

WORKFORCE SHORTAGES IN HEALTHCARE: A LOOMING CRISIS FOR PATIENT CARE

ISSUE:

Shortages Affect Patients: Professional healthcare providers help assure that health care is available to all citizens. Severe shortages of professional healthcare providers place our patients in jeopardy. Studies show that patients have better outcomes when a greater proportion of their nursing care is provided by RNs, and when the number of hours of RN care per day is increased. The correlation is clear: fewer qualified care givers places our patients in peril!

Contributing factors to the shortages:

1. The aging of the baby boomer generation and the relatively small numbers in Gen “X” & “Y” to replace the boomers.
2. As the population ages, there is greater demand for MORE healthcare services.
3. The lack of focus in the K-12 education system to prepare and interest quality high school students in healthcare fields.
4. Colleges and Universities lack the capacity to keep up with the demand of the healthcare industry.
5. Shortages lead to expensive “temporary” solutions including foreign trained professionals and “travel” personnel.
6. The nursing profession is largely dominated by females; 94.6% of RNs are women.
7. Minorities are still underrepresented among nurses, particularly RNs.

POSITION:

Multiple Challenges Require Multiple Solutions: Examples:

- National Nurse Service Corps Scholarship Program - Supports individuals who choose the field of nursing by providing education in exchange for their commitment to work in a geographical area with critical nursing shortages.
- Nursing Faculty Stipend and Scholarship Program –Encourages students to seek a masters or doctoral degree at a school of nursing to help alleviate the growing shortage of nurse faculty.
- Fast Track Nurse Faculty Loan Program - Provides partial loan repayment to eligible nurses who can be recruited into faculty positions.
- Nurse Recruitment Grant Program - Attracts young men and women into the nursing profession through outreach to primary, junior, and secondary schools.
- Nursing Career Outreach - Enables the DHHS to develop a multimedia public education program to enhance the image of the nursing profession, promote diversity in the workplace, and encourage individuals to enter nursing.
- Grants for Internship and Residency Programs - Provides funding to assist new nurses from other fields and new graduate nurses to transition into highly technical and/or specialized areas of practice.
- Grants for Career Ladder Programs - Provides education and training for upward career mobility in the field of nursing.
- Enhanced Area Health Education Centers (AHEC) Program - Provides support for the AHECs to concentrate on education and outreach for nursing recruitment and education activities.
- Grants for Nurse Training in Long-Term Care for the Elderly - Allows for the development and incorporation of gerontology curriculum and competencies in nursing education.

- Grants for Retention Strategies and Best Practices in Nursing Staff Management - Provides for the development of demonstration models of best practices in nursing care and nurse retention.
- National Commission on the Recruitment and Retention of Nurses -Establishes a commission to study the nursing shortage and make innovative and creative recommendations.

STATUS:

As healthcare human resources professionals, we work every day to collaborate and partner with our local schools and businesses to help alleviate the nursing shortage. However, we will only see significant progress when national resources are engaged. We urge you to carefully consider and support initiatives and programs designed to alleviate the shortage.

NURSING IMMIGRATION

ISSUE:

One way hospitals and the healthcare industry deal with short term shortages are to recruit foreign trained healthcare professionals.

- Registered Nurses, Physical Therapists (PTs) and other skilled workers come to the U.S. as immigrants in the employment-based (EB) visa category and The Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) sets a worldwide limit of 140,000 EB visas for each fiscal year.
- For the past decade, the immigration service has been using less than the annual allotment of EB visas because of delays in processing and the current backlog reduction by USCIS is consuming all available EB skilled visas for FY06, creating a substantial backlog for recent applicants.
- In December 2006, all available EB visas for nurses were used up. The current skilled worker delay is four and a half years.

POSITION:

A solution is to eliminate the cap on visas for just those professionals deemed to be faced with chronic shortages by DOL, currently RNs and PTs. This policy change should be considered in the context of immigration reform. In the interim, ASHHRA recommends a “recapture” of unused visas from past years dedicated to shortage professions – nurses and physical therapists.

The American Society for Healthcare Human resources Administration (ASHHRA) is the nation’s only personal membership group dedicated to meeting the professional needs of human resources professionals in hospitals and healthcare organizations. ASHHRA is a Personal Membership Group of the American Hospital Association and a joint membership partner with the Society for Human Resources Management. For information about ASHHRA, please contact Suzanne Graham, Project Assistant, at (312) 422-3724.