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Nurse workforce researchers find turnover continues to threaten health care in Florida

A recent study from the Florida Center for Nursing, the state entity responsible for reporting on nurse supply, demand, and education in Florida, found that nurse turnover continues to be a major problem for the state. Leaders across the state have worked diligently to increase nurse supply in anticipation of a looming nursing shortage that could cripple the state's health care system. Though Florida gained more than 27,000 Registered Nurses (RNs) over the past two years, nearly 60% of this gain was erased by losses to the RN workforce--resulting in a net gain of only about 11,000 RNs. "This is a concern for Florida because there are significant costs, both in terms of patient safety and economic costs, when we continue to have such major levels of turnover," said the Center's Executive Director, Mary Lou Brunell, RN, MSN. "Our research found that the cost of nurse turnover exceeded \$1.4 billion for just one year in 2006-2007. I would imagine that nurse employers are feeling the turnover costs even more in this economic recession, particularly because we would expect to see lower levels of turnover when the job market is tight." Losses to the Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) workforce were even more dramatic, with a net gain of only about 28% of the total gains to the LPN supply. Florida is one of the only states to report on the LPN workforce, as national models lack the ability to report on LPNs.

"The results were especially surprising at a time when nurse workforce participation rates, defined as the percentage of licensed nurses actually working in the field of nursing, are at a historic high," said the Center's lead researcher, Dr. Jennifer Nooney. "The gains we did see were almost entirely because of new nurses added to the supply, not decreased attrition. Our reports have consistently demonstrated that we cannot address the nursing shortage without improving the retention of nurses and I think the results here make that message loud and clear. If even a severe economic recession did not significantly reduce turnover, it is not a market issue. We need to do more to improve the work environment for nurses."

In February, the Center released reports on employer demand for nurses as well as nurse education program capacity. The reports found that Florida's nursing education programs continued to turn away vast numbers of qualified applicants while employers also forecasted considerable growth in nursing positions through 2011. The Center's findings continue to show that the nursing shortage in Florida persists because more than 40% of Florida's nurses are approaching retirement age within the next 10 years and there are not enough younger nurses to replace them. Resolving Florida's nursing shortage will require a multi-pronged approach, including interventions to increase the production of new nurses, improve the work environment to retain existing nurses, and redesign work to accommodate the older nurse.

For more information on the Florida Center for Nursing, and to view a full copy of the report, please visit www.FLCenterforNursing.org.

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The Florida Center for Nursing is the definitive source for information, research, and strategies addressing the dynamic nurse workforce needs in Florida.