

Long Term Care Nursing Study 2009

Vermont Health Workforce Assessment Survey

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Why was this survey done?

One factor in assuring access to quality health care for all Vermonters is an ongoing and current knowledge of the state's health workforce resources. To this end, the Office of Nursing Workforce Research, Planning, and Development conducted the Health Workforce Assessment Survey in February, 2009. The following is a report of this survey from 15 of 41 long term care (LTC) facilities surveyed (36% response rate).

Who was surveyed?

In February 2009, The Vermont Health Workforce Survey was sent to all 41 Vermont long term care facility nursing directors. A letter was sent to both the director of nursing and administrator to encourage participation in this important study. In order to increase response rate, follow up postcards and replacement surveys were sent. Only a third of facilities responded to repeated requests; therefore, results should be viewed with caution.

What was learned?

Average Vacancy Rate (Range)

Nurse Managers	14% (0-100%)
RN	.8% (0-29%)
LPN	.7% (0-32%)
MDS Coordinator	7% (0-100%)
LNA	.6% (0-23%)
Quality Assurance	0% (0%)

Average Turnover Rate (Range)

RN	57% (0-225%)
LNA	44% (0-108%)
LPN	.34% (0-86%)
MDS Coordinator	25% (0-100%)
Nurse Managers	16% (0-100%)
Quality Assurance	0% (0%)

Assessing need for nursing positions:

Only one facility reported a greater need for RNs and LPNs than the number of budgeted positions. This is a dramatic change from previous years. The need for RNs with specialized skills was only reported by three facilities.

Hardest positions to fill*

(Average weeks to fill position)

- RN nights (18 weeks)
- RN days (10 weeks)
- LNA nights (8 weeks)
- RN evening (7 weeks)
- LNA days (7 weeks)
- Nurse Managers (7 weeks)

* >50% of respondents reported vacancies in these positions during the past year.

Impact of Shortages

	Never	Several times a year	Monthly	Weekly	Daily	Missing or n/a
Reduced number of staffed beds	67%	13%				20%
Delayed or diverted admissions	60%	20%	7%			13%
Mandatory staff overtime	67%	20%				13%
Decreased patient satisfaction	33%	53%	7%			7%
Increased patient complaints	47%	27%	20%			7%
Decreased staff satisfaction	27%	33%	20%	7%		13%
Curtailed plans for facility expansion	No 93%					7%
Discontinued clinical programs	No 93%					7%

Use of financial recruitment incentives:

- 60% of responding LTC facilities reported starting salaries were adequate for recruiting.
- Two of the responding LTC facilities (13%) reported a pay differential for RN educational preparation.
- Only one of the responding LTC facilities reported a pay differential for credentialed RNs.

Recruitment and retention of nurses age 50+

Efforts to recruit older nurses were reported by 20% of the respondents. Specific efforts to retain older nurses were reported by 27%.

Covering Vacant Positions

The following methods were reported to cover vacant positions:

- per diem or part time staff to pick up shifts
- overtime or bonus pay
- nurse managers to cover shifts
- nurses usually in non-direct care roles cover hours or shifts
- three facilities reported use of agency nurses for a median cost of \$30,000 per year (range \$2,800 to \$419,206)

Conclusions

The results of this survey may not accurately represent the entire Vermont long term care industry due to a limited response rate of 36%. However, using previous Vermont

nursing home demand surveys from 2003, 2005 and 2007 with similar response rates, an improvement in demand for nurses in responding facilities is noted. Across the country, economic conditions in 2009 have caused nurses who were previously working part-time or not at all to return to the workforce, possibly delaying their retirement (Nelson, 2009). This may be true in Vermont's long term care facilities where the vacancy rates for RNs have fallen from 20% (in 2005) to 8% (in 2009).

Positions for RNs, LPNs and LNAs are more available in long term care facilities than in hospitals in Vermont at this time. This may be an ideal time for long term care facilities to develop enhanced orientation programs for new graduates and other nurses without geriatric nursing experience. The Hawaii State Center for Nursing provides an example of a program to retain existing LTC nurses and identify strategies to attract new nurses into geriatrics. This program can be found at: <http://www.hinursing.org/abstract01.htm>.

Vermont's own efforts to enhance LTC recruitment and retention, the statewide Gold Star Employer Program, has attracted national attention and may very well have contributed to decreased vacancies and improved turnover rates.

Nelson, R (2009), Nursing Shortage, or Not? *American Journal of Nursing*, 109 (5), 21-23.