

WWAMI CENTER FOR HEALTH WORKFORCE STUDIES

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Project Summary

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Washington State Hospitals: Results of 2002 Workforce Survey

Background: The University of Washington Center for Health Workforce Studies and the Washington State Hospital Association collaborated in a staffing survey of Washington’s non-federal acute care hospitals, which employ 37% of non-federal health services employees in the state. The staff data are useful for workforce planning by hospitals as well as by other health employers when direct data from their industries are not available.

Methods: The survey team sent 85 hospitals a five-page questionnaire asking about employment and contracting across 21 occupational categories, level of difficulty recruiting these staff, and level of difficulty credentialing physicians. The response rate was 84%. The team analyzed responses at three levels: state, hospital size, and workforce development area. Values were imputed for non-respondents in order to develop state and regional estimates of vacancies and employment.

Major Findings:

- ✦ Statewide, nursing is the health occupation with the greatest number of vacancies—1,869. But the staff nurse vacancy rate dropped from 11.1% in 2001 to 7.4% in 2002.
- ✦ Occupations with the highest statewide vacancy rates are ultrasound technologist (14.3%), radiographer/radiology technologist (11.3%), nuclear medicine technologist (10.9%), and licensed practical nurse (9.2%).
- ✦ Hospitals reported that it is “very difficult” to recruit radiation therapy technologists (91%); nuclear medicine technologists (91%); ultrasound technologists (88%); specialized radiology technologists (83%); licensed pharmacists (71%); staff nurses (67%); and radiographer/radiology technologists (62%).
- ✦ While all regions of the state reported shortages and difficulty recruiting hospital staff, not all regions are having problems with the same occupations.
- ✦ Anesthesiologists and radiologists are the physician types most difficult to credential.

Occupations Most In Demand at Washington’s Hospitals in 2002

	PERSONS NEEDED	VACANCY RATE
Staff nurses (RNs)	1,869	7.4%
Nursing assistants	219	5.5%
Licensed practical nurses	172	9.2%
Radiographers/radiology technologist	130	11.3%
Licensed pharmacists	111	8.4%
Physical therapists	84	8.0%
Ultrasound technologists	52	14.3%
Nuclear medicine technologists	24	10.9%

Policy Implications: Washington hospitals have unmet demand for many health care occupations. Recognizing that the state’s educational output for many of these occupations has not increased in recent years despite a growth in the population needing health services, many policy makers and planners propose to address the shortages by increasing education capacity. But to prevent future shortages or surpluses, policies should account for other factors affecting health workforce dynamics, including occupational migration, retirement and attrition rates, employee productivity, and demographic and economic trends.

Findings from this study are more fully described in WWAMI Center for Health Workforce Studies Working Paper #79: Skillman SM, Hutson T, Andrilla CHA, Washington State Hospitals: Results of 2002 Workforce Survey, August 2003.

