



National Nursing Shortage Facts

The Growing Shortage of Nurses:

The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) projects that, absent aggressive intervention, the supply of nurses in America will fall 36 percent (more than 1 million nurses) below requirements by the year 2020. This report, *What is Behind HRSA's Projected Supply, Demand, and Shortages of Registered Nurses?*, is available online at:

<ftp://ftp.hrsa.gov/bhpr/workforce/behindshortage.pdf>

The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that registered nurses are projected to create the second largest number of new jobs among all occupations in the time period spanning 2004 – 2014. During this time period, the health care system will require more than 1.2 million new nurses.

See: <http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos083.htm>

The American Hospital Association reports that hospitals needed 118,000 more RNs to fill immediate vacancies in December, 2005. Hospitals report that this 8.5% vacancy rate is hampering the ability to provide emergency care. See:

<http://www.aha.org/aha/content/2006/pdf/PreparedToCareFinal.pdf>

The National Commission on Nursing Workforce for Long-Term Care released a report in May, 2005 stating that there are nearly 100,000 vacant nursing positions in long-term care facilities on any given day, and the nurse turnover rate exceeds 50%. The shortage is costing long-term care facilities an estimated \$4 billion a year in recruitment and training expenses. See:

http://www.ahca.org/research/workforce_rpt_050519.pdf

According to the National Council of State Boards of Nursing, the number of first-time, U.S. educated nursing school graduates who sat for the NCLEX-RN®, the national licensure examination for registered nurses, decreased by 20% from 1995-2003. A total of 19,820 fewer students in this category of test takers sat for the exam in 2003 as compared with 1995.

www.ncsbn.org

The lack of young people entering the nursing profession has pushed up the average age of the working nurse. Today, the average age of the RN population is estimated to be 47. See:

<http://bhpr.hrsa.gov/healthworkforce/reports/rnpopulation/preliminaryfindings.htm>

HRSA also projects that, if recent trends continue, the number of RNs leaving the workforce will outpace those entering the profession by 2016. See:

http://www.kaisernetwork.org/health_cast/uploaded_files/Nursing_Shortage_Presentation_esseler_2.pdf

An average vacancy rate of 10.4% for registered nurses and 9.2% for nurse practitioners exists at our nation's 5,000 community health centers. Vacancy rates are even higher in urban areas and small, isolated rural areas. JAMA 3/1/06

According to a May 2001 report, *Who Will Care for Each of Us?: America's Coming Health Care Crisis*, released by the Nursing Institute at the University of Illinois, the ratio of potential caregivers to the people most likely to need care (the elderly population) will decrease by 40% between 2010 and 2030. Demographic changes may limit access to health care unless the number of nurses and other caregivers grows in proportion to the rising elderly population.

Impact of the Nursing Shortage on Patient Care:

The nursing shortage is stressing military health care delivery. The Army, Navy, and Air Force are offering new lucrative RN recruitment packages that include large sign-on bonuses, generous scholarships, and loan forgiveness packages. Yet, neither the Army nor the Air Force has met their active service nurse recruitment goals since the 1990s. The Navy has not met its recruitment goal in four years. Army leaders warned the Senate Appropriations Committee on March 7, 2007 that they were experiencing shortfalls of more than 40% in certain key combat specialties (anesthesia and critical care). In 2005, the Navy Nurse Corps recruitment fell 31% below target. Navy Nurse Corps leaders testified in 2007 that “the Navy Nurse reserve component recruitment and retention continues to be of great concern.” Air Force Nurse Corp leaders testified in 2007 their 15% shortage was “gravely concerning.” See:

<http://appropriations.senate.gov/hearings.cfm>

According to American Hospital Association’s 2005 Workforce Survey, staffing shortages are contributing to emergency department overcrowding, emergency department diversions, decreased patient satisfaction, delayed discharges, increased wait times for surgery, and cancelled surgeries.

<http://www.ahapolicyforum.org/ahapolicyforum/resources/content/TakingthePulse2005.pdf>

A study based on a review of more than 6 million patients was published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* in May, 2002. The researchers found that hospitalized patients had better outcomes when a greater proportion of their nursing care was provided by RNs, and when the number of hours of RN care per day increased. Specifically, nursing shortages were found to correlate with longer lengths of stay, increased incidence of urinary tract infections and upper gastrointestinal bleeding, higher rates of pneumonia, shock and cardiac arrest. Increased hours of RN care resulted in fewer “failure-to-rescue” deaths from pneumonia, shock or cardiac arrest, upper gastrointestinal bleeding, sepsis and deep venous thrombosis.

<http://content.nejm.org/cgi/content/abstract/346/22/1715>

A study published in the January/February 2006 journal *Health Affairs* shows that if hospitals increased RN staffing, more than 6,700 patient deaths and four million inpatient days could be avoided each year. For details, see <http://www.nursingworld.org/pressrel/2006/pr0110.htm>.

Research published in the October 23, 2002 *Journal of the American Medical Association* demonstrated that more nurses at the bedside could save thousands of patient lives each year. In reviewing the experiences of more than 232,000 surgical patients at 168 hospitals, researchers from the University of Pennsylvania concluded that a patient's overall risk of death rose roughly 7 percent for each additional patient above four on a nurse’s workload. Having too few nurses may actually cost more money given the high costs of replacing burnt-out nurses and caring for patients with poor outcomes. http://www.nursing.upenn.edu/news/pdf/PennNursing_JAMA_10-22-02.pdf

In *Health Care at the Crossroads: Strategies for Addressing the Evolving Nursing Crisis*, a report released in August 2002 by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO), the authors found that a shortage of nurses in America's hospitals is putting patient lives in danger. JCAHO reported in that the shortage of nurses contributes to nearly a quarter of all unexpected incidents that kill or injure hospitalized patients. http://www.jcaho.org/PublicPolicy/nurse_staffing.htm

Current Funding Levels are Not Meeting the Need:

In FY 2005, HRSA was forced to turn away 82 percent of the applicants for the Nurse Education Loan Repayment Program (NELRP) due to lack of funding. This means that 3,662 RNs interested in working in facilities deemed to have a critical shortage of nurses were not accepted. See: <http://bhpr.hrsa.gov/nursing/loanrepay.htm>

Similarly, in FY 2005, HRSA turned away 94 percent of the applicants for the Nursing Scholarship Program due to lack of adequate funding. This means that more than 6,000 students interested in nursing were turned away from this program last year. See: <http://bhpr.hrsa.gov/nursing/scholarship/default.htm>

Nursing Education:

The American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) survey data from academic year 2006-2007 showed that nursing colleges and universities denied admission to 42,866 qualified applicants. The data is based on responses from 600 schools which show that enrollment in entry-level baccalaureate nursing programs increased by 7 percent from 2005 to 2006. The top reasons for not accepting applications to entry-level baccalaureate programs included insufficient faculty (71%), and admission seats filled (74%).

The National League for Nursing (NLN) released a preliminary report on December 9, 2005 which estimated that schools of nursing with entry-level baccalaureate, associate, and diploma programs were forced to reject more than 147,000 qualified applicants for 2005. This was an 18 percent increase over last year's figures. www.nln.org

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