Introduction

The Utah Nursing Consortium is a collaboration of 10 publically funded and nonprofit nursing education programs, health care industry partners and concerned community members. These 10 schools educate over 2/3 of Utah's nursing workforce, graduating over 1200 of the 1600 registered nurses educated annually. The mission of the Consortium is to increase the number of new RNs licensed in Utah each year to meet market demands and continue Utah's legacy of high quality, cost effective health care.

Problem

Utah's population is growing, aging and become more chronically ill. Our need for nurses is particularly acute because we have the fasted growing elderly population, the youngest population, and the lowest death rate in the country (1). Behavioral health is an area where future nurses will be in high demand. Utah has one of the highest age-adjusted suicide rates in the U.S. and has the seventh-highest rate of alcohol poisoning deaths, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. This is a perfect storm to drive demand for nursing care.

Background

According to the Utah Medical Education Council, Utah's health care employers report over 1200 vacancies for RN positions and the capacity to expand their workforces by 8-21%. The greatest future demand for nursing is anticipated in home care, hospice and skilled nursing facility/long-term care organizations. Finally, Utah's nurses are also aging – 48% of the workforce is over the age of 45. (2, 3)

Nurses have a major positive impact on the health of the general population. A recent study documented that counties with higher RN to population ratios are healthier, with lower reports of poor health, higher mammography screening rates and lower teen pregnancy rates. Utah's current nurse-to-population rank is 47. The nursing workforce would need to grow by 20% to rank in the top 25%. (4)

Utah cannot 'recruit' its way out of this workforce issue. The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that there will be 1.2 million unfilled nursing positions nationwide by 2022. Several surrounding intermountain states are already being impacted by these shortages (5).

Nursing is a valued and trusted profession. Each year, over 1000 qualified applicants are turned away from a nursing education and career because of limited class size. The median annual income for an RN is $67,000. (2)

The Utah State Legislature has not made a significant investment in the nursing workforce since 2005, when $2M was provided over 3 years to expand class size in the eight public institutions by about 200. While class size has slowly increased in a few institutions, uniform growth has not been demonstrated across the state since this investment.

Solution

Increase class size by 25% across the 10 Utah Nursing Consortium institutions, producing an additional 350 registered nurses entering the workforce each year.

Provide ongoing funding for the additional nursing faculty needed to accommodate this growth.

Member Schools

Brigham Young University
Dixie State University
Salt Lake Community College
Snow College
Southern Utah University
University of Utah
Utah State University
Utah Valley University
Weber State University
Westminster College

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