

Commission on Nursing Workforce for Long-Term Care Releases Report Finding LTC Nurse Shortage 'Affects All Geographic Areas, All Types of Providers'

Representatives Lois Capps, Michael Burgess Present Remarks at Capitol Hill Press Conference

The nation faces considerable challenges related to the long-term care nursing work force in terms of recruitment to fill the worsening shortage of nurses and retention of these employees, the National Commission on Nursing Workforce for Long-Term Care said last week. The commission, which was formed in 2003, released a report from its 18-month study of the issue at a press conference held at the U.S. House of Representatives' Cannon House Office Building Terrace.

The commission's report, "[Act Now for Your Tomorrow](#)," gauges that long-term care providers "face a major shortage of nursing staff" affecting "all geographic areas of the nation and all types of providers." The commission notes in its report that the shortage "diminishes quality of care and increases the costs of providing services." The study was commissioned by the American Health Care Association in collaboration with the George Washington University's Wertlieb Educational Institute for Long-Term Care Management and defined the long-term care community as being generally divided into a number of smaller segments, including nursing homes, home health agencies, and assisted living facilities.

Reps. Lois Capps (D-CA) and Michael Burgess (R-TX), both members of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, were present to speak at the press conference. The two representatives described the important role of nurses in the long-term care delivery system as well as the obstacles that plague nurses on the job. Capps, who spent 20 years serving as a nurse, welcomed and praised the work of the commission, stating that the commission's report "should be used as a platform to make the case for action in addressing the long-term care nursing shortage." She said it is "about time we recognize the core role nurses play."

Driving that point home, Burgess -- also a veteran health care professional (he spent 21 years as a doctor) -- maintained that nurses "are on the front line. They are usually the first, and often the last, person who patients see." Speaking about the overwhelming effect on the health care system that is widely anticipated in the coming years with the retirement and advancing age of the baby boom generation, Burgess stated that long-term care "is going to feel the tsunami more than any other industry as the baby-boomers retire."

To address nursing work force problems in long-term care, the commission recommends that partnerships be developed at the national, state/local, and individual facility/provider levels. One recommendation includes establishing state-level workgroups on the long-term care nursing work force to build consensus on strategies for strengthening it and providing leadership for ongoing coordination and communication regarding these strategies.

The commission also recommended creating partnerships between long-term care organizations and nursing programs with the goal of increasing the supply and availability of nurses in long-term care. On the national level, long-term care organizations should develop active working relationships with federal agencies key to the development of the long-term care workforce, according to the commission. Those agencies include the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), the Health Resources and Services Administration, the Employment & Training Administration within the Department of Labor, and the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality.

To recruit and retain a "well-trained and dedicated" nursing work force in long-term care successfully, the commission report stresses that leadership for related efforts must come "from the community itself." In addition, the report emphasizes that long-term care leaders are "the critical factor necessary for not only the development of the commission's broad recommended initiatives, but for the achievement of overarching goals."