

The U.S. Nursing Shortage: Action Urgently Needed Now

THE PROBLEM:

The nursing shortage is a serious problem now and will only worsen in the coming years

- U.S. government studies have been documenting for years the current and worsening U.S. nursing shortage. According to the Department of Health and Human Services, more than a million new and replacement nurses will be needed by 2020 to address the country's severe nursing shortage.
- Last year, nearly 150,000 qualified U.S. RN applicants were turned away from domestic nursing schools because of a lack of available classroom slots and faculty.
- According to a 2004 study, 56% of the U.S. nurse workforce is 45 years of age or older; veteran RNs are retiring every year and there are simply not enough U.S. nursing grads to fill the vacancies.
- The Departments of Defense (DoD) and Veterans Affairs (VA) are finding it increasingly difficult to recruit and retain the large number of civilian nurses currently necessary to meet force management needs. A major reason for this problem is the corresponding nursing shortage facing our civilian health care facilities.

The nursing shortage's impact on patient care

- The nation's severe nursing shortage, now in its ninth year, challenges hospitals' and long term care facilities' ability to operate at full capacity to care for their communities.
- Low nursing staff levels have been found to be a contributing factor in 1 out of 4 hospital deaths. Patients who have common surgeries in hospitals with high patient-to-nurse ratios have up to a 31% greater chance of dying.

The nursing shortage's economic impact on healthcare facilities

- From an economic standpoint, workforce shortages are forcing hospitals and long term care facilities to reconsider or postpone expansion projects, potentially reducing the number of inpatient beds and services available.
- The American Hospital Association reported on the impact that hospitals alone have on the U.S. health care and the economy: there are over 35 million people admitted, nearly 118 million people treated in emergency rooms, over 4 million babies delivered, and over 481 million outpatients treated each year.
- Hospitals are one of the largest private sector employers, employing more than 5 million people, and stimulating economic productivity. According to that report, when also accounting for hospital purchases of good and services from other businesses, hospitals support one of every 10 jobs in the U.S. and \$1.9 trillion dollars of economic activity.

THE SOLUTION:

International Nurses (RNs) are a critical part of the solution

- Although a relatively small percentage of the total U.S. nursing workforce, international RNs have been relied upon during past nursing shortages to fill a percentage of RN vacancies.
- This source has been cut off since December of 2006, when a special allocation of Schedule A visas was used up.
- The U.S.-based international healthcare staffing industry, a vital nurse supply source, is at risk of collapse due to ongoing visa retrogression. Most of these staffing companies are small businesses, and with little or no incoming revenue over the past 2 years, many of these companies will be forced to shut down.
- It would take years to rebuild this critical staffing infrastructure at time when health systems are in dire need of qualified nurses

The Emergency Nurse Supply Relief Act- a timely, targeted, and temporary solution to the U.S. nursing shortage

This bipartisan legislation was introduced by Reps. Robert Wexler (D-FL) and Jim Sensenbrenner (R-WI) on May 20, 2009.

- **Targeted:** The Emergency Nurse Supply Relief Act is specifically targeted to address the critical nursing shortage by allowing qualified immigrant nurses to quickly fill vacancies in our nation's health care system, while also enhancing the training and retention of U.S.-educated nurses.
- **Timely and Temporary:** While the stimulus bill provided much needed funding for nurse education and training, this provision will not have a near-term impact on bringing nurses to the bedside.
 - The Emergency Nurse Supply Relief Act would provide up to 20,000 visas per year over a three year period for nurses and physical therapists, allowing healthcare facilities to quickly fill vacancies.
- **Provisions of the Emergency Nurse Supply Relief Act**
 - The bill provides up to 60,000 additional green cards over a three year period for registered nurses and physical therapists.
 - The bill would require importing employers of registered nurses to pay a \$1500 fee for each nurse visa used into a fund to provide grants to U.S. nursing schools to hire additional faculty, purchase additional educational equipment, and repair and expand school infrastructure.
 - The bill would provide for a retention grant pilot program to fund career enhancement training for health care workers.