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Health Care Workforce

Background

Wisconsin residents value high quality, accessible and affordable health care. The ability to provide that care hinges on hospitals' ability to attract and maintain an adequate workforce. Today, the ability to attain this workforce is compromised as many positions are difficult to fill. There is even greater concern that Wisconsin is not positioned to train enough and the right mix of health care workers to meet the even greater future demand that Wisconsin's aging demographics pose.

Wisconsin's population is aging at a dramatic rate. While Wisconsin's total population is expected to increase nearly 20% from 2000 to 2030, its retirement-aged population (65 or older) will climb more than 30% to 1.3 million persons by 2030. This older population will use more health care services as they deal with chronic illness and the aging process itself. The older population includes many people who are employees in the health care system.

- If these workers retire before replacements enter the workforce, Wisconsin's capacity to provide the additional care required by the population will be seriously diminished.
- If these workers do not retire, but continue as older workers, employers will need to redesign the work environment and benefits for this class of worker. Changes in tasks such as lifting and turning patients and scheduling, such as 12 hour shifts, may be necessary to keep these older workers in the workforce.

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- Labor costs account for 50 percent of hospital spending and the effects of labor shortages contribute to the rising cost of health care.
- Today, hospitals are pressed to keep positions filled. Pharmacist and physical therapist positions are very difficult to fill, as well as physician, nurse practitioner and physician assistant positions. To fill current positions, additional educational capacity in all of these occupations is necessary.
- Not all vacant positions in hospitals can be filled by newly educated staff. Skilled, experienced workers are also difficult to find. Today, certain critical positions are very difficult to fill, including registered nurses with experience and special skills in intensive care, emergency care, surgery, and nurses for leadership positions.



Wisconsin Hospital Association, Inc.

Health Care Workforce

- Keeping vacancy rates for key positions low is always a challenge. Even one unfilled position in a key occupation can seriously hinder a hospital's ability to help patients. For the patient, a vacant position can result in care being delayed, a transfer to another hospital, or the inability to access care.
- The problem of filling vacant positions is exacerbated by waiting lists to get into health care-related programs at Wisconsin's technical colleges and University system. As a result, qualified students either have to wait to get into a program, or they choose another career path.

What is Needed?

Current workforce shortages must be addressed. Programs that educate pharmacists and physical therapists must increase capacity to ensure an adequate workforce of these professions. Additional numbers of direct care providers; physicians, nurse practitioners and physicians assistants are also needed to provide care to Wisconsin residents.

A statewide health care workforce plan is needed. With scarce resources, Wisconsin must wisely use educational funds to ensure the appropriate professional staff is prepared, in the correct timeline to meet health care needs. Educational facilities, provider organizations and state government must collect workforce data and develop this plan. This plan would predict workforce retirements and anticipate new needs. It would project the numbers and types of workers that Wisconsin's educational system must prepare and offer strategies for working to meet these needs. A cooperative effort can assess needs, target timeframes, ensure educational capacity and an adequate future workforce.

Workforce solutions must be based on the emerging research on best practices for providing care to patients. Legislative proposal that direct staffing and ban mandatory overtime will exacerbate the problem of already existing staff shortages.

Efforts are needed to restore funding for graduate medical education and to address the mal-distribution of health care workers in Wisconsin. Urban inner city and rural areas are already dealing with great difficulties in recruiting and will experience even more projected shortages.

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Related Resources

Can be found at: <http://www.wha.org/workForce/default.aspx>



Localize the Message

Be prepared to talk about:

- Your hospital's efforts in attracting, recruiting and retaining employees.
- Scholarships and other "grow your own" workforce efforts.
- Ways that hospitals are helping educational institutions prepare the future workforce.
- Specific needs in your facility or region.

