

# Workforce Shortage



## HLC OUTLOOK: Health Care Workforce Shortage



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### ISSUE

Health care is a service industry that, despite the developments in medical technology, still relies on people. Millions of people are employed in the health care industry, and that number only continues to grow because the workforce is the backbone of health care delivery. A shortage of health care workers has existed for several years and is now felt in many health care fields, ranging from nursing to pharmacy to radiology and lab techs. The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) released a report projecting a shortfall of approximately 55,000 physicians by the year 2020 and the American Nurses Association projects more than 1 million new and replacement nurses will be needed by 2016. In some cases, a shortage is due to dramatically increased demand, as with pharmacists. In other cases, it is due to a reduction in supply, such as in the nursing field. The impact on health care delivery has been felt, with more and more hospitals reporting increased waiting times for emergency room treatment and surgery due to staff shortages, and the Institute of Medicine (IOM) linking staffing shortages to some medical errors. Thus, addressing health care workforce shortages is a critical issue in the delivery of high-quality medical care. Solutions to the workforce shortage problem must be as diverse as the many reasons that cause it – including efforts to recruit new health care workers and faculty to teach them, and improvements in the retention of existing staff.

### HLC POSITION

HLC is one of the few organizations looking at the health care workforce shortage in overall industry terms. **HLC believes that, in addition to public funding to address shortages, attention must be paid to the impact of issues like health information technology, medical liability, regulatory burdens, and the costs associated with each that affect staffing and recruitment capabilities. HLC also supports efforts beginning in elementary school to foster an interest in the fields of science and math.**

### HLC ACTION

- HLC continues to serve on the U.S. House Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) Education Caucus steering committee, in order to work with diverse constituencies. The caucus allows HLC to work with a broader nonhealth care group in advancing the importance of math and science careers as part of America's global competitiveness.
- HLC encourages members of Congress to join the Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) Education Caucus to develop long-term solutions to personnel shortages in health-related fields.

## ***HLC ACTION (con't)***

- HLC continues to advocate for adequate reimbursements for hospitals, clinics, doctors, laboratories, and other providers as a vital part of solving health care workforce shortages.
- HLC also continues to advocate for support of health information technology improvements and adoption. Studies show that organizations which have effectively implemented electronic medical records and other technologies see a marked decrease in staff turnover.

## ***TALKING POINTS***

- The shortage of qualified health care personnel extends beyond one profession; it can be felt in nursing, pharmacy, and many other allied health professions. Workforce shortages reach beyond the United States to international proportions. Having workers come from other countries raises concerns over visas and could further exacerbate the problem. Although there are many noteworthy local efforts to address workforce shortage issues, ultimately there must be a national response if shortage issues are to be addressed beyond the short-term.
- The workforce shortage issue is a complex one that has many causes. Some of these causes are: shortage of faculty to train new workers, shortage of individuals interested in entering the health care field (in needed professions), lack of job satisfaction (causing many trained personnel to leave the field), and an ever-increasing demand in many health care fields. This complex issue is threatening the industry's ability to deliver services and is neither short-lived, nor easy to solve.
- A complex regulatory environment dictated by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) affects already overburdened personnel. Reducing the complexity of Medicare and other health care regulations and their associated paperwork requirements is critical to addressing the workforce shortage issue. Complex paperwork steals time from patient care, especially in a work shortage environment, and is one of the major factors that studies show contribute to burn-out.
- The national crisis in liability is causing a shortage of physicians. The shortage is particularly severe in high risk specialties, such as surgical and obstetrical care. In fact, nearly half of America's counties lack an obstetrician. In the case of obstetrical care, dramatic increases in liability insurance cause many physicians to stop practicing or eliminate high-risk procedures.
- Payment disparities are affecting the number of primary care physicians in the system.
- Promoting healthy lifestyles can help enhance the workplace and strengthen the workforce.

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