

Comprehensive Strategic Action Plan to Increase Supply of Registered Nurses and Nurse Graduates to Meet Healthcare Demands in Texas
Recommended by
Texas Center for Nursing Workforce Studies and
Texas Center for Nursing Studies Advisory Committee

In *The Supply of and Demand for Registered Nurses and Nurse Graduates in Texas* report to the Texas Legislature, the advisory committee to the Texas Center for Nursing Workforce Studies provided the following recommendations and strategies to increase the number of initial RN graduates in Texas:

The Texas Center for Nursing Workforce Studies' (TCNWS) Advisory Committee recommends the following high priority strategies to increase the number of RN graduates in Texas:

1. Recommend that the Texas Legislature appropriate \$52 million in new funds to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB). The THECB will distribute new funds among professional nursing programs to increase the capacity of the state's nursing programs that prepare students for initial RN licensure.

Rationale: In order to meet the projected target number of graduates in 2010 and 2011, \$51,936,122 of additional funding is needed over the next biennium (FY 2008 – FY 2009) to distribute among the 84 initial RN licensure programs in Texas. This funding will allow the professional nursing programs to have the resources necessary to:

- Increase the number of nursing faculty positions.
- Increase the number of initial RN licensure graduates by 50 percent between 2006 and 2010.
- Implement strategies to increase completion rates of initial RN licensure graduates.

The following recommendations include strategies for distributing the new funds to increase the capacity of the state's nursing programs that prepare students for initial RN licensure.

- A. Allocate a portion of the new funds to increase the amount available under the Professional Nursing Shortage Reduction Program. This program provides financial incentives to schools that increase the number of graduates from their professional nursing programs.

Rationale: Increasing the supply of RNs in Texas is of paramount importance. Although both enrollment and completion rates have been

increasing in professional nursing programs, the completion rates need to continue to improve. Nursing students not only need to graduate from a nursing program but also need to pass the licensing examination (NCLEX-RN) to become a registered nurse. These two performance standards should be used to provide a financial incentive to those nursing programs that show evidence that a large portion of their nursing students successfully graduate and are able to pass the NCLEX-RN.

- B. Use a portion of the new funds to provide additional student financial aid for both undergraduate and graduate students successfully pursuing professional nursing degrees in Texas.
 - i. Financial aid and financial incentives could be in the form of reduced tuition, loan repayment programs for graduates who practice nursing or teach in a nursing program, traineeships, grants, tuition rebates, and financial assistance not only for tuition but also for other educational expenses.
 - ii. Financial assistance could also be provided to undergraduate and graduate nursing students who are not eligible for qualified financial aid programs due to their lower-than-minimum required credit hour enrollment or their need for assistance with living and educational expenses.
 - iii. Recipients of traineeships or grants for their graduate degree in nursing could be required to teach full-time for three years or part-time for six years in a professional nursing program in Texas following completion of the traineeship/grant.

Rationale: In the THECB's 2006 study on *Strategies for Increasing Student Completion Rates in Initial RN Licensure Programs*, 54 to 62 percent of the nursing students who participated in this study reported working between 11 and 40+ hours per week while going to school. If nursing students were able to receive financial support, it would attract a higher caliber of students to the nursing programs, would allow students to reduce the number of hours they work per week, and would allow the students to focus more on their nursing education in order to successfully complete the program on-time. Nursing programs also need to increase the number of students enrolled in their graduate programs, more specifically to prepare graduate students to become nurse educators. In the past, traineeships and financial aid helped to recruit more nurses to continue their education at the masters and doctorate levels.

- 2. Recommend that the Texas Legislature establish a separate line item appropriation for the purpose of increasing existing nurse faculty salaries to be competitive with salaries earned by masters and doctorally prepared RNs in the

practice sector. (Based on current 1,600 FTE faculty at \$10,000 increase in salary per faculty member, it is estimated that a total of \$32 million will be needed to increase nursing faculty salaries for the next biennium [FY 2008 – FY 2009]).

Rationale: To increase student capacity in initial RN licensure programs, there needs to be concerted efforts to recruit and retain nursing faculty. In order to do this, nursing faculty salaries need to be competitive with salaries that nurses with comparable educational preparation and experience make in clinical practice areas. In TCNWS' report on *Highlights: Recruitment and Retention of Nursing Faculty*, the faculty salaries in professional nursing programs in Texas were reported to be non-competitive with the salaries of nurses with comparable educational preparation and experience who work in clinical practice areas. The perception that faculty salaries were insufficient was the most frequently cited reason that qualified faculty applicants declined faculty positions. It is also the most frequently cited reason for the turnover of faculty members who left nursing programs to work in higher paying positions.

