



ADDRESSING HEALTH CARE STAFFING NEEDS-TEXAS

The Issue

The health care system is experiencing a staffing crisis unlike previous decades. A combination of an aging workforce and declining enrollments in nursing schools demands a comprehensive state and national strategy, involving public and private energies and resources.

Although shortages exist in many health care professions, including pharmacy, physical therapy, occupational therapy, radiology and other technologies, the most pervasive (and probably most long-lasting) problem is the exploding shortage of registered nurses needed to deliver quality care in our communities.

In Texas, officials project the state will need a total of 161,000 nurses to meet demand by 2010.

Shortages seem to be especially severe in areas such as critical care, trauma care, and labor and delivery. Geriatrics, traditionally one of the least popular nursing specialties, is also experiencing staffing shortages. As a result, nursing units are being closed, patients are diverted to other locations, surgeries and other medical procedures are being canceled, and nurses are being asked to work extra hours often in understaffed conditions.

In 2007, the Texas Legislature took a variety of steps to tackle the nursing shortage. Senate Bill 992 extended for another four years the dedication of a portion of the tobacco lawsuit settlement funds to support nursing schools. Approximately \$4 million over the biennium was made available to the THECB to make grants to nursing schools for innovative programs designed to reduce the nursing shortage.

House Bill 2426 established the Texas Hospital-Based Nursing Education Program which pairs hospitals with existing nursing education programs. Under the law, grants are made by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) to assist partnerships in meeting the state's needs for registered nurses.

Senate Bill 138 required the THECB to develop methods to promote retention and graduation of nursing students and establish a program to recognize nursing schools that achieve a graduation rate of 85 percent or higher.

Other laws addressed the shortage of nursing faculty.

The biennium budget included \$14.7 million to be used by nursing schools to increase faculty salaries by \$10,000 and to hire more faculty members.

Senate Bill 289 provided for professional nursing shortage reduction grants to be used for part-time faculty which encourages schools to utilize more part-time or adjunct faculty to help alleviate the nurse faculty shortage.

Senate Bill 131 directed the THECB, members of the Health Professions Council and representatives of certain higher education institutions to study the feasibility of students in health professions taking combined health science classes. This could help alleviate faculty shortages.

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

The public will be significantly impacted by the current and impending nurse shortages. CHRISTUS Health advocates for a strong commitment from the Texas Legislature and the Governor to increase funding for undergraduate and graduate nursing and allied health professional education.

CHRISTUS Health urges state lawmakers to continue to appropriate funds to the state's nursing programs to be used to add and retain nursing faculty in Texas schools; to implement programs that allow educational institutions to attract and enroll more students into nursing programs; to improve the workplace for nursing; to recruit a more diverse student population; and to provide assistance to students to enable them to complete nursing studies.

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