Healthcare Workforce Insights
May 2012

Topic: Nursing Workforce Snapshot – A Regional & Statewide Look

Nursing Workforce in Texas

- 184,467 registered nurses (2011)
- Median age of RN is 47 (2011)
- Gender – 89% Female and 11% Male (2011)
- Race/Ethnicity – 71% White, 8% Asian, 9% Black, 9% Hispanic, and 3% Other (2011)
- Education – 38% of active RNs have BSN, 47% have ADN, and 15% have diploma (2009)
- More RNs in Texas than any other health profession
- Employment Focus: Majority of the RNs actively employed as nurses in Texas work in hospitals (64%). 7% in home health, 4% in physicians’ offices and clinics. (2009)
- Most common work areas for active RNs - medical/surgical (14.3%), intensive care/critical care (11%), operating/recovery care (8%) and obstetrics and gynecology (7%). (2009)
- 2010 Texas RN Vacancy Rate – 6.7% compared to 11.2% in 2008
- 2011 North Texas RN Vacancy Rate – 4.8 % compared to 4.1% in 2010
- Texas supply ratio lags behind the U.S. ratio of 824.5 in 2004 with Texas having a ratio of 681.2 licensed RNs per 100,000 population in 2009
- Highest concentrations of RNs are in Central and East Texas
- Registered nurses (712,000, US) is one of the occupations expected to add the most employment according to the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics news releases on Employment Projections – 2010-20 on February 1, 2012

Nursing Workforce in North Texas

- GroupOne conducts annual vacancy and turnover survey and the 2012 survey was just published. It has over 80 participating North Texas hospitals. It shows the 2012 North Texas RN vacancy rate to be 5.9%. This is up from the 2011 rate of 4.8% and 2010 rate of 4.1%. This vacancy rate is below the state of Texas rate of 6.7%. Survey is seeing the rate slowly move up again.
- The GroupOne survey identifies highest needs for bilingual staff is Spanish and Vietnamese languages. The most urgent future job positions needed are nursing, physical therapy, and occupational therapy.
- There is still much uncertainty in the healthcare market as Medicare and Medicaid cuts are implemented. Hospitals are reigning in expenses and in some situations, closing hospitals or units as a result of these cuts. Despite these trends, vacancy rates continue to increase as the economy improves and the aging workforce begins to retire. There are double digit vacancy rates in roles vital to patient care: physician assistants, nurse practitioners, paramedics, occupational therapists and clinical systems analysts. Expect vacancy rates to continue to increase for registered nurses, physical therapists and other critical allied health positions.
- Preliminary data from the DFWHC Regional Workforce Planning Collaborative shows statistics for race/ethnicity and gender for nurses in the North Texas area. This includes data from North Texas hospitals. Nurse gender is 90% female and 10% male. Ethnicity of North Texas nurses include the following: 65% White, 17% Asian, 12% Black, 5% Hispanic, and 1% other.
According to Board of Nursing reports as of September 2011, there are over 40,000 nurses employed in nursing in a 4 county area in North Texas. Significant employers of nurses in North Texas include 59% with inpatient hospital settings, 7% in outpatient hospital care, 6% in home health agencies, and 5% in physician/dentist office, and 1% in schools of nursing. The four counties includes Dallas, Tarrant, Collin and Denton.

An informal audit of several of the North Texas hospital systems showed over 1,000 job postings for registered nurses in April 2012. North Texas hospitals are hiring RNs.

North Texas nurse shortages are reflective of other regions. There is need for experienced nurses as well as specialty nurses including operating room, emergency room, and nurse practitioner.

As Congress debates the constitutionality of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010, hospitals are cautiously awaiting the outcome to determine the financial and service impacts to accurately project healthcare services demand in the next decade. If implemented as originally approved, we expected an increase in demand for healthcare services in the next decade as health insurance becomes more available. Expect to see expansion in current healthcare workforce as more workers will be needed to meet demand. Health reform is continuing to impact the delivery of care for hospitals. Readmission is another critical factor in the delivery of patient care and models are changing to reflect needs.

