

Addressing the Nursing Shortage in Florida: Strategies for Success

VISION

Florida shall have a qualified nursing workforce that is sufficient to meet the changing demands of the health care environment and the needs of its people.

By 2020, Florida will be faced with a convergence of an aging nurse population – resulting in decreased supply – and an aging general population – resulting in increased demand. Combined with the unresolved existing shortage, the result will be a critical deficiency of qualified, experienced nurse workforce. Continued commitment and purposeful interventions on the part of key stakeholders are essential to assure that the needs of all Floridians are met.

The Florida Center for Nursing Board has identified three critical issues as essential to successfully resolve the nursing shortage. Presented with each are the key stakeholder activities recommended to address the issue.

RETENTION OF NURSES CURRENTLY IN THE WORKFORCE

Successful resolution of the nursing shortage must involve parallel strategies: retention of the current workforce and increased production of the future workforce. Acceptance of the need to make significant improvements in the work environment and a global approach to increased retention of the existing workforce has, to date, remained limited. Individual nurse employers are implementing programs to address this issue. As of November 2007, 17 of the state's 228 acute care facilities have achieved national recognition for nursing excellence through the American Nurses Credentialing Center's Magnet Recognition Program[®]. Yet, we continue to have problems in our work environments. National estimates suggest that 50% of new nurses leave direct care within the first two years of practice. As nurses age the physical demands of practice can be daunting and the ability to and interest in working 12 (or more) hour days' wanes. The movement of experienced, senior nurses out of direct care roles results in a critical loss of knowledge and skills. With this loss of experiential knowledge there is no one to orient and develop the large influx of new nurses resulting from the focused effort to increase capacity in our nursing education programs. Thus, the cycle continues.

Who should address the issue?

Florida Legislature:

- Establish incentives for nurse employers, primarily acute care hospitals and skilled nursing facilities, to effectively decrease nurse turnover rates and increase retention of experienced nurses.
- Establish a grants program to fund projects directed to improve the work environment.
- Assure funding for the Center to conduct biennial nurse employer surveys and complete data analysis.

Nurse Employers – Administrators/Chief Executives, Directors of Nursing/Chief Nurses, and/or Boards of Directors/Trustees

- Change the work culture in nurse employment settings based on input from nurses and analysis of issues specific to a given environment.

- Implement known strategies to improve the work environment (e.g.: shared governance; flexible scheduling; ergonomic designs).
- Develop consortiums for problem identification, intervention development, and sharing of successful practices.

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- Provide information on strategies to increase nurse retention and promote successful practices.
- Conduct nurse employer surveys and provide data on nurse vacancy and turnover rates.
- With available funding, award small grants for retention and recruitment initiatives.

MAXIMIZING CAPACITY OF NURSE EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN FLORIDA

Increasing the production of new nurses, in and of itself, will not achieve the goal of assuring Floridians a sufficient and qualified nursing workforce. Simply adding new programs, increasing funding for existing programs, and/or conducting clinical training on nights and weekends does not guarantee student success. To increase production of new nurses there must be increased admissions, increased graduations and increased successful passage of the National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses (NCLEX). Spreading resources too thin in our academic settings (i.e.: faculty; clinical experience; qualified preceptors) by over-emphasizing admissions through unconstrained approval of new programs and expansion of capacity in existing programs has resulted in *decreasing* NCLEX pass rates for nursing graduates in Florida. We must make the best use of our existing nursing education programs by providing the resources that can increase the end product – a licensed registered nurse (RN). This means addressing the nurse faculty shortage, assuring appropriate clinical experiences, and acknowledging the cost of nursing programs.

Who should address this issue?

Florida Legislature:

- Give authority to the Florida Board of Nursing (BON) to develop criteria for 1) approving proposals to introduce new or expand current programs and 2) evaluating successful outcomes of nurse education programs in Florida.
- Give authority and funding to the state universities and community colleges to 1) establish market driven pay structures for nurse faculty and 2) adjust nursing program budgets to reflect the unique needs of practice-based education.
- Establish incentives for education programs to decrease student attrition and increase NCLEX pass rates for first time test takers.
- Fund scholarship and incentive programs to encourage pursuit of graduate nursing degrees that prepare individuals to become faculty at universities and community colleges.

Florida Board of Nursing:

- With legislative authority, develop and implement criteria for approval and evaluation of nursing education programs.

Education System:

- With legislative authority, implement market driven pay structures and appropriate budget for nurse education programs. Nurse education program administrators must evaluate current curricula and implement changes to maximize outcomes including consideration of new technology and the needs of employers.

- Develop regional consortiums of nursing education programs to share critical faculty (e.g., clinical specialties) and advanced technology (e.g., simulation equipment; distance learning).

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- Conduct nurse education program surveys, complete analysis, and report results. Minimally, provide data on program capacity, graduation rates, and faculty vacancies.

STATEWIDE STRATEGIC PLANNING

Efforts initiated with the intent to address the nursing shortage in Florida must be fiscally sound with predictable outcomes that will achieve the desired goal(s). As a state, Florida is highly diverse with variances in population demographics and needs from the southern tip to the panhandle. The supply of and demand for nurses is also varied throughout the regions of our state. What is constant is that there is a shortage of qualified nurses. How to approach resolving that shortage must reflect the available resources (human and fiscal) and identified needs of each region. Decisions must be based on valid information regarding trends in the supply of nurses (i.e.: current, active licensees; graduates from area education programs) and demand for nurses with consideration of nurse employing industries (i.e.: acute care hospitals; home health agencies; skilled nursing facilities; public health departments; hospice).

For example, nursing education program expansion decisions should be based on an identified need for additional new graduate RNs in the school's region and validation of access to needed resources such as qualified faculty and clinical space. However, if there is a greater need in the given region for experienced critical care nurses, funds should be directed to certification programs and training to transition already licensed RNs to work in critical care settings.

Who should address this issue?

Florida Legislature; Public and Private Education Programs; State Agencies; Nurse Employers:

- Utilize state and regional information provided by the Center in identifying strategies and determining funding for programs and initiatives to resolve the nursing shortage in Florida.
- Continue to support and participate in data collection for analysis to evaluate outcomes.

Florida Center for Nursing

- Serve as the definitive source for information, trends, research and forecasting about nurses and the dynamic nursing needs in Florida.
- Publish biennially a "state of the state" report identifying positive outcomes of strategies employed and current problem areas with recommended strategies for resolution.
- Conduct statewide biennial nurse employer surveys, analyze data and report results on a regional and statewide basis including vacancy and turnover rates by industry.
- Publish trend analysis and projections of nurse supply and demand in Florida.
- Participate in relevant national efforts to address nurse manpower issues and identify successful strategies for implementation in Florida.
- In partnership with the Department of Health, on a regional and statewide basis:
 - Receive BON licensure data for analysis and report results.
 - Collect nurse workforce data for analysis and report results.
 - Conduct annual survey of nurse education programs in Florida and report results.