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Migrant nurses and the contemporary crisis in Asia

This paper examines the links between the current economic downturn and the migration of health professionals within Southeast Asia. Drawing on recent ethnographic fieldwork with Filipino nurses in Singapore, I consider the extent to which the contemporary crisis in Asia (and beyond) has affected the current experiences and future plans of migrant nurses. The economic crisis enters into migrant lives that are already characterised by uncertainty and insecurity. Singapore is seen primarily as a transit city among migrant health professionals, a city in which to gain experience en route to other places. Making plans to move on, and waiting, are an intrinsic part of migrants' daily lives, while visa restrictions and changes in hiring patterns often delay nurses' transnational journeys. While the impact of the economic crisis is not yet clear, I suggest that it may be understood among migrant nurses as something which compounds existing uncertainties, rather than marking a period of drastic change. I also consider whether transit cities like Singapore will, during times of recession, take on a greater importance for migrant nurses.