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SHORTAGES OF SKILLED WORKERS HIT HEALTH CARE INDUSTRY

As California's Population Ages, Health Care Faces "Double Whammy" of Retiring College-Educated Workers and Growing Demand for Care

Oakland, Calif. – While all industries are projected to show major shortages of college-educated workers in California by 2020, an important new study finds that these shortages have already reached the health care sector.

Further, health care will soon be hit by the 'double whammy' of California's aging population – older residents will need substantially more care as they age while a generation of highly skilled Baby Boomers retires from health care jobs. In some hospital systems, occupations such as Clinical Laboratory Scientists have an average age well over 50.

"Shortages in the healthcare workforce will place the health of Californians in jeopardy," according to Marilyn Chow, Vice President of Patient Care Services at Kaiser Permanente. "Today's chronic shortages are going to become worse as the population ages."

California's population over 65 is the state's fastest growing group and is expected to increase by 75% from 2000 to 2020. Health expenditures increase four-fold between age 65 and age 97.

The first study of its kind in nearly a decade, this study found major shortages in "allied health," a sector which includes 60% of health care jobs. These technical occupations include such jobs as EMTs, radiology technologists, and respiratory therapists.

While many factors influence the numbers of allied health professionals, the study cited the "greatest limiting factor" is the lack of capacity in California's colleges to train and educate enough people to meet demand.

Most allied health jobs have education requirements that include certificates and Associate Degrees, and some of these occupations require post-graduate degrees. California lags behind the rest of the nation in educating an adequate health care workforce to meet today's needs. Future shortages because of retiring workers and greater demand will worsen this situation and could mean a health care crisis for the state.

"As Californians, all of our healthcare depends on getting more students into and through community college and university training programs," according to Abdi Soltani, Executive Director of the Campaign for College Opportunity which sponsored the study.

Soltani suggests that there are two basic areas where policymakers and educators will need to place an “unprecedented focus”: increasing capacity – the number of spaces for students in health care programs and program pre-requisites – and improving student success once in college.

In addition, high school students are often not aware of college and career options early enough, especially for the less visible, but relatively high paying, allied health occupations.

Much can also be done to provide training and education to adults already working in the health care industry, so that they may move up into jobs requiring more education while benefiting from their existing experience.

There are several reasons that prevent colleges and universities from meeting the demand, according to the report, including the high costs of health education programs, a lack of clinical placements, and faculty shortages. Those factors, combined with limited funding, rapid growth, and increased student needs in the community college system create a major problem for the future of the state.

“Other industries need to pay attention to the shortages being experienced in the health care industry because they’re next,” according to Bill Hauck, President of the California Business Roundtable. “California could lose its competitive edge which depends on an educated workforce.”

California is expected to change in a number of ways in the next 20 years. In addition to getting older, the population is expected to get increasingly diverse. Health caregivers will need to be skilled at dealing with this diversity of patients. One of the study’s key policy recommendations encourages the state to invest in programs that target youth from diverse communities to prepare them to be successful in college and health care careers.

Other major findings of the study include the following (*four*):

1. In nursing and in nearly every allied health occupation, California lags behind the nation in the number of professionals in proportion to the population;
2. In $\frac{3}{4}$ of the occupations analyzed, California produces fewer graduates than job openings each year;
3. Latinos make up over 33% of California’s population, but only 17% of the allied health workforce;
4. The recent nursing initiatives under Governor Schwarznegger have reduced the projected nursing shortages by 25%, but considerable attention to nursing is still required to close projected shortages.

The research was funded by Kaiser Permanente and the California Wellness Foundation and conducted by Health Workforce Solutions LLC. The study was sponsored by the Campaign for College Opportunity.

Media interested getting a copy of the Executive Summary or full Report should go to www.collegecampaign.org/healthworkforce or contact Blake Ulveling at: (510) 645-1362 or blake@collegecampaign.org.

About the Campaign for College Opportunity: The Campaign for College Opportunity is a broad-based, bipartisan coalition, including business, education and labor leaders, and is dedicated to ensuring the next generation of Californians has the opportunity to go to college. For more information, visit: www.collegecampaign.org.

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