3. Recommend that the Texas Legislature continue to dedicate tobacco fund earnings from the Permanent Fund for Nursing, Allied Health, and Other Health-Related Education Program to nursing education through fiscal year 2011.

Rationale: The grants from this fund have helped professional nursing programs develop innovative public-private partnerships to recruit and retain nursing students and faculty. Further dedicating funds to nursing education will allow nursing programs to continue to develop innovative strategies to increase capacity while minimizing cost.

In order to address the nursing shortage in Texas and to develop a nursing workforce that can meet the healthcare demand needs through 2020, complex strategies, in addition to increasing the number of new graduates, need to be developed and implemented. The solutions need to be long-term and directed at both recruitment and retention of nurses.

The TCNWS and TCNWS Advisory Committee realizes that, in order to increase the supply of nurses to meet demand by 2020, additional strategies such as retention of nurses need to be implemented. In order to effectively address the nursing shortage, a commitment and partnership should be established among healthcare consumers, the Legislature, state and regulatory agencies, educational institutions, healthcare industry, and healthcare and professional organizations. There are no simple solutions to the nursing shortage. This comprehensive strategic action plan reflects the scope and

complexity of what actions need to be taken to insure that there are enough nurses to provide healthcare to all citizens of Texas.

TO INCREASE THE NUMBER OF RN GRADUATES:

It is recommended that:

1. THECB, BNE and professional nursing programs support educational strategies that increase the number of initial RN graduates who are successful on the licensure examination and are prepared to function competently as professional nurses. Examples of strategies include but are not limited to the following:
 - A. Develop accelerated track in professional nursing programs for students with degrees in other majors besides nursing
 - B. Actively pursue distance education methodologies to improve access to professional nursing programs
 - C. Collaborate with healthcare organizations and use computer technology to maximize use and availability of clinical sites to ensure that all nursing students have increased access to clinical educational experiences
 - D. Develop partnerships among nursing programs, healthcare organizations and businesses in order to share faculty, educational and clinical resources. This partnership would also allow sharing of the cost and use of computer and patient simulation technology, as well as other advanced technology
 - E. Use off-peak periods when additional classrooms, skills labs, and clinical sites are available (e.g., evening, weekend, summer hours) to educate pre-RN licensure students
 - F. Create a full-time Retention Counselor position to identify at-risk students and implement strategies to help at-risk students successfully complete the nursing program.
2. Professional nursing programs streamline administrative processes to ensure that every nursing program seat is filled with the most qualified nursing student.
 - A. Collaborate and share resources in order to establish regional admission centers that can efficiently and effectively expedite the admission process for qualified students.
 - B. Establish a standardized admission application to all nursing programs in Texas for timely placement of qualified applicants in nursing programs who still have space available for admission.
3. Professional nursing programs identify and share best practices for a) predicting success of applicants in nursing programs, and b) increasing the number of initial RN graduates who are successful on the licensing examination.
4. Partnerships be established between professional nursing programs and healthcare organizations to prepare professional nursing students to work as clinical nurse technicians in order for students to obtain additional income and work experience

while maintaining flexible and realistic work hours that will not jeopardize the student's ability to successfully complete the nursing program.

TO INCREASE CAPACITY IN PROFESSIONAL NURSING PROGRAMS:

It is recommended that:

1. Potential faculty members who are not prepared for the nurse educator role take nursing education courses through regular academic programs or online programs provided by the National League for Nurses or the Southern Regional Education Board.
2. THECB, BNE, healthcare and professional organizations encourage education and practice partnerships to support new models of nursing education, including simulated clinical learning, clinical preceptorships and graduate internships.
3. Schools of nursing invest in the integration and shared use of the latest educational technology and use of innovative nursing educational strategies.
4. Schools of nursing use reward and recognition incentives (such as obtaining course credit toward a master's degree in nursing) to expand availability of experienced preceptors.
5. Schools of nursing provide support services to faculty in order to utilize faculty resources in the most effective way.

TO INCREASE RETENTION OF NURSES IN THE NURSING WORKFORCE:

It is recommended that:

1. Healthcare organizations and employers of nurses increase the supply and retention of nurses by regarding them as strategic assets and making positive changes in the work environment. Strategies include the following:^{1,2}
 - A. Provide management training and resources
 - B. Recognize and reward hospitals that attain national/state designation for excellence in nursing retention by establishing an infrastructure and meeting stringent standards to enhance recruitment and retention of nurses to their facility.³
 - C. Set staffing levels based on competency and skill mix applicable to patient mix and acuity according to JCAHO standards and Texas Hospital Licensure rules and regulations
 - D. Measure, analyze and improve staffing effectiveness
 - E. Offer flexible scheduling
 - F. Mentor new graduates and nurses in new and expanding roles
 - G. Promote participation and professional autonomy in clinical decision-making

