

## **CENTER TO CHAMPION NURSING IN AMERICA**

### **FACT SHEET**

#### **Nursing**

- Nurses comprise the nation's largest health care profession. There are almost three million registered nurses nationwide (HRSA 2007).
- More than 587,000 new nursing positions will be created through 2016 (a 23.5% increase) making Nursing the nation's top profession in terms of job growth (BLS 2006).
- Registered nurses typically prepare for professional practice through a four-year Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN), a three-year hospital diploma program, or a two-year Associate Degree in Nursing (ADN). Driven by the need for more baccalaureate-level nurses due to the growing complexity of healthcare delivery, the percentage of RNs with BSN degrees grew from 22% in 1980 to 34% in 2004 (HRSA 2007). However, the majority of RNs continue to enter Nursing from community colleges.

#### **Nursing Shortage**

- The United States is experiencing a critical nursing shortage that is projected to last into the foreseeable future. Projections show that the shortage could grow as large as 500,000 nurses by 2025 (Buerhaus et al, 2008). HRSA (2006) projections predicted the shortage could reach as high as 1 million nurses by 2020. As the population grays and more people experience multiple chronic illnesses, the need for nurses grows ever more critical.
- Over the past five years, estimates put the RN vacancy rate in hospitals at 8.1% to 13% (AHA 2002; 2007).
- Of the total licensed RN population in March 2004, an overwhelming majority of 83.2 percent was employed in nursing and only 16.8 percent were not (HRSA 2007).
- The average age of the RN is climbing. In March 2004 it was 46.8 years of age, and the percentage of nurses under 30 was 8% (HRSA 2007). By 2010, approximately 40% of the nursing workforce will be over 50 (Wisdom at Work/RWJF 2006).

## **Impact of Nurse Staffing and Education on Patient Care**

- The shortage of registered nurses, in combination with an increased workload, poses a threat to quality of care. Increases in RN staffing are associated with reductions in hospital-related mortality and failure to rescue as well as reduced lengths of stays, according to a meta-analysis of existing studies (AHRQ 2007).
- In a 2002 study reported in JAMA, U. of Pennsylvania researchers reported that patients who have common surgeries in hospitals with the worst nurse staffing levels have an up to 31% increased chance of dying (Aiken et al. 2002).
- A higher proportion of nursing care provided by RNs and a greater number of hours of care by RNs per day are associated with better outcomes for hospitalized patients, according to a study published in the New England Journal of Medicine in 2002 (Needleman et al. 2002).
- Similarly, a 2003 study found that surgical patients had a “substantial survival advantage” if treated in hospitals with higher proportions of nurses with a BSN or higher degree. Every 10% increase in proportion of BSN nurses in hospitals had a resulting 4% decrease in risk of death (Aiken, 2003; 2008).
- Americans are aware of the nursing shortage and believe that the availability of nurses is a critical factor in the quality of hospital care (Harvard School of Public Health/RWJF 2005).

## **Factors Contributing to the Nursing Shortage**

- Enrollment in nursing schools is not keeping up with the growing demand for nurses. In 2006, HRSA officials stated that the US must graduate 90% more nurses from US nursing programs to meet the growing need (HRSA 2006).
- Nursing schools are turning away qualified applicants to baccalaureate and graduate nursing programs. More than 40, 285 qualified applicants were turned away in the academic year 2007-8, compared with fewer than 5,000 in 2002 (AACN, 2008; JAMA 2007).
- Nursing schools are unable to accommodate qualified applicants due to faculty shortages and insufficient clinical sites, classrooms, clinical preceptors and budget constraints (AACN 2008).
- Faculty shortages were cited by 71.4% of AACN survey respondents as a reason for turning away qualified applicants for entry-level nursing programs (AACN 2008). The faculty shortage promises to worsen as faculty age continues to climb. For 2007-8, the average ages of doctorally-prepared nurse faculty holding the ranks of professor, associate professor, and assistant professor were 59.1, 56.1, and 51.7 years, respectively (AACN 2008). According to Berlin and Sechrist (2002) the average age of nurse faculty at retirement is 62.5 years.

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