

PROJECTED NUMBER OF NURSING STAFF POSITIONS AND VACANCIES IN NURSING FACILITIES: 2008 - 2020

In order to forecast nursing staff shortage in future, AHCA Department of Research has produced a projection of nursing staff positions and vacancies from 2008 to 2020 in nursing facilities. We projected that the total established nursing staff positions in nursing facilities could raise to more than 1,343,000 FTEs in 2020 and total vacant positions will increase to 142,000 FTEs in 2020.

The projection is based on two basic assumptions: overall long-term care (LTC) workforce will increase by two percent annually; and vacancy rates by nursing job categories will be relatively constant for a long time period. Previous studies found that LTC workforce would need to grow by two percent per year from now until 2050 to maintain the current ratio of LTC workers to the elderly population. Previous studies found that LTC workforce would need to grow by two percent per year from now until 2050 to maintain the current ratio of LTC workers to the population age 85 or older (Friedlan, 2004). Some government estimates are slightly higher (Health Resources and Services Administration, 2003). According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), professional LTC direct care workers (registered nurse and licensed practical nurse) increased by 2.3 percent per year during 2003-2006; in the same time period, paraprofessional LTC direct care workers (mainly nursing aides) increased by 1.6 percent annual rate. Total established nursing positions have grown by 1.7 percent annually from 2002 to 2007 according to AHCA 2002 and 2007 vacancy and turnover surveys.

We have used 2007 as the baseline year to forecast number of established nursing staff positions from 2008 to 2020 with two percent annual growth rate for each of all nursing position categories except 'director of nurses'. We also projected number of vacant nursing positions using 2007 vacancy rates for each of five nursing position categories. AHCA 2002 and 2007 nursing staff position vacancy and turnover studies show that nursing staff vacancy rates at national level have remained relatively consistent.

This projection provides a general picture of the future nursing staff needs and shortage in nursing facilities. Some foreseeable and unforeseeable factors in future can affect the accuracy of this projection, though the direction and the magnitude of the effects cannot be predicted with certainty, such as:

- Change of national and state nursing staffing standards
- Medicare and Medicaid reimbursement policies and overall healthcare reform
- Acuity characteristics of nursing facility residents in future
- National and local economies

Continuous effort of conducting survey on nursing staff position and vacancy in nursing facilities could provide timely-updated data to improve the accuracy of this projection.

Reference

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