

Acknowledgements

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In Our Hands

**HOW HOSPITAL LEADERS CAN BUILD
A THRIVING WORKFORCE**

AHA Commission on Workforce for Hospitals and Health Systems

April 2002



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A Letter to the Reader

April 8, 2002

To the reader:

Among the many issues facing the field of health care, none is more important to its long-term future than solving the growing workforce crisis. Fundamentally, good health care is people caring for people. Plus, good hospital care is numerous caregivers in a variety of occupations providing services to patients on an individual, highly personalized basis. The provision of that care is made possible by workers in many fields who support the systems and resources that sustain both patients and caregivers. The work is demanding, but can and should be equally rewarding, because everyone in the hospital is helping to meet a vital human and community need.

Yet, as this report documents, hospitals face a severe shortage of workers that threatens their ability to meet community needs. It is a long-term shortage that is much broader and more severe than the periodic shortages that have been experienced at various times over the past four decades. This current shortage reflects growing demand, shifting demographics, a change in career expectations and attitudes about work, and worker dissatisfaction within health care.

If the shortage is not solved, it is certain to result in a major national health care crisis.

While society has significant responsibility for dealing with this crisis, this report—IN OUR HANDS—recommends bold, innovative changes that hospitals and their leaders must make in order to avert limitations in necessary health care services now and in the future. The report also contains recommendations for others, such as government, which are critical to support the actions of hospital leaders.

The report is organized into an introduction (*A Looming Crisis in Care*) and five chapters:

- **FOSTER MEANINGFUL WORK**
- **IMPROVE THE WORKPLACE PARTNERSHIP**
- **BROADEN THE BASE**
- **COLLABORATE WITH OTHERS**
- **BUILD SOCIETAL SUPPORT**

Each chapter contains strategic recommendations and specific tactical recommendations. The report also includes a Workforce Strategy Map at the end that provides an overview of the recommendations. The report begins with an executive summary that highlights the essential principles that underlie both the strategic and tactical recommendations and ends with a summary of the Commission's fundamental conclusions about the workforce crisis, appendices and an index.¹

IN OUR HANDS presents the basic conclusion of the AHA Commission on Workforce for Hospitals and Health Systems: hospital leaders, including management, trustees, physicians, and others who have the ability to influence the direction of these recommendations, have the primary responsibility for making the changes necessary to attract and retain caregivers and support staff. Others in society, including government, business, and the public at large, have a responsibility to make the supportive and complementary changes that can ensure hospitals' success in this crucial effort.

The Commission believes that bold and innovative action is needed now to ensure a long-term supply of qualified, compassionate, enthusiastic, and satisfied workers for hospitals and the communities they serve. The Commission urges hospitals, associations, schools and universities, foundations, businesses, and government to study the recommendations in this report ... and then act on them.

It's a job we must do together for our communities, for our nation, for our health.

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¹ Appendices are included for:

- The Commission's Charge
- Commissioner Biographies
- Historically Black Colleges and Universities
- Hispanic Serving Institutions

² Mr. Mecklenburg chaired the Commission from November 2001 to April 2002.

³ Mr. Butler chaired the Commission from April 2001 to November 2001.

Executive Summary

Hospitals today face both an immediate need for caregivers and support staff and an even more threatening long-term shortage of qualified workers. The current shortage mirrors many of the characteristics of the workforce shortages hospitals have faced in the past. But this shortage is different because it is the prelude to a long-term shortage that results from four significant demographic and societal trends:

- The U.S. labor force is aging,
- There are fewer potential workers coming behind the aging “baby boomer” generation,
- Careers in health care are seen as less attractive to those entering employment, and
- Many in the current hospital workforce are dissatisfied with their work.

With the demand for hospital services increasing because of a growing and aging population, the workforce shortages facing hospitals present our nation with a potential health care crisis.

The AHA Commission on Workforce for Hospitals and Health Systems believes strong leadership and aggressive action is needed to address the workforce shortage, build a thriving workforce, and avoid a crisis in care. The Commission believes it is hospital leaders—especially boards of trustees and hospital executives—who must address numerous challenges to overcome the shortages. Thus the report is entitled **IN OUR HANDS**.

Some of these workforce challenges are within the hospital and some involve building partnerships with others. To encourage action, the report makes strategic and tactical recommendations for addressing the challenges and offers examples of hospitals already implementing the recommendations. It is hoped that the combination of clearly stated challenges, recommendations, and examples will serve as a catalyst to reduce substantially the current shortages and prevent the developing one.

The recommendations of the AHA Workforce Commission are presented in five chapters, each reflecting a key to solving the workforce crisis in hospitals and health systems:

- 1 Foster meaningful work** by transforming hospitals into modern day organizations in which all aspects of the work are designed around patients and the needs of staff to care for and support them. Workers must find meaning in their work and be supported in their efforts to provide high-quality patient care.
- 2 Improve the workplace partnership** by creating a culture in which hospital staff – including clinical, support, and managerial staff – are valued, have a sustained voice in shaping institutional policies, and receive appropriate rewards and recognition for their efforts.
- 3 Broaden the base** of health care workers by designing strategies that attract and retain a diverse workforce of men and women, racial and ethnic minorities and immigrants, and older workers.
- 4 Collaborate with others** — hospitals, health care and professional associations, educational institutions, corporations, philanthropic organizations, and government to attract new entrants to the health professions.
- 5 Build societal support** for the public policies and resources needed to help hospitals hire and retain a qualified workforce, including adequate payment rates for hospital care; financial support for the introduction of information technology that facilitates improvements in the way hospital work gets done; and regulatory reform that reduces administrative burdens and promotes effective team approaches to providing quality care.