



Hospitals Find Experienced Nursing, Entry-Level Positions Difficult to Fill

WHA report says team-based care will help address workforce gaps, while innovation, technology change how care is delivered

MADISON (November 2, 2017) ---- Hospitals and health systems are not immune to the workforce struggles all employers are facing as the number of available workers continues to decline and baby boomers retire. That leaves positions that require experienced professionals difficult to fill in hospital intensive care units, operating rooms and highly specialized care units, such as oncology and surgery.

“Employers will need strategies, such as flexible or shorter shifts, less physical work and ‘as needed’ positions to keep the boomers, with all their experience, working a few years longer,” according to Ann Zenk, Wisconsin Hospital Association (WHA) vice president, workforce and clinical practice.

A new WHA [report](#) indicates that with the number of people over age 65 living in Wisconsin expected to double by 2030, the health care workforce will need to grow more than 30 percent to meet the demand for care. That growth is dependent on health care organizations successfully competing for entry-level applicants.

Unlike many other employers, hospitals offer a career pathway for most entry-level professions. For example, a certified nursing assistant can advance to registered nurse and then pursue an advanced degree and become a nurse practitioner. Hospitals list advanced practice nurses as one of their most sought after and difficult positions to recruit. (See [infographic](#))

“It is critical that we have a pipeline of advanced practice nurses, respiratory therapists, surgical technicians and physical therapists. These positions are among the hardest to replace,” Zenk said.

The good news is that millennials are showing increased interest in health care professions.

“As a generation, millennials want to make a difference. They value teamwork and they form strong bonds with their employers, all values that are embodied in health care,” according to Zenk. “Not only are they eager to serve patients, they also want to be actively involved in their workplace and bring new ideas that will help shape the future of health care.”

Technology, innovation are changing care delivery, creating new roles

Health care leaders recognize that new models of care must leverage health care professionals’ time, while ensuring patients receive the care they need, when they need it, as close to home as possible.

Advanced in-home technology is being used to monitor patients with chronic conditions so they do not need to travel to the clinic or hospital. Patients can be remotely monitored by nurses, physicians or

therapists who can facilitate self-care, or direct patients to the appropriate care setting if their health cannot be managed in the home.

Telemedicine has brought the expertise of specialists located anywhere in the country to the bedside and exam room to diagnose, monitor and treat patients. According to the WHA survey, over 75 percent of Wisconsin hospitals have implemented some form of telemedicine. Physician specialists are often difficult to recruit, but through telemedicine, their expertise can be available to hospitals and clinics in rural areas of the state.

Innovation in how care is delivered expands access to medical services as teams of health care professionals share the responsibility for patient care. These care teams can be comprised of, for instance, a physician, physical therapist, dietician, social worker, pharmacist and nursing assistant. Together, they apply their specific skillsets to meet the needs of the patient.

The Future Is Now: WHA Workforce Recommendations

Wisconsin is consistently ranked as having the highest quality of health care in the nation. That standard of care is only possible if there is a highly skilled, adequate workforce. Key recommendations WHA makes in the 2017 report to help ensure the demand for health care can be met today and into the future:

- Nursing schools at all levels should collaborate with one other and with key stakeholders to ensure that faculty supply is aligned to demand for nurses in the workforce.
- Educators should continue to create innovative solutions, such as online, accelerated and early entry programs, to support a nursing career pathway to advanced degrees for clinical practice, education and informatics.
- State government has a critical role in growing the workforce locally by supporting grant programs that help hospitals and their partners develop training programs that offer opportunities for advancement for entry-level positions.
- Policymakers and state agencies must understand and seek to reduce the impact of burdensome regulation and documentation requirements that do not improve patient care and may hinder access; a clinician's workday is a finite resource.
- Reimbursement to hospitals and health systems should recognize the investment of time and technology that is required to perform care coordination, especially for rural and safety net providers who care for vulnerable patient populations who require complex care.
- Policymakers must continue to support broadband expansion with priority to rural and remote areas of the state. This will ensure that access to health care will be backed by evolving technology.

"Technology and innovation in the hands of highly qualified health care professionals will ensure Wisconsin will continue to deliver the highest quality of care in the nation," according to WHA President/CEO Eric Borgerding. "To do this, the health care workforce must keep pace with the demand for medical services in a rapidly changing, increasingly complex environment. Together, with our partners in the Legislature, education, and state government, we can achieve the goal of providing even better care, higher value and healthier people in Wisconsin."

The [Wisconsin Health Care Workforce Report](#) is an annual publication of the Wisconsin Hospital Association.

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