

## Wisconsin Hospital Association, Inc.

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### **Health Care Workforce Shortages Expected to Intensify Within the Decade** ***Wisconsin hospitals report position vacancies on the rise***

**MADISON (October 2, 2008)** ---- Hospitals in every region of the state are reporting workforce shortages—a situation that is expected to worsen over the next decade as Wisconsin's population continues to grow.

The number of Wisconsin residents reached 5.6 million, a 5.7 percent increase over 2000 census figures. However, the growth in the health care workforce is lagging behind the demand for health care being driven by both the growth in and aging of the population. By 2010, Wisconsin hospitals, along with all other employers, will be competing for a much smaller pool of people to fill their job vacancies.

According to the Wisconsin Hospital Association's 2008 Health Care Workforce Report released today, Wisconsin hospitals' vacancy rates for key positions are on the rise, with hospitals listing therapists and pharmacists among the most difficult positions to fill. (Full report is available at: [www.wha.org](http://www.wha.org))

The increase in consumer use of pharmaceuticals is driving a need for professional assistance with managing medication regimens and fueling the demand for pharmacists statewide, according to the WHA Report. That, combined with the fact that it takes five or more years of education to become a pharmacist, contributes to shortages.

Hospitals also report that the largest percentage of vacancies and the most difficult to fill are therapist positions. This includes physical and occupational therapists, a need that is partially created by the increasing demand for medical care to improve joints and increase mobility. Hip and knee replacement surgeries, along with other increasingly sophisticated interventions that help patients overcome physical limitations often require multiple visits to a therapist to ensure a full recovery. Education programs for these professionals are lengthy, sometimes requiring more than five years, and the number of slots available in these college programs has failed to keep up with the demand from applicants and employers alike.

WHA's Judy Warmuth, vice president of workforce for the Madison-based Association, said expanding the number of slots in college training programs is critical if the supply of health care professionals is ever going to keep pace with demand.

"We're starting to see some promising movement with a new pharmacy school in the planning stages, but at this point, the demand for some key health care professionals is still increasing much faster than supply," according to Warmuth.

Health care (hospitals, nursing and residential facilities, and ambulatory care) is the largest employer segment in Wisconsin, and it is the segment that is consistently creating new jobs, according to the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development, Office of Economic Advisors. However, the majority of the available health care jobs in Wisconsin will not be new;

rather, they will be replacement positions for individuals leaving the workforce, mainly due to retirement.

### **Advanced Practice Providers Surface as Emerging Shortage**

With the demand for care likely to outstrip supply in the near future, new models of delivering care are being implemented. Advanced practice providers (APPs), which includes physician assistants and advanced practice nurses, are becoming a critical component of the health care delivery system. Hospitals have created roles for these professionals in their medical practice groups, emergency rooms, working with hospitalists in managing care of hospitalized patients, and in convenient care clinics.

There is a growing demand for APPs. If education programs for these professions do not increase in number or capacity, it is expected that APPs will emerge as the next group of professionals that will be in short supply.

### **High Tech-High Touch Careers**

Technology is changing the nature of many health care jobs. Electronic medical records, increasing reliance on complex diagnostic procedures, and enhanced sophistication of even basic equipment like temperature monitors, require that health care employees have a high degree of comfort working in a high-technology environment.

“It is no longer sensible to ask if health care is high tech or high touch. It is both,” according to Tomah Memorial Hospital CEO Phil Stuart, who chairs the WHA Council on Workforce. “Patients want and need committed, caring empathetic caregivers who make appropriate and skillful use of high technology.”

Stuart said health care positions are often attractive because they offer good salaries, a stable work environment, and are unlikely to be downsized or moved out of state.

“Health care is a career that affords a person an opportunity to make a lasting difference in other people’s lives. That kind of personal fulfillment is often what leads a person to choose a health career,” Stuart said.

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