

OR salary increases linked to longevity, experience and age

by Jeannie Akridge

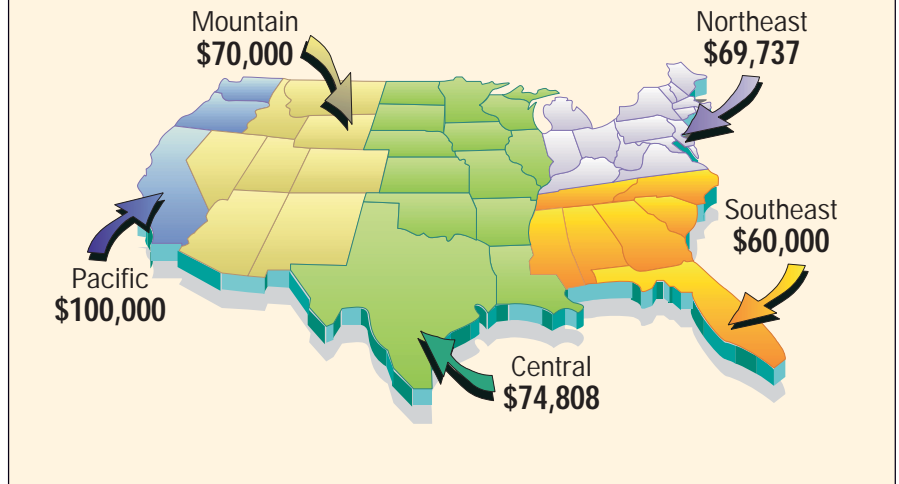
They work in a high-stress, high-risk profession, their workload is constantly increasing, and the nursing shortage appears to have no end in immediate sight. Ultimately, their clinical experience has won them a hard-earned hike in pay, but some may ask: Is it enough?

According to the 2004 *Healthcare Purchasing News* OR Salary Survey of operating room professionals across the country, average earnings are \$70,880. That figure represents an increase of about 4.5 percent from 2003, a bigger jump than the 3.2 percent increase from 2002 to 2003.

Such a statistic is a long, long way from the \$4.35/hour that ambulatory surgery program director Trudy Redford made when she first started her career as a nurse 30 years ago. Still, she observed, "For all the changes that have been made over the last 30 years – efforts have been there to keep compensation adequate, but by and large, hospitals are not doing a good job."

More than half (59.26 percent) of respondents for *HPN's* informal email survey answered to the title of OR Director or Manager; 17 percent were OR Supervisors; 11 percent were in OR Materials/Business/Financial Management; and just 5 percent of respondents were OR Nurses. Naturally, OR Directors/Managers reported the highest earnings at an average of \$85,156. OR

Average Salary by Region



nurses reported an average salary of about \$60,000.

Redford, who admits that head hunters "don't even bat an eyelash" at her minimum requirement of \$110,000/year to move to another facility, noted that, on the other hand, staff nurses "who are getting the work done and keeping patients safe make much less than that."

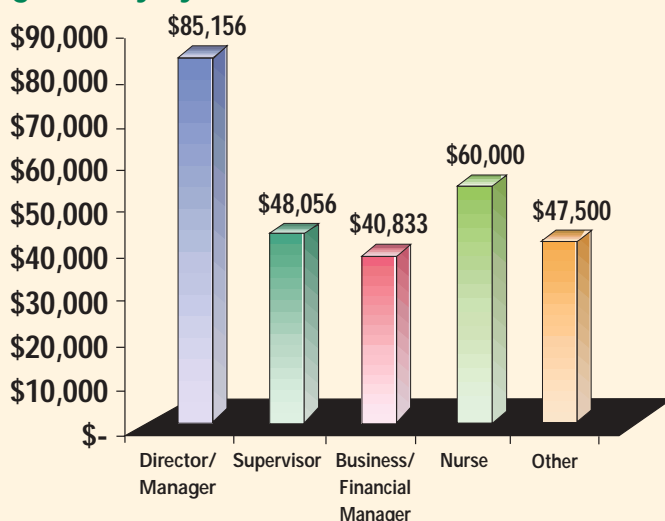
"With the amount of technological knowledge that has come along in the last 30 years, it's indescribable what these nurses have to know," she continued. "They have more responsibility, more documentation requirements and the job is much more technical than it ever was."