North Texas hospitals have over 237,000 employees according to a 2011 study done by the DFW Hospital Council in 2011. With a total economic impact of $12.2 billion on the North Texas economy.


This 2010 report has had a significant impact on the Nursing Workforce and the role that nurses play. The report focuses on four key messages for transforming the nursing profession:

- Nurses should practice to the full extent of their education and training
- Nurses should achieve higher levels of education and training through an improved education system that promotes seamless academic progression
- Nurses should be full partners, with physicians and other health professionals, in redesigning health care in the US
- Effective workforce planning and policy making require better data collection and improved information infrastructure

The Future of Nursing: Campaign for Action has seen progress nationwide in implementing the report’s recommendations. Texas has joined this campaign with nurses and other stakeholders involved statewide. But health care reform has brought new dimensions to the delivery of care and the nursing practice. The delivery of healthcare models is changing continuously and will not look the same in the future. How our nursing workforce adapts to changing practice will look different from what we have seen in the past and that is being defined now.
Factors that Impact the Nursing Workforce – Now and Future

- Aging Nursing Workforce
- Aging Nursing School Faculty
- Education Requirements
- Transition to Practice for New Graduates
- Advanced Practice Nurses
- Specialty Nursing
- Diversity of Nursing Workforce
- Nurses in Rural Areas
- Turnover
- Hospitals pursuing Magnet Designation
- Aging Population Requiring More/Different Level of Care
- Critically and Chronically Ill Care Needs
- Long Term Care Needs
- Contract/Travel Nurses
- Recession/Economic Issues
- Health Care Reform
- Hospital Readmissions and Reimbursements
- Electronic Health Records
- Coordinated Care Models
- Patient Safety
- Healthy Work Environments

Thoughts

Is there still a nursing workforce shortage? Yes and No. An informal audit of several of the North Texas hospital systems showed over 1,000 job postings for registered nurses in April 2012. North Texas hospitals are hiring RNs. The critical needs in hospitals now are for the more experienced nurse focusing on specialty areas of practice. The Texas Center for Nursing Workforce Studies 2010 Hospital Nurse Staffing Survey stated that 70% of hospitals responding to the survey have experienced difficulty in recruiting experienced RNs. Contract/traveling nurses are still being used by hospitals to fill critical areas with over 44% of hospitals using them according to the same report. And hospitals are still hiring new graduates, but not always into the practice area or shifts the new nurse desires.

The current recession and economic downturn has forced many nurses to reevaluate their career paths. Many nurses that had chosen not to work have returned to the workforce and are staying longer in their jobs. A recent article published in the New England Journal of Medicine, Registered Nurses Labor Supply and the Recession – Are We in a Bubble?, suggests that the national unemployment rate could be considered a predictor for RN workforce. When the unemployment rate is high, the RN workforce tends to be larger than predicted - thus the “temporary bubble”. Unemployment rate is expected to decrease by 3.5 percentage points between 2010 and 2015. With this projected improvement in economy, RNs will be leaving the workforce again. The report suggests approximately 118,000 RNs. At the same time this happens, consider expected retirements of baby boomers that will occur. The nursing shortage will become more critical.

Several reports that have been conducted in the first quarter of 2012 will be telling in giving us specific information on the Nursing Workforce in North Texas and Texas statewide. They include the 2012 Hospital Nurse Staffing Survey being conducted by Texas Center for Nursing Workforce Studies and GroupOne Vacancy and Turnover Report for the North Texas region. Both reports look at the nursing workforce vacancy and turnover rates. Report results will be available in 2012. And the DFWHC Regional Workforce Planning Collaborative is developing information with several large hospital systems in the region that will provide details on the regional healthcare workforce needs including nursing. Information from this collaborative will inform the future nursing workforce needs for the region.
References:
Texas Center for Nursing Workforce Studies, Center for Health Statistics, Texas Department of State Health Services. 
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DFWHC Foundation Regional Workforce Planning Collaborative Data
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