

Wisconsin Hospital Association, Inc.

NEWS



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Retirements, Aging Population Fuel Health Care Workforce Shortages

Vacancy Rates Nearly Double for Key Professions

MADISON (December 20, 2016) ---- Following years of relatively flat vacancy rates, a new report warns that the health care workforce market is heading toward a crisis. Vacancy rates for key health care professionals employed in hospitals are increasing dramatically. Some have more than tripled over the past four years, according to the Wisconsin Hospital Association 2016 Health Care Workforce Report (www.wha.org/pdf/2016workforcereport.pdf).

Retirements are up significantly over prior years, leaving a higher than usual number of positions unfilled in hospitals. Wisconsin hospitals employ more than 100,000 people; more than half of the state's 87,000 nurses are working in hospitals. Vacancy rates have nearly doubled since 2012 for registered nurses (RNs) and certified nursing assistants (CNAs), while the vacancy rates for hospital-based dietitians and surgical technicians have more than tripled since 2012. More than one-third of all RNs in the state are over the age of 55 and a little more than 40 percent of Wisconsin nurses indicated on their state relicensure survey that they plan to leave the workforce within the next ten years.

"Retirements are outstripping hospitals' ability to fill the vacant positions they leave behind. Wisconsin could soon see an unprecedented shortage of key health care professionals," according to Steven Rush, WHA vice president, workforce and clinical practice. "It persists for several reasons, but primarily because the demand for health care is increasing as baby boomers approach retirement. It's like a double whammy: The age of our workforce is a direct reflection of the average age of our population."

The demand for nurse practitioners (NPs) and physician assistants (PAs) continues to grow. There was a staggering and unprecedented 150 percent increase in the number of PAs in just one year (4.3 in 2014 to 10.8 in 2015). The vacancy rate at 11.2 percent for NPs remains one of the highest of all professionals working in Wisconsin hospitals.

The current workforce supply is strained and that is a major impetus for re-evaluating current workforce and health care delivery models, according to WHA President/CEO Eric Borgerding. Wisconsin hospitals and health systems are rapidly moving toward team-based care models that are patient-centered, condition-defined and community-appropriate.

“Wisconsin has some of the highest quality care in the country. This is possible because our health care delivery system is highly integrated—hospitals and health systems provide a continuum of care starting at the initial point of patient contact, sometimes continuing through the hospital and all the way through rehabilitation and into the home, if necessary,” said Borgerding. “For team-based care to be successful, health care professionals must be able to practice at the top of their license. That requires an understanding of how regulatory issues, such as billing and reimbursement, must keep pace with the changing dynamics of our patient care models.”

As health reform initiatives transform how health care is delivered, the ability to quantify the supply of and the demand for health care professionals is essential. The need for accurate, timely and comprehensive workforce data has never been greater. Apart from Wisconsin’s nursing workforce data that is collected from nurses when they renew their licenses, no standardized data collection exists for all other health care workers. The data in the WHA report is collected from hospitals only, and it does not reflect the demand by other health care employers, such as extended care and skilled nursing facilities.

“Wisconsin health care employers, policymakers and our college and university system need workforce data to assist them in allocating scarce resources and providing education opportunities for the next generation of health care professionals,” according to Rush.

Rush added that the shortage of nursing faculty is contributing to the current nursing shortage. The average age of a nurse educator is 52.

The WHA 2016 Workforce Report is available at www.wha.org/pdf/2016workforcereport.pdf. See the infographic here: <http://www.wha.org/pdf/2016workforceInfographic.pdf>.

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