Not surprisingly, the average age of these OR professionals is 51 years old, up from an average age of 49 last year. As a matter of fact, nearly 90 percent of respondents were over the age of 40. Almost 70 percent have worked in OR for more than 20 years; and just 12 percent for less than 10 years. They've worked at their current facility for an average of 11 years, a number that continues to steadily rise each year, one more indicator of the lack of younger new recruits.

As in previous *HPN* research years, 74 percent of these OR professionals were female. But interestingly, women's salaries outweighed men's salaries by almost \$17,000. Women earned an average of \$78,487, while men made \$61,667.

More than 20 percent of respondents held a post-graduate degree, earning them an average salary of \$85,833. Those holding a bachelor's degree totaled 43 percent with average earnings of \$78,152. Those with just a high school degree under their belt fell well

Average Salary by Title



below the average for OR professionals at \$35,000.

Who's the head honcho in the OR? According to *HPN's* 2004 survey, most of those working in the OR report to the Operating Room Director (28 percent), followed closely by the Nursing Director at 24 percent. A newly added category of CNO garnered 11 percent of the votes, perhaps pulling votes away from the Nursing Director whom 43 percent of those surveyed said they reported to last year.

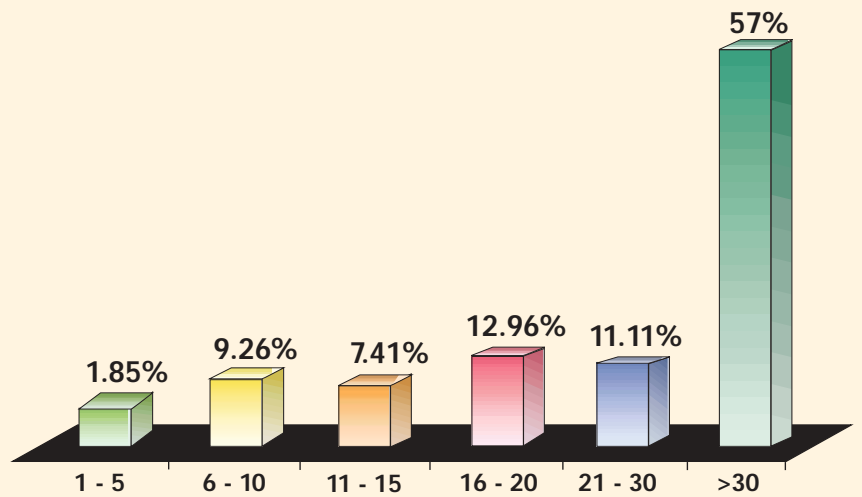
Facility demographics

For the most part, the more OR suites a facility operated, the higher the pay for those running them. Those with just one to four OR suites (30 percent) earned an average of \$64,063; those with between five and nine suites (24 percent) earned \$71,176; between 10 and 14 OR suites (32 percent) resulted in an average salary of \$77,308. Highest earners could be found in facilities with more than 20 OR suites at \$94,167.

