

## The Labor Shortage... An Aging Population Compounds the Problem

The shortage of nurses is well known in this country, with journalists and studies foretelling an almost catastrophic shortage as the baby boomers age. What are the real numbers, though?

A recent study by Dr. David I. Auerbach, an analyst with the Congressional Budget Office, and colleagues estimated that the U.S. shortage of registered nurses (RNs) will increase to 340,000 by 2020. Over the next 13 years, the authors estimate the shortage will increase by three times the current rate.


The medical technology field is not facing as serious a shortage, according to experts in the field. Many departments, though, are stretched thin because of budget constraints and struggle to meet the minimum job responsibilities when staff are in training. And they look to nurses—who are in short supply—to help take care of the equipment and troubleshoot problems. As Pat McCartney, RNC,


PhD, FAAN, says, “we could all learn how to take better care of equipment so it doesn’t end up needing repair as often as it does.”

Is the nursing shortage due solely to a lack of interested students? A study conducted by the American Association of Colleges of Nursing says no. According to the study, U.S. nursing schools turned away 42,866 qualified applicants from baccalaureate and graduate nursing programs in 2006 due to insufficient number of faculty, clinical sites, classroom space, and clinical preceptors, as well as budget constraints.

Hospitals, educational institutions, and even the federal government are taking steps to address this shortage through more flexible education opportunities, grants and other funding, and even a national media campaign called *Nurses for a Healthier Tomorrow*. And Auerbach’s study notes that more people are entering the profession later in life and from different segments of the population than they have in past decades.

The study, entitled *Better Late Than Never: Workforce Supply Implications of Later Entry into Nursing*, is available at <http://content.healthaffairs.org/cgi/content/abstract/26/1/178>.





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