

TRENDS FOR HEALTH SCIENCES

Overview

The success of the health care system is dependent upon qualified personnel. Access to care, quality of care, and costs of care are all affected by the availability of properly educated and trained workers. Health care continues to be one of the nation's fastest growing industries and in North Carolina, 10 of the 22 (45 %) largest employers are hospitals/medical centers. Future challenges include meeting the needs of an aging population, recruitment and retention of qualified health care workers, and managing acute and chronic diseases and increasing access to health care. It is necessary to plan to meet present and predicted needs for health care workers within a health care delivery system that is characterized by diversity and changing technologies.

Health care costs are growing and are projected to continue to grow more rapidly than the overall cost of living, workers' incomes, and the economy as a whole. Technological advances and economic forces continue to change medical care and each year brings fewer and shorter hospital stays and better treatments for more conditions. Information technologies have emerged as a major component of health care for this new century.

Workforce Demand

The health care workforce is an important component of the economic engine in the U.S. representing more than 10.5 percent of all American workers. These workers also generate a large share of the Gross Domestic Product in the country. Hospitals in the United States and in North Carolina are facing a profound shortage of qualified nurses and other allied health professionals. Among the various reasons cited for the shortages include:

- Acuity in hospitals has been rising rapidly due to the declining average length of stay, increased outpatient treatment and home health care, and the use of new technology that allows rapid assessment, treatment and discharge
 - With the declining graduate pipeline, there are fewer professionals to replace those who retire or leave for other opportunities, translating into a substantial and significant increase in retirements over the next ten years
 - Changes in Medicare and Medicaid funding have taken their toll on numerous sectors of the industry, specifically long term care facilities. Both programs, especially Medicare, continue to lower payment reimbursements, even though care costs are rising and the demand for services continues to grow
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Occupations

Approximately half of the fastest growing occupations are related to health care. Among them, personal care and home health aides are among the occupations expected to provide the most job growth. Rapid job growth in the health care industry will continue to be realized in numerous categories and among all levels of training and education. Of occupations nationwide, only about half require education or training beyond high school. However, jobs requiring an associate's degree or higher are projected to grow faster than the average for all occupations and will account for 40 percent of total job growth through 2008. Health care claims 7 of the 25 fastest growing occupations which require a Bachelor's degree or higher and 15 of the 25 fastest growing occupations requiring post-secondary training or Associate's Degree.

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Aging Population

The population as a whole has continued to age and additional health care workers will be needed to serve the growing population. The median age increased from 33.0 in 1990 and 35.9 in the year 2000. The overall potential workforce grew only 19.5 percent, while the elderly population grew by 28.5 percent. The median age will increase to 38.8 years. The population over 65 is projected to grow 72 percent, which is expected to increase the demand for health care services.

Health Promotion

Great emphasis on prevention and health promotion will continue. More and more individuals are participating in complementary and alternative medicine.

- Leading causes of death for all adults (ages 25-44) include unintentional injuries, cancer, heart disease, suicide, HIV and homicide
- Leading causes of death for adults (ages 45-64) include cancer, heart disease, unintentional injuries, stroke, diabetes, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease
- The proportion of nonelderly population without any form of health insurance continues to increase due to the decline in employer-provided coverage

The “Leading Health Indicators” will be used to measure the health of the Nation over the next 10 years. As a group the indicators reflect the major health concerns:

1. Physical Activity
 2. Overweight and Obesity
 3. Tobacco Use
 4. Substance Abuse
 5. Responsible Sexual Behavior
 6. Mental Health
 7. Injury and Violence
 8. Environmental Quality
 9. Immunization
 10. Access to Health Care
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Technology

Information technologies and research will continue as a major component of the health care future and research will continue to make a tremendous impact on health care related services:

- Increased bioethical dilemmas, especially in research, such as in human experimentation, stem cell research, cloning
 - Electronic medical records, access to patients’ confidential information, legislation regarding patient information
 - Telemedicine and telecommunications
 - Use of computer-enhanced and robotic systems
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