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Executive Summary

Illinois Nursing Workforce Center Licensed Practical Nurse Survey 2017

This report details the results of the 2017 Illinois Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) workforce survey. The survey was structured to capture data on the demographics, education, workplace settings, and state distribution of LPNs in Illinois. The voluntary survey was conducted during the 2017 LPN license renewal period from 11/7/2016 to 1/31/2017. In 2017 over 88% of Illinois LPNs completed their license renewal via the on-line platform. After the on-line renewal process, including payment of fee, there was a link to the survey along with an explanation of its purpose. The survey was completed by 4,951 LPNs representing 17.7% of the 29,541 total LPNs licensed in Illinois.

General Overview

Data on the characteristics, size, practice foci, educational pipeline and distribution of LPNs in the State of Illinois is essential to planning for provision of essential health care services to many groups of Illinois citizens, particularly the elderly and home bound. This report contains data on the demographics of the current LPN workforce, the relative numbers of LPNs in each age group, their workplace and their plans for retirement; data which is essential for State workforce planning.

Age of the Workforce

Similar to the RN workforce, LPNs are an aging group; 31% of the respondents are between the ages of 55-64 years. Taken together with the 65+ and 45-54 years old age groups, the data indicate that 66.7% of the LPN workforce falls into upper age ranges, which is slightly more than those LPNs who participated in the 2015 survey when 61.8% were 45 years or older. Serious concerns about the capacity of this group to meet future population's health needs surface when one considers that, on the question related to retirement and plans to leave the workforce, 21% of respondents plan to retire in one to five years.

Diversity

The LPN group, particularly in comparison to the RN workforce, is a racially diverse group. Twenty six percent of respondents to the question on race placed themselves in the Black/African American category. Three age-ranges of Black/African American LPNs (35-44, 45-54 and 55-64 years of age) were 25-26% of respondents, which speaks to some consistency in the diversity of this group. Interestingly the Hispanic/Latina percent was highest in the younger years, showing approximately 60% are less than 44 years of age. The gender diversity is low with approximately six percent males, though thirty-nine percent of this group are under 44 years of age. While there is a clear need to increase diversity in the nursing workforce, the LPN group demonstrates some promising trends.

Workplace Settings

Nursing homes/extended care/assisted living environments were the primary workplace settings for close to half of the respondents (47.6%). Another large group of LPNs (11%) practice in home health. Of concern is that approximately 35% of the LPNs who practice in the nursing

homes/extended care/assisted living environment plan on retiring in one to ten years. Demand projections for this workforce depend on the anticipated shift from nursing to home health care for the elderly but long-term employment growth is expected to continue into 2030 (Spetz, Trupin, Bates & Coffman, 2015; HRSA, 2018). Combining workplace setting, age and intent to retire data have clear implications for Illinois workforce planning groups, particularly the need to focus on the nursing home/home health population, its growth, service needs and the demand/workforce capacity imbalance.

Distribution

To determine the distribution of LPNs throughout Illinois, the total number of LPNs in licensure database was used. Illinois counties are the common denominator for geographic information presented. Illinois LPNs are generally clustered in the dense Cook County (36%) population. The ratio of LPNs to population density is lowest in sparsely populated rural counties. Part of this distribution could be a result of the location of Community Colleges and Proprietary Schools that offer an LPN certification in Cook County.

Summary

The LPN survey data indicates a workforce that is aging with a diminishing LPN pipeline to replace these nurses. It is well known that aging of the US population poses particular demands on health care services, one sector being long-term care needs. Recent reports on long term care raise concerns about the quality of these services (Harrington, Wiener, Ross, & Musumeci, 2017). Given LPNs traditional roles in nursing homes/extended care/assisted living environments and home care and the anticipated growth of the elderly population there is an urgent need for work force planning. As we plan for the LPN nursing workforce needed to meet health care demands created by both population shifts and health care transformation, it would be helpful to have a better understanding of the drivers for choosing an LPN certification and how we might optimize each individual's interest in a nursing career.