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Illinois Center for Nursing Registered Nurse Workforce Survey 2014

The purpose of this report is to detail the results from the 2014 Illinois Registered Nurse (RN) workforce survey. The survey was structured to capture data on the demographics, education, state distribution, and practice foci of RNs in Illinois. The survey was conducted during the 2014 Illinois RN licensure renewal period, from 3/6/14 to 5/31/14.   In Illinois, over 90% of individual RNs completed licensure renewal via an on-line platform. When individuals concluded the renewal process, there was a link to the survey along with an explanation of its purpose. The voluntary survey was completed by 52,902 RNs, representing 31% of the total RN population in Illinois.

General overview: Data on the characteristics, supply and distribution of RNs in the State of Illinois is essential to expanding access to care and planning for provision of essential primary and other health care services. This report contains data on the demographics of our current RN workforce, the relative numbers of RNs in each age group, their cultural diversity, and educational preparation.

Aging workforce: The report presents important information about the aging of the RN workforce. Of the respondents polled, 40% are 55-65 years of age or older. One-third of this group has indicated intent to retire within the next five years. Of the respondents who self-identified as working in education, the vast majority are concentrated in the older age group, making it necessary to view these data within the context of our educational pipeline. Of note, currently there are smaller numbers of nurses in the younger age cohorts (25-35 years old) who are entering PhD programs.

Geographic distribution: The report maps out where RNs are practicing within the state. The report finds that the RN density is fairly even between urban and rural areas of the state, with only non-metro areas under 2,500 having a lower ratio of RNs to total population.

Decreased diversity: The data indicate that the cultural diversity of the RN workforce decreases in the younger cohorts, which is of great concern given the increased diversity of our state. Viewing this trend in concert with the decreased number of graduates of associate degree programs (ages 25 and under) cohort (20% of graduates versus 30% in the 35-54 years of age cohorts) raises the question of whether the shift in educational models towards BSN graduates has contributed to the decreased diversity.   An additional area of concern is gender diversity, which is low and decreasing in younger cohorts (7% male in age 25 years and younger).

Specialty foci: The respondents reported that the top five nursing specialties across all age groups are: acute/critical care, medical/surgical, geriatrics and home health. The data also demonstrated the distribution of nurses in specialties by age cohorts, revealing significantly fewer younger nurses in specialties such as psychiatric, school , home health and community health nursing. These trends stand in contrast to the Illinois report, T*he Workforce Implications of New Health Care Models,* which forecasts a significant increase in ambulatory services, as well as a concomitant need for RNs to practice in community based models of care.

Salary, etc: When it comes to salary, the data shows that educational preparation matters.   BSN graduates reported salaries of more than 7% over RNs with associate degrees. Interestingly, experience provides an initial earnings boost with salaries growing by 8-10%. Beyond the first seven years, however, experience does not seem to be associated with significant growth in earnings. RN specialties are also impacted, as RNs specializing in school and community nursing earning substantially less income.

Summary: Collectively, the 2014 Illinois Registered Nurse (RN) workforce survey will prove extremely useful as health care planners project the human health care capital that will be needed in Illinois. The information will allow us to address questions such as, what is the current RN supply and will it be adequate to meet the health care needs of Illinois citizens? Health care workforce planners can help determine and guide educational preparation as to what types of RN (e.g. specialty) will be in greatest demand, as well as the types of specialties and skills required of future models of care.