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## **Chicago-area Health Care Workforce Shortage Fact Sheet**

The following fact sheet provides information about the impact of current and future workforce shortages on the delivery of health care services in the Chicago area and the region's economy. "Caring for the Future: A Report from the Metropolitan Chicago Healthcare Council" (MCHC) states that today, the Chicago area experiences "a significant health care workforce shortage," which left unchecked will severely limit the ability of hospitals to meet growing patient and community demand.

- *Workforce Shortages:* According to survey data collected by the Metropolitan Chicago Healthcare Council, the metropolitan Chicago area experiences a current shortage of 2,500 nurses. Chicago-area hospitals report vacancy rates in excess of 10 percent for physical therapists, occupational therapists and magnetic resonance imaging technicians. Other allied health care professionals in short supply include respiratory therapists, speech therapists and pharmacists. The nursing shortage in Illinois is expected to rise to 21,000, or 19 percent of projected demand, by 2020 if no intervention is taken.

*Health Care Workers Needed:* By 2010, Illinois will need 6,000 nurses and 1,200 allied health care professionals to meet patient demands. This means an additional 2,000 nurses and 400 health care professionals must be trained each year while maintaining current graduation rates. Most of these 2,400 new health care professionals will be needed in the Chicago area.

*Reason for Growing Need:* An aging population will increase demand for health care services through 2020. Beginning in 2011, the number of people over age 65 will rise steadily as baby-boomers retire. This will increase hospital discharges by 26.5 percent and inpatient days by 24.4 percent. An aging workforce will shrink the supply of workers available to provide health care services.

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- *Impact of Workforce Shortage on Health Care Delivery:* Health care workforce shortages limit the number of patients that hospital critical care and medical surgical units can accommodate, sometimes requiring them to be transferred to adequately-staffed hospitals. Chronic shortages prevent hospitals from expanding services even where a community demand exists. Shortages in radiology and nuclear medicine affect a hospital's ability to provide high-tech diagnostic services and minimally invasive procedures, such as radiosurgery and catheter-based blood vessel repair.

Workforce shortages increase the risk of health care errors and adverse patient outcomes, playing a part in 24 percent of 1,609 hospital patient deaths nationwide between 1995 and 2002 according to the Joint Commission on the Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations. A study from the "Journal of the American Medical Association" indicates that shortages of nurses trained at the baccalaureate and master's level decrease quality of care and increase hospital deaths. Low nurse staff levels and long work hours contributed to patient care errors according to a 2003 study by the Institute of Medicine.

- *Impact on Chicago-area Economy:* Health care workforce shortages "put at risk the metropolitan Chicago region's robust economic development," states "Caring for the Future." One of the fastest growing regional economic sectors, health care generated \$23.7 billion or 9.5 percent in personal income for regional residents and contributed 400,000 workers in 2003.

Health care worker salary and benefits averaged \$63,088 compared to \$43,021 in other regional sectors. Every dollar in hospital wages creates \$1.42 in wages in other economic sectors.

Health care expansion will create 22,500 hospital and 50,000 regional jobs by 2020. One hospital job creates 1.54 community jobs.

Chicago-area hospitals contributed \$1.8 billion in capital improvements to the economy. The availability of hospital and health care services makes the Chicago area attractive to potential employees looking for a business site.

- *Educational Changes:* State and local programs to increase health careers awareness at the K-12 level should continue to expand. Programs such as "The Other Side of the Stethoscope," which emphasizes the importance of good math and science skills, introduced 43,000 Chicago Public School seventh graders to health care careers last year. Statewide under Gov. Blagojevich's Critical Skills Shortages Initiative, K-12 students learn about health careers through the special health-related classroom activities incorporated in existing curriculum.

Post-secondary changes should include standardizing basic course curriculums to streamline health care education; reduce financial and time commitments; and allow students to move between programs. Currently, health care workers, including those with advanced training and experience, must retake basic courses to earn degrees in other disciplines, such as nursing. Illinois recently passed a law allowing advance practice nurses to expand their practices without earning another degree by demonstrating commensurate skills and passing national certification board exams.

State law requires nursing faculty members to hold master's or doctorate degrees in nursing to teach. Lifting regulatory barriers allows professionals with advanced training in fields, such as geriatrics or pharmacy, to teach related health care courses.

- *Funding Chicago-area Workforce Initiatives:* Expanding education programs to increase by 50 percent the annual number of nurses and allied health care professionals trained over five years will require an investment of between \$40 million and \$50 million.

Gov. Blagojevich has already committed \$18 million this year to support health care workforce development through 2010. Part of the \$18 million is a \$3.6 million grant secured this year under the Critical Skills Shortage Initiative to the Workforce Boards of Metropolitan Chicago to upgrade the skills of existing health care workers from which \$2.6 million will fund training programs for 16 health care, government and education organizations. The remaining \$945,000 will go to non-traditional nurse training programs offered by northeast regional community colleges.

These grants should add 444 registered nurses; 119 licensed practical nurses; 116 medical records workers; 84 technician/technologists; and 10 therapists to the Northeast Illinois workforce over the next two years – far short of the needed 2,400 health care Chicago-area workers, states “Caring for the Future.”

In 2003, \$100,000 in grants provided to MCHC by the “Promise of Nursing Illinois Program” of Johnson and Johnson, New Brunswick, N.J., enabled seven area undergraduate nursing programs to establish 100 nursing student slots by 2006.

- *Retaining Chicago-Area Health Care Workers:* In an effort to improve employee satisfaction and retention, the American Hospital Association's Commission on Workforce, Chicago, has recommended that hospital leaders seek solutions to:
  - Foster meaningful work
  - Improve workplace partnerships
  - Broaden the base of potential health care workers
  - Collaborate with educators, government, community groups and other health care stakeholders
  - Build support for valuing and funding health care workforce development.

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The Metropolitan Chicago Healthcare Council is a membership and service association comprising more than 140 hospitals and health care organizations working together, since 1935, to improve the delivery of health care services in the greater metropolitan Chicago area. More information is available on the MCHC Web site at [www.mchc.org](http://www.mchc.org).