



ADDRESSING HEALTH CARE STAFFING NEEDS:LOUISIANA

The Issue

The state of Louisiana, like every other state in the union, is currently facing a workforce crisis in health care. Multiple factors have contributed to this shortage that now affects many of the allied health professions. Most troubling and pervasive is the shortage of registered nurses needed to deliver quality care on the front lines of the communities we serve.

According to a recent General Accounting Office (GAO) report to Congress, evidence suggests emerging shortages of nurses available or willing to fill many vacant positions. The nurse workforce is aging, and fewer new nurses are entering the profession to replace those who are retiring or leaving. Job dissatisfaction factors such as inadequate staffing, heavy workloads and the increased use of overtime have been frequently cited as contributing to the current problems of recruitment and retention. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, more than one million new and replacement nurses will be needed by 2012.

More than 210,000 people are employed in the healthcare sector in the state of Louisiana, representing 15 percent of Louisiana's total work force. Annually, this accounts for over \$6 billion payroll dollars in our state. The Health Works Commission staffed by the governor's office has worked in collaboration with the Nursing Supply and Demand Commission to recommend a five-year plan to address the nursing shortage, as well as the shortages in other allied health professions.

The 2008 Louisiana Legislative Session passed several measures addressing a few of the important workforce issues:

- A program to fund forgiveness of student loans for physicians who practice in rural areas;
- The establishment of the Workforce Training Rapid Response Fund as a special fund within the state treasury to be available to the Louisiana Community and Technical College System to address education needs;
- The reorganization of key components within the workforce system in Louisiana to streamline and centralize the coordination of training programs.

Much remains to be done. It is clear that we must continue to approach the problem from two directions – recruitment to the health care field and retention.

The problems of retention will take a broad solution to address various factors in the health care delivery system.

The CHRISTUS Health Position: Support full funding for nurse training, education and recruitment.

The public has a significant role in dealing with current and impending nurse shortages. CHRISTUS Health advocates for a strong state commitment to increase funding for undergraduate and graduate nursing and allied health professional education, training and faculty development, augmented by adequate reimbursement to help attract and retain the most qualified caregivers.

CHRISTUS Health urges Governor Jindal and the state of Louisiana to continue to appropriate funding to implement work force programs to address this crisis and to fully support schools of nursing by providing faculty and updated curricula, to recruit a more diverse student population; and provide assistance to students to enable them to complete their studies.