

Nursing shortage expected to continue

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HUNTINGTON — Demand for nurses is expected to top a million by 2012, leading the U.S. Department of Labor to list registered nursing as the top growing profession.

In West Virginia, there also is a need to find younger nurses because of the state's large population of aging nurses, said Duane Napier, executive director for the West Virginia Center for Nursing.

"One-third of the nursing work force is over 50," Napier said. "In registered nurses overall, less than 12 percent are under age 30."

According to the Nursing Shortage Study Commission's 2004 report, West Virginia will need at least 318 new registered nurses a year for the next eight years to meet statewide needs.

There were 15,468 registered nurses working in West Virginia as of June 30, 2005, according to the West Virginia Registered Nursing Board.

To meet the need in West Virginia, colleges have expanded their enrollment in recent years. Last fall, there were 3,033 registered nursing students enrolled in public and private colleges. That's up from 1,178 in the 2001-02 school year, according to the nursing report.

Napier said the key to eliminating the

nursing shortage statewide is to attract more young people and minorities. Many nursing schools are conducting career fairs and health fairs each year, he said, but he still sees a need for more.

"What we really need to do with all that is be more aggressive," Napier said. "Every nurse should be the ambassador to their profession."

Salary also is an issue in the state when it comes to keeping local nursing graduates close to home. According to the Center for Nursing, in 2002 the annual average salary for West Virginia RNs was \$41,800. However, a graduate could easily cross the state border and find a hefty salary increase.

In Kentucky, the average salary is \$43,750, Ohio is \$46,810, and Maryland is \$60,320. The national average is \$49,840.

Clark said her visits to the hospital are not only beneficial to her, but to nurses who are working long shifts.

"When we go to the hospital as students, I think it really takes a load off the nurses' backs," Clark said. "I think I could see a shortage happening when you think about the 12-hour shifts that nurses have to work."

In the September/October 2005 issue of Nursing Economic, Peter Buerhaus and co-

authors presented survey results that showed nurses feel the shortage has negatively affected the quality and safety of patient care in hospitals.

The results were gathered from two random national surveys of registered nurses in 2002 and 2004 and a national survey of chief nursing officers in 2004 and are being presented as part of a six-part series in Nursing Economic.

According to the report, the results showed a majority of registered nurses (79 percent) and chief nursing officers (68 percent) believe the shortage is a major problem affecting the overall quality of patient care. The surveys also reveal a strong majority of RNs feel the shortage is a major problem for the quality of care in settings outside of hospitals, including long-term care facilities, home, community and ambulatory settings, schools and student health service clinics.

Dr. Shelia Kyle, vice president at St. Mary's School of Nursing, said there have been efforts during the past few years to increase the number of students completing the nursing program.

"It is very important to fully staff nurses," Kyle said. "The concern is that if you work too long, you could run into problems where you don't make good decisions."