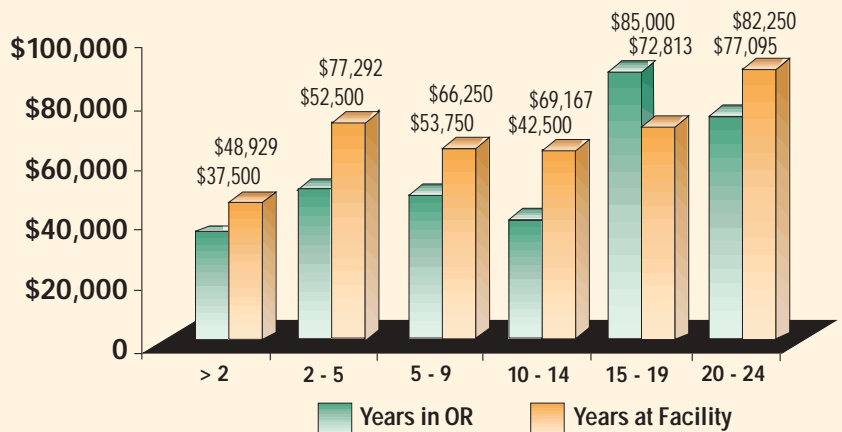
More than half (57 percent) of respondents reported that their facilities retained more than 30 employees in the OR department. That's a rise from 2003, when 48 percent of respondents said their OR department had more than 30 workers. Only three respondents out of 154 reported that their facility gets by with just one to five employees.

This year, 72 percent of respondents said that they worked in a non-profit facility; 24 percent in a for-profit; and just under 4 percent reported that they worked in a government facility. But when it comes to salaries, figures ran the opposite direction. Those in a government-owned facility had the highest average salary of \$91,250; for-profits were at \$74,038; while non-profit

Average Number of OR Employees

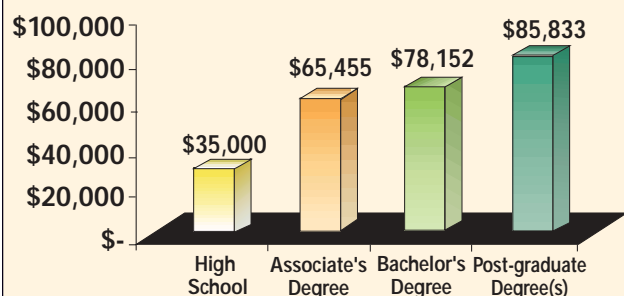


Average Salary by Years in Operating Room

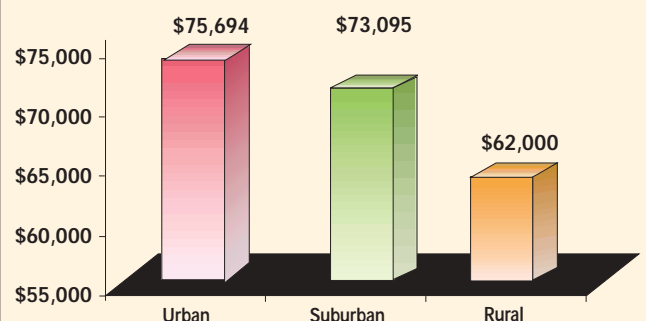


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Average Salary by Education

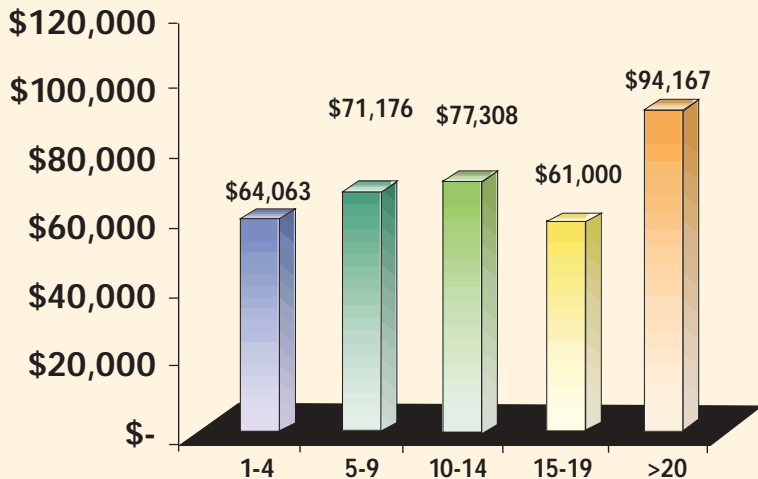


Average Salary by Location



OR SURVEY from page 31

Average Salary by OR Suites in the Facility



facilities paid their OR professionals the least at \$68,782.

