



Wisconsin Health & Hospital Association



Wisconsin Health Care Association

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Nursing Survey Refutes Mandatory Overtime Claims

MADISON (May 03, 2002) ----- A new statewide survey released this week by Governor Scott McCallum sheds welcome light on the state of nursing in Wisconsin. Prompted by concerns over the growing nursing shortage, the Wisconsin Hospital Association (WHA), the Wisconsin Health Care Association (WHCA), the Wisconsin Nurses Association, and other health care provider organizations, joined the Department of Health and Family Services, the Department of Workforce Development and other state agencies in developing and promoting the survey.

“The public and private partnerships we formed to implement this web-based workforce survey will be even more important now as we strengthen statewide efforts to increase the supply of registered nurses to meet the needs of Wisconsin’s entire health care system,” according to Department of Workforce Development Secretary Jennifer Reinert.

“There is much speculation and, frankly, misconception, about the nursing shortage in Wisconsin and its causes,” said Diane Peters, R.N. and WHA vice president of workforce development. “This survey will help cut through the rhetoric, help identify the real problems and hopefully guide us toward real solutions in addressing the shortage.”

“Rather than jump to quick conclusions, we wanted to take a close look at the numbers and figure out what they really say,” said WHCA President Tom Moore. Since the study was released on Tuesday, the two groups have thoroughly reviewed the numbers and what the survey actually says.

Perhaps the most enlightening findings revolve around the use of unavoidable, or “mandatory,” overtime in health care facilities. “Mandatory” overtime is often cited by labor unions and others as the main reason current nurses are leaving or future nurses are avoiding the profession. These claims are also used to support legislation that prohibits the use of mandatory overtime in health care settings. However, the survey shows that mandatory overtime is rarely used.

Of the estimated 56,925 survey responses, 3,420 -- or just 6% -- indicated they had worked mandatory overtime hours in the past month. The vast majority of overtime was performed voluntarily, or by salaried nurses, according to the survey.

“Obviously, no one wants to use overtime, mandatory or voluntary, to fill staffing needs,” said Peters. “Overtime is costly, and it is not the preferred method, for hospitals or nurses, of staffing our facilities. But this data clearly shows that hospitals are rarely mandating overtime, as is often claimed.”

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The survey also indicates that overtime, when used, is not a significant factor in nurses leaving or avoiding the profession. **According to the survey data, only 689 of the estimated respondents-- just 1.2% -- indicated that they planned on leaving nursing in the next year due to shift assignments or hours.**

According to WHA and WHCA, the single largest issue contributing the nursing shortage is the aging of the nursing workforce. According to the survey, over **32% of Wisconsin nurses are over 50 years of age, while just 8% are under 30.** “The age data underscores the importance of addressing the severe bottlenecks in our nurse education system,” said WHCA’s Moore. “We need to ensure that all qualified students applying to nursing programs are accepted.”

According to the latest statistics, there are over 2,000 students waiting to get into technical college nursing programs. “While we are very concerned about this situation, we are also very encouraged with the new leadership at the Wisconsin Technical College System,” said Peters. “There is clearly a new sense of partnership there and we look forward to working together to bring new people into the rewarding profession of nursing.”

WHCA’s Moore echoed those comments, “We have a serious shortage out here, and we urge the Legislature and other policymakers to focus on the real problem – working together to find real solutions, real ways to increase the pool of nurses,” Moore said.

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