

## HEALTHCARE WORKFORCE DEMANDS

### Scope of the Problem

As the general population ages and the need for healthcare services increases, a growing demand for healthcare workers is stressing the nation's healthcare system. Worker shortages affect many sectors of the economy, but the possibility of a shortage of healthcare workers is of particular concern. The "baby boomers" who work in the healthcare field are approaching retirement age; unfortunately, an inadequate number of young workers are being educated to take their places. Primary among these areas of concern is registered nursing, although increasing demands exist in other fields as well. The impending retirement of healthcare faculty in higher education, especially acute in the area of nursing, is also of concern.

Other factors contributing to an increased demand for healthcare workers include the 24/7 environment of the hospital setting, which is often not palatable to young workers. Additionally, many opportunities outside the traditional hospital setting are now available for nurses and other healthcare workers to pursue.

Experts agree that this demand is different than the cyclical employment ups and downs that have occurred in the past. The aging of the population, the reduction in students selecting healthcare as a field of study and the overall growth in career opportunities for women have all led to a potential decline in the available healthcare workforce.

The shortage of healthcare workers is also affecting care in every setting and is driving up costs for nurses, pharmacists, technicians and others – the people whose skills we rely on to keep the system working for all who need it. Rising wages and salaries account for about three quarters of the increase in the cost of caring for patients in hospitals.

### Utah's Situation

Although Utah's healthcare providers continue to report openings in a variety of professions, Utah has been fortunate in having a large pool of qualified applicants in many of its educational programs. Utah enjoys a high demand for its nursing programs; however, lack of funding for faculty positions to expand these programs has resulted in qualified students being turned away or put on waiting lists. Many of these students choose to pursue other fields of study rather than wait for an opening to become available. Recent budget cuts, reducing faculty positions and student slots, has further exacerbated this problem.

Utah enjoys positive relations between industry, the professions, the educational community and the legislature. It is imperative, however, that these forces work together to find solutions to the growing demand for healthcare professionals. All must work in concert to find workable, long-term solutions.

### Call to Action

An important step in dealing with Utah's healthcare workforce needs is to "fill the pipeline" with qualified workers to replace those leaving the workforce. A major concern in filling this need is increasing the number of qualified nurse educators in Utah. UHA members are committed to will continue their \$1 million donation toward funding nursing education as part of the 2:1 match obtained from the Utah State Legislature.

Utah's hospitals also urge the Legislature to keep this funding "whole" so that we can continue to educate the number of healthcare professionals necessary to meet the increasing demand for healthcare services in our state.