A majority of 81 percent reported working in a standalone hospital; 13 percent in an IDN and just 6 percent for a surgi-center or ambulatory center.

The average number of beds at our respondents' facilities totaled 220. The average reported salary for OR workers in a 200-299-bed hospital was \$83,333.

Across the region

Where the facility is located also makes a difference in salaries. Most of the survey respondents worked in suburban facilities (45 percent); but urban and rural facilities were nearly neck in neck for second and third place, at 29 percent and 26 percent, respectively. What's changed slightly from last year's survey is that those in an urban facility reported higher earnings than their suburban counterparts. OR salary earnings in urban facilities averaged \$75,694 in 2004, but \$69,023 in 2003. This year's suburban average earnings stayed fairly consistent with last year's figures at \$73,085. As in previous years, rural hospitals carried lower salaries with an average of \$62,000, but were still up slightly from 2003 urban salary averages.

This year, salaries along the Pacific Coast were the most desirable. Although just 7 percent of respondents worked in this region, average salaries topped out at \$100,000. The majority of 2004 respondents were from the Northeast region, with average salaries of \$69,737. The Central region and the Southeast each accounted for 24

percent of respondents, but with quite different salaries. The Central region weighed in at \$74,808 (second highest) and the Southeast at \$60,000 (lowest). This year, the Mountain states were no longer the lowest earners; 2004 earnings were \$70,000 as compared to \$55,622 in 2003.

Responsibilities

New questions for this year's survey included "Has the nursing shortage increased your responsibilities and workload in the hospital?" – to which 65 percent answered yes. *HPN* also asked if their hospital had hired additional technologists in place of RNs to help fill the void; almost 70 percent said that their hospital had hired techs.

According to Redford, she wouldn't hire techs in her OR unless it was absolutely necessary simply because "they're not cost effective at that level." She explained that while they could scrub for cases, without the flexibility of a nursing license, most techs are not able to do things like PACU, which is a part of the job at her facility.

When asked which functions report directly to the OR director in their facility, top answers included sterile processing (89 percent); decontamination (83 percent); OR supply distribution (69 percent); anesthesia services (65 percent) and medical equipment cleaning (56 per-

cent). Decontamination is apparently one area that is reporting to the OR director in record numbers. Last year just 60 percent of survey respondents said that function was under the OR director's realm. In addition, an added 16 percent of respondents said that sterile processing reported to the OR director in 2004. Purchasing as a function of the OR rose from 10 percent to 13 percent.

Redford, who works in a government-owned facility and said she spends 50 percent of her time on direct patient care, and the other 50 percent on administration, is directly involved in purchasing for her department. With a government-issued credit card at her disposal, Redford practices "direct issue ordering" for everyday supplies such as screws, plates, tourniquets and sutures. Though accountable for the money that's spent, she doesn't even go through the supply department for such items. "It saves 'supply' a lot of time," she said. Redford's also involved in putting together a budget for high-ticket items. According to Redford, the facility's director of purchasing and supply "wholeheartedly supports the system."

With added responsibilities and a tight market comes inevitable job security. A full 98 percent of OR professionals reported that they felt at least "somewhat secure" in their jobs, and 61 percent said they felt "very secure." Accordingly, most salaries (83 percent) reflected an increase from the previous year; the average increase was 3.33 percent.

Compounding the problem of a lack of nurses, is a shortage in nursing teachers. Redford said she recently heard from a nursing educator who said, "We only teach them what they need to know to pass the board exam. That's all we have time for."

She advised that recruitment needs to start early, even among middle-school students. "We're constantly publicizing surgeons, but the role of the nurse needs to be much more visible than it is," she added. **HPN**

Average Salary by Gender

