

STATEMENT

of the

AMERICAN NURSES ASSOCIATION

to the

United States Senate Committee on Finance

regarding

*WORKFORCE ISSUES IN HEALTH CARE REFORM:
ASSESSING THE PRESENT AND PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE*

MARCH 12, 2009

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***Workforce Issues in Health Care Reform:
Assessing the Present and Preparing for the Future***

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The American Nurses Association (ANA) deeply appreciates the Committee's recognition of the importance of workforce issues to healthcare reform, and the valuable focus brought to the issue by the hearing held on March 12. ANA is the only full-service professional organization representing the interests of the nation's 2.9 million registered nurses, and advances the nursing profession by fostering high standards of nursing practice, promoting the rights of nurses in the workplace, and sharing a constructive and realistic view of nursing's contribution to the health of our nation.

While the day's discussion centered primarily on solutions to the physician shortage, we would echo the comments made by some witnesses emphasizing that, in order to meet our nation's health care needs we must ensure that we have an integrated national healthcare workforce policy that looks beyond physicians to ensure that the valuable contributions of Registered Nurses (RNs), Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRNs), and others on the health care team are appropriately recognized and integrated as we move forward with healthcare reform.

There are a wide variety of ideas currently circulating on health care reform, but all include a focus on prevention and screening, health education, cultural competency, chronic disease management, coordination of care and the provision of community-based primary care. These are precisely the professional services and skills that registered nurses bring to patient care. As the largest single group of clinical health care professionals within the health system, licensed registered nurses are educated and practice within a holistic framework that views the individual, family and community as an interconnected system that can keep us well and help us heal. Registered nurses are fundamental to the critical shift needed in health services delivery, with the goal of transforming the current "sick care" system into a *true* "health care" system.

RNs are the backbone of hospitals, community clinics, school health programs, home health and long-term care programs, and serve patients in many other roles and settings. Advanced Practice Nurses, in particular Nurse Practitioners and Nurse Midwives are proven providers of high-quality, cost effective primary care. The support, development and deployment of this keystone profession is essential for any quality health reform plan to succeed.

It is precisely because of the integral role nursing plays in health care that we urge the committee to give increased attention and focus to addressing the growing nursing shortage as part of health care reform. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) reports that the health care system will require more than 1 million new nurses by the year 2016, and the potential increased coverage promised by healthcare reform will only exacerbate that shortfall.

Attention to and investment in faculty and workforce recruitment and development is vital. Given that we are losing so many new nurses within the first year of practice—as many as 1 in 5 according to a 2004 national study, nurse retention strategies such as attention to safe staffing must play a vital role in efforts to address the nursing shortage as well. Without attention to these areas of concern we will not meet the needs outlined by the BLS. More to the point, if we do not undertake such efforts, our healthcare delivery system will not meet the needs of the American people, whether under our current system or a new paradigm created through healthcare reform.

While the hearing discussion focused a majority of time and attention toward physician education and training toward primary care—certainly a component of workforce reform—there was little in-depth attention given to the significance of the growing nursing shortage and the neglected systems that exist within our communities, such as public health and preventive services, community clinics, hospitals, mental health services, long term care, primary health care, schools, work places, and other venues where health services are delivered. Although reform of Medicare Graduate Medical Education (GME) and efforts to grow the physician population are needed (and we would argue that Graduate Nursing Education deserves significant attention as well) such efforts in isolation will not result in the creation of a health workforce that will be able to meet the care needs of the United States.

We appreciate that this view was shared by some on the panel and valued the Chairman's questions regarding the origins of and solutions to the nursing shortage. However it was clear that there was not sufficient time and expertise available to delve deeply into his questions.

Finally, we whole-heartedly agree with the comments made by Dr. Wartman:

"I think it's really important for the Committee to look beyond physicians to solve these problems—and we've heard mostly talk about physicians today. There are a host of other professions that are out there that can be very, very helpful-- and in fact some models that I've seen, instrumental --in bringing care to needed populations, whether they be in the nursing profession at a variety of levels, whether it be in the physician assistant programs, pharmacy in the community, psychology, things of that sort, it's all out there. Moving beyond just looking at the physicians, we need to consider all health professionals as we put this together, and then you bump right into the problem that I alluded to in my earlier remarks: there are a lot of barriers to making that work well. And those barriers could be everything from health workforce laws, standards, scope of practice, licensing, credentialing, things of that sort. How do you reimburse team care? What does that mean? How could we improve that? So I think there is a real good

opportunity here to begin to look at the big picture of all the providers that are out there and figure out ways to overcome the barriers that keep them from working very effectively together. My opinion is that if we rely only on physicians we won't have a solution that works."

Because these questions are so fundamental, ANA urges the Committee to hold another hearing involving experts on the nursing profession, as well as representatives of other professions to further explore both the nursing shortage, as well as ways that we can reduce the barriers in our current system that prevent full integration, coordination, and collaboration at all levels among our nation's health care workforce. Again we appreciate the dialogue that the committee started on the 12th, and hope that you will continue this discussion. In order to be successful in transforming our nation's health care system, we must have a holistic workforce policy that fully recognizes the vital role of nurses and other providers.

ANA looks forward to working with Chairman Baucus, Ranking member Grassley, the Senate Finance Committee, and other progressive voices seeking comprehensive health reform, in order to assure that the promise of universal coverage is fulfilled through accessible, high-quality, affordable health care for all.