

Is The United States Staring At A Nursing Shortage?

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With reforms in healthcare and with a rapidly aging baby boomer population, the United States could possibly be staring at a shortage of nurses. According to a study released by the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN), there is likely to be a demand for over a million nurses between now and 2020.

A 2012 report published by the Bureau of Labor Statistics points out that the population of registered nurses (RN) is likely to grow from 2.71 million in 2012 to 3.24 million in 2022 – an increase of almost 526,800. In addition to the absolute increase, another 525,000 nurses will have to be replaced during this period bringing the total number of new recruits due to growth and replacements to 1.05 million by 2022. According to AACN, the association is now working with schools, policy makers, nursing organizations and media to bring attention to this impending shortfall. The institution points out that the nursing schools in the country are struggling to expand capacity to meet the growing demand.

The impending growth in demand for nurses has however had a positive fallout. Simon Vaughton, an Adjunct Faculty for the graduate nursing programs at GMercyU points out that the rising demand for quality nurses could bring about a rise in average wages for people choosing nursing as a career option. The Bureau of Labor Statistics report notes that the median pay for registered nurses in 2012 was \$65,470 per year – this could well rise by as much as 20% if the shortfall is not met adequately.

Another fallout from the shortage of Rns is a potential rise in immigrant nurses in the United States. According to Karen Keast, a health journalist with the Australian journal HealthTimes, while the shortfall is quite likely to incentivize nurses in English speaking countries like Australia and New Zealand to secure work in the United States, they could face potential challenges with respect to meeting the stringent US standards.

Karen notes that Australian nursing education falls particularly short of US standards in areas like maternity, paediatrics and psychiatry. This could potentially bring about greater demand for nursing education from institutions in the United States. The need of the hour, as the BLS reports and the various editorials suggest, is to establish a mechanism to train and employ qualified RNs in a more scalable and efficient manner.

So how does this shortage impact the morale of the registered nurses? In the April 2005 issue of Nursing Economics, Dr. Peter Buerhaus found that close to 75% of RNs believed that the shortage was causing a major problem for the quality of their work life. Additionally, this was found to impact the quality of patient care by reducing the amount of time RNs could spend time individual patients. An overwhelming 98% of the surveyed RNs believed that the shortage could serve as a trigger for work-related stress.

The shortage of nurses in the American health industry is not a new phenomenon. But with the widening gap between supply and demand, the onus is on the policy makers to establish a strong setup that will enable the training and deployment of qualified nurses into the workforce at the earliest.