

Position Statement

Shortage of Nursing Professionals

This Position Statement was developed as an educational tool based on the opinion of the authors. It is not a product of a systematic review. Readers are encouraged to consider the information presented and reach their own conclusions.

There is a growing crisis in the delivery of nursing care in this nation. The supply of nurses is decreasing while the demand is increasing. In a report released by the American Hospital Association in July 2007, the national Registered Nurse (RN) vacancy rate is approximately 8.1 percent.¹ *The Future of the Nursing Workforce in the United States: Data, Trends and Implications*, found that demand for nurses is growing between 2-3 percent annually.²

There are multiple factors contributing to the growing nursing shortage. These factors include:

1. Existing nurses are leaving the profession due to dissatisfaction with their jobs;
2. The nursing workforce is aging and many of these nurses are reaching retirement age;
3. Fewer younger persons are entering into this profession.

Job dissatisfaction has been identified as a contributing factor for nurses leaving the profession earlier than anticipated. Inadequate staffing, heavy workloads, and mandatory overtime are reasons cited for job dissatisfaction among nurses. As fewer nurses enter the profession, the average age of the nurse has risen to 46.8 in 2004, while the RN population under 30 has decreased to 8 percent.³ Nursing programs have seen a 5.4 percent increase in enrollments but must graduate approximately 90 percent more nurses in order to meet demand. Due to the severe nursing faculty shortage, in 2007 over 40,000 qualified applicants were turned away. Over 70 percent of nursing schools cited the faculty shortage as the reason for not accepting these applicants.⁴

This nursing shortage impacts the quality of patient care and safety. A 2007 report by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality found that an additional RN full time employee per patient day was associated with a 1.24 percent reduction in death rate, while one additional patient per RN per shift was associated with an increase in hospital-related mortality by 0.1 percent.⁵

The American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons and the American Association of Orthopaedic Surgeons (AAOS) support the efforts of nursing organizations to obtain federal and state initiatives that would ensure quality patient care and safety by encouraging more individuals to join the nursing profession and by maintaining the supply of existing nurses. These initiatives could include loan forgiveness and scholarship programs for individuals in nursing schools, efforts to educate young people about the nursing profession, expansion of nursing schools and the amount of nursing faculty, and finally, legislation regulating the

amount of mandatory overtime for nurses and appropriate staffing ratios for healthcare facilities. States should consider appropriating money from the tobacco settlement to fund these initiatives.

Most importantly, the AAOS encourages orthopaedic surgeons and other physicians, as well as hospitals and other healthcare facilities, to assess the work environment for nurses and take appropriate steps to reduce their job dissatisfaction. Mechanisms to reduce nurses' job dissatisfaction should include higher pay, flexible work schedules, ability to advance within the profession, and increased staffing to help manage the nursing workload.

References:

1. American Hospital Association. The 2007 State of America's Hospitals - Taking the Pulse. July 2007.
2. Buerhaus P, et al: The Future of the Nursing Workforce in the United States: Data, Trends and Implications. 2008
3. Bureau of Health Professions. 2004 national Sample Survey of Registered Nurses. 2004.
4. American Association of Colleges of Nursing. 2007-2008 Enrollment and Graduations in Baccalaureate and Graduate programs in Nursing.
5. Agency for Health Research and Quality. Nursing Staffing and Quality of Patient Care. March 2007.

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