- H. Build needed competencies and expertise in specialty nursing care and leadership
 - I. Create additional standards for professional practice environments
 - J. Develop and test new care delivery models
 - K. Create work options for older, mature nurses
 - L. Make use of technology that saves time and money, speeds clinical decision-making, and reduces risks of error and injury
 - M. Implement ergonomic and safety improvements
 - N. Minimize the paperwork and administrative burden that takes nursing time away from patient care
 - O. Adopt zero-tolerance for abusive behaviors by physicians and other healthcare practitioners
 - P. Adopt fair and competitive compensation and benefit packages for nursing staff
2. To attract and retain a new generation of nurses and to ensure that the new nursing workforce represents the ethnic and racial diversity of Texas, efforts focus on reinventing nursing education and work environments to address the needs and values of these new workers. Examples of strategies include the following:
 - A. Create new training/educational models and new community-based roles that utilize nurses' unique skills
 - B. Develop replicable demonstration projects to attract and retain men, minorities and special populations such as single mothers, workers displaced from other professions and workers with other degrees who want to make a career change
 3. Employers develop or enhance tuition reimbursement programs and flexible work schedules that promote career pathways for LVNs-to-RNs, RNs-to-BSNs-to-MSNs, MSNs-to-Doctorates, and BSNs-to-Doctorates.

TO DELAY RETIREMENT OF OLDER, EXPERIENCED NURSES FROM THE WORKFORCE:

It is recommended that:

1. Employers of nurses develop a program and strategies to encourage pre-retirement nurses to extend their work-life careers. Some of these strategies include the following:⁴
 - A. Identify technology to boost or maintain productivity. Adjustments, such as allowing more time to learn how to use the technology and larger computer screens in order to read text more easily, should be made for older, experienced staff nurses
 - B. Identify equipment that allows nurses to perform responsibilities with decreased physical effort, such as overhead lifts and patient movers
 - C. Identify nursing positions that are less physically demanding, such as telehealth, telecare and quality management

- D. Develop a plan to address the use of older nurses
 - E. Employ older nurses as clinical leaders to educate the younger workforce
 - F. Institute flexible work schedules and part-time or per diem work. Other creative schedules could include seasonal employment (e.g., working winters with summers off), preferred or flexible work schedules, no weekend shifts
 - G. Provide financial incentives and optimize hourly salary rates to older, experienced staff nurses
 - H. Implement a Less-Work for Less-Pay program (e.g. work four hours per shift and get paid for four hours of work).
 - I. Develop and support health promotion and return-to-work programs (after an employee injury or illness) in order to prevent or treat injuries and medical problems
 - J. Implement strategies to reduce patient care workload that encourage older, experienced staff nurses to stay at the bedside and promote patient safety
 - K. Develop a program for retired nurses to recruit and mentor prospective and new nurses throughout the educational process and the first year of work
2. Schools of nursing design new phased retirement plans that support the inclusion of productive retired faculty, including:
- A. Re-design current faculty workload to accommodate part-time retired faculty
 - B. In addition to teaching, consider other ways that qualified retired faculty might save current faculty time by counseling or tutoring students, supervising in skills labs, mentoring students and/or faculty, assisting with research projects and serving as ambassadors to the community
 - C. As a inducement to participation, create programs that formally include and recognize retired nursing faculty as a continuing productive part of the nursing academic unit
 - D. Cultivate a workplace that is perceived by faculty as positive, productive, enriching and satisfying so that they will be enticed to continue employment longer than originally planned

This comprehensive strategic action plan is available on the TCNWS website at:

<http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/chs/cnws/Npublica.shtm>

Endnotes:

¹ Kimball, B. and O'Neil, E. for The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. *Health Care's Human Crisis: The American Nursing Shortage*. Princeton New Jersey: April 2002.

² Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations. *Health Care at the Crossroads: Strategies for Addressing the Evolving Nursing Crisis*. Chicago Illinois: 2002.

³ Such recruitment and retention programs are the American Nurses Credentialing Center's Magnet Recognition Program® at: <http://www.nursingworld.org/ancc/> and the Texas Nurses Association's Nurse-Friendly™ Designation Program at: <http://www.texasnurses.org/index.htm>

⁴ Strategies listed are based upon what respondents from two studies identified as strategies to encourage older, experienced nurses to delay retirement. For more information, refer to: (1) Leftridge, D. and Jordan, D. Help ease the nursing shortage by retaining senior nurses. *Nursing Management* 2005, 36(7): 14 and (2) Cyr, J.P. Retaining the older hospital nurses and delaying their retirement. *JONA* 2005, 35(12): 563-567.