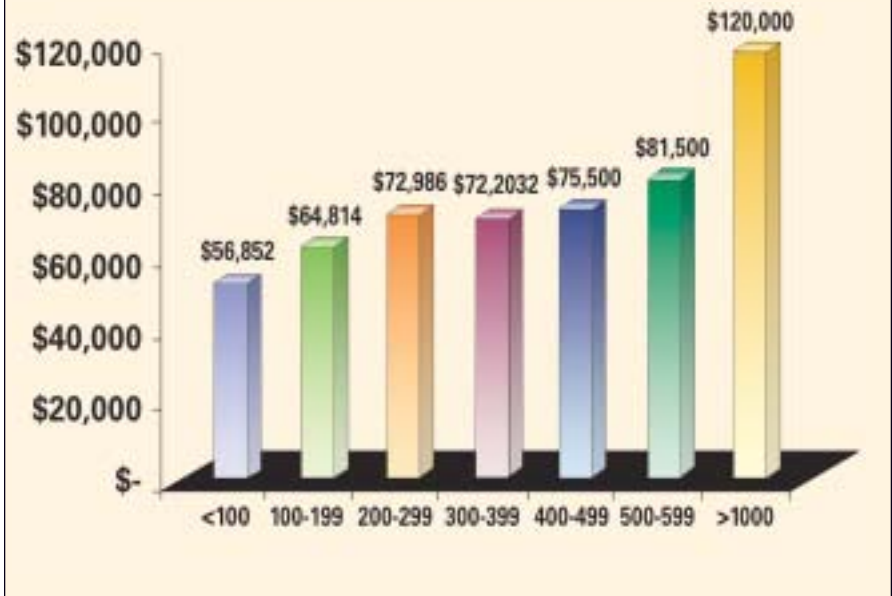
Average Salary by Location



OR SURVEY from page 27

- Four out of five survey respondents feel they are not properly compensated for the additional workload, a percentage (80 percent) that was identical to last year's result.
- A plurality of respondents (43 percent) say they report to the vice president or director of nursing services, about the same percentage as in 2002 when 39 percent gave that answer.
- The mean number of OR suites in hospitals covered by the survey was 13, compared with 10 in 2002.
- 91 percent of survey participants work in either standalone hospitals (68 percent) or in integrated delivery networks (23 percent). That figure is down from 98 percent who work in those types of institutions in 2002, a change explained by an increase in those working in surgicenters. In the 2002 survey, which had a higher number of responses, just 2 percent of respondents said they work in surgicenters. That figure, while still fractional in actual number, jumped to 8 percent in 2003. **HPN**

Average Salary by Number of Beds



Circle 33 or visit www.ksrleads.com/311hp-033