Spotlight on the Past and Looking Forward to the Future of Nursing in North Dakota

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Nationally, it is projected that over 4.0 million jobs will be generated in health care by 2018 due to an aging population and advances in medical technology (Woods, 2009). Within North Dakota, health care and social assistance is the largest industry with an estimated 55,598 workers (Job Service North Dakota, 2009). Health care facilities are economic drivers in our communities and are a vital part of North Dakota’s future growth. Ensuring that each North Dakotan has access to high quality care will be even more important as health care reform is implemented.

The nursing profession is an important part of all facets of the health care system from prevention through chronic and end-of-life care and from prenatal and pediatric to gerontology care. The entire health care system relies on nursing as the backbone, making a healthy supply of nurses a necessity to state policy and planning.

This brief includes highlights findings from the ten-year North Dakota Nursing Needs Study as well as initial strategic plans for the North Dakota Center for Nursing. The full report is available at www.ndcenterfornursing.org However, the North Dakota Center for Nursing cannot solve all nursing workforce issues and solutions must come from the broader cadre of stakeholders. This report was developed by the ND Center for Nursing Leadership Team which includes 50 different organizations that are working together to provide a unified voice and to work strategically on solutions. The full report includes comprehensive information for the K-12 pipeline, higher education, supply and demand. Highlights from these areas are included in this brief.

K-12 Pipeline

There are currently many programs and activities that target students in K-12 to increase their awareness of health careers and in nursing in particular and interest in nursing careers has been sustained over a number of years. However, about 1/5 of students are undecided about their future careers. This pool of students would benefit from targeted hands-on activities including high fidelity human patient simulation and activities to bring a greater awareness of the wide scope of the nursing profession.

The ND Center for Nursing is working to link targeted partners to provide these opportunities and resources to students.
Higher Education

North Dakota currently has eighteen nursing education programs including preparation for LPN, RN, Advanced Practice Nurses and other graduate education programs (NDBON, 2012). North Dakota has a wide cadre of established nursing programs that utilize clinical sites across many areas. However, 17 counties currently have no clinical sites. These are largely rural counties.

*The ND Center for Nursing is working to determine clinical placement gaps and to work with nursing programs and employers to facilitate additional clinical placements.*

The North Dakota Nursing Education Consortium composed of all of the nursing education programs in North Dakota has over the last four years worked to develop greater opportunities to incorporate high-fidelity human patient simulation. There has been a marked increase in the use of high-fidelity human patient simulators from 25% of nursing programs to 87% in 2010. The North Dakota Center for Nursing is working to help ensure continued success of the North Dakota Nursing Education Consortium which has received legislative and state-appropriated funding to provide for increased availability of high-fidelity simulation and electronic health record technology for all nursing education programs.

Although LPN programs include about 1/5 minority students, other nursing programs have few minority or male students. Great efforts to increase diversity in nursing education programs are needed. This is also a concern with nursing faculty as there are very few male or minority nursing faculty. *The ND Center for Nursing is working to collaborate with several existing grant-funded programs that are targeting increasing diversity. The ND Center for Nursing is also working on developing cultural competence training for faculty.*

Few current students and nurses are interested in becoming faculty members. In addition, few nurses have climbed the career ladder and obtained further education. Efforts need to be increased to create seamless career ladders amongst North Dakota’s nursing education programs.

*The ND Center for Nursing is also working to develop faculty recruitment and mentoring programs to help increase the future faculty pool.*

Barbara Diederick, Associate Professor and Chair, North Dakota State College of Science Nursing Program
Nursing Supply and Demand

North Dakota currently has a good supply of LPNs with some maldistribution. However, projections indicate that the slow growth of LPN supply over the last several years will not be adequate for future projected demand. Efforts to increase the pool of LPNs and to retain current LPNs are needed. While North Dakota has a good supply of RN/APRNs there is a misdistribution with some rural areas without an adequate supply of RNs. In addition, with the implementation of the Affordable Care Act it is anticipated that RNs will be utilized in greater care coordination roles and APRNs utilized to fill in areas with physicians shortages.

The North Dakota Center for Nursing is working to provide a career center along with support to health care facilities to increase retention of new graduates across urban and rural settings. The North Dakota Center for Nursing is working to establish regional LPN interest groups in order to establish opportunities for education, networking and support that are currently non-existent.

Data from Jobsnd.com (2012), the state’s job posting system that pulls job postings from the majority of job postings by employers can be utilized to roughly estimate demand. There was an average of 139 jobs/month for LPNs during 2012. Eight counties averaged between 5 and 50 LPN job postings over the twelve months of 2012. Twenty counties had no job postings for LPNs. There was a monthly average of 441 job openings for RN/APRN jobs using Jobsnd.com data (2012). Three counties averaged over 50 job postings for RN/APRN positions over the twelve months of 2012. 12 counties averaged between 5 and 50 RN/APRN job postings. Nine counties had no job postings for RN/APRNs (Note: Jobsnd data includes flex time, traveling and other positions).
Supply/Demand Workforce Projections

Over the next 10 years it is projected that statewide RN/APRN supply will continue to meet demand (Moulton & Howe, 2013). The figure also includes estimates of high and low demand in order to emphasize that many factors may influence demand including population shifts, aging and economics which may not be captured in the demand projections. Factors such as implementation of the ACA will also increase demand.

As of 2010 and for the next years, it is projected that there will be a striking statewide shortage of LPNs when compared to demand including high and low demand estimates of demand (Moulton & Howe, 2013).

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The full report is available on our website at www.ndcenterfornursing.org