Connecticut's Nursing Workforce Supply Data Findings Require Prompt Attention

The numbers leave little doubt that attention and systemic actions are required to address the nursing workforce challenges in Connecticut.

In 2022, Connecticut reported 89,819 active licenses for Registered Nurses, but only about half that number -45,014- are actively employed in a nursing capacity in Connecticut. This is according to a just-completed analysis by the CTData Collaborative and The CT Center for Nursing Workforce, Inc. in September 2023.

Nursing is the single largest job category within the field of healthcare. Licensed nurses provide high-quality, safe, and compassionate care within hospitals, long-term care facilities, homecare settings, and schools, as well as within community-based agencies throughout Connecticut. It is imperative that Connecticut adopt data-driven strategies to inform programming and innovative solutions to support a robust and sustainable nursing workforce to meet the healthcare needs of all Connecticut residents.

It is easy to assume that with more than 89,000 licensed Registered Nurses (RNs), Connecticut has more than a sufficient number of RNs to handle the increased need for care due to the aging of the Connecticut population and anything else that comes our way. Yet, we now understand, conclusively, that assumption would be wrong.

That is not the only alarm bell ringing. The data indicates that of the working RNs totaling 51,154, the age range comprises five generations from ages 20 to 96, with a median age of 47; and that 46% of the working RNs are 50 years and older.

The largest age group of working RNs is between 30-39 at 23% or 11,626; followed by 22% between the ages of 50-59; and most alarming, is that only 11% of the total pool of employed RNs are between the ages of 20-29. Connecticut does not have nearly the number of younger nurses needed to replace those who will be retiring within this decade.

Based on the 2020 Census data, Connecticut is tied for 14th as a state with the oldest population in the nation. It is reported that 18.2% of the population is over the age of 65, which underscores the need for medical professionals, particularly nurses, in a variety of settings from hospitals to home care. Yet, as the population grows older, the number of nurses is not keeping pace, and many hospitals and healthcare facilities are experiencing double digit vacancy rates.

The Connecticut Center for Nursing Workforce, Inc. (CCNW) and the CTData Collaborative (CTData) have partnered in recent years and issued a report entitled, **"Understanding Connecticut's Nursing Workforce- Who's Caring for You?"**. In that report, the findings highlighted the importance of devoting state resources to better understand the education, supply, and demand dynamics for nursing professionals to ensure that our State can produce the numbers and types of nurses that we will need to provide safe and quality care to our residents. That imperative is even more acute today.

There are numerous work settings in which RNs can become employed. The following highlights the work settings of Connecticut's employed RNs:

- Acute Care Hospital (42%)
- Other (11.5%)
- Ambulatory Care (11.1%)
- Nursing Home/Extended Care/Assisted Living Facility (6.4%)
- Home Health (5.7%)
- Insurance Claims/Benefits (5.5%)
- School Health Service (3.7%)

- Community Health (3.7%)
- School of Nursing (2.1%)
- Public Health (1.2%)
- Occupational Health (0.6%)
- Correctional Facility (0.6%)
- Policy/Planning/Regulatory (0.1%)

Did not respond (5.8%)

The full report highlighting the nursing supply data analyzed by CCNW and CTData in Connecticut can be found at https://www.ctdata.org/nursing-2022. The report underscores that for CT to systematically address its nursing and healthcare workforce challenges, we need better administrative data. The current data is collected annually through an online survey for licensure renewal and initial license activation. The survey is lengthy, and questions are not required which leaves many of the critical questions unanswered. It is a missed opportunity to collect a critical set of data to make effective workforce planning decisions.

In addition, Connecticut must take the next step and engage in implementing, collecting, and analyzing findings from a statewide employer demand study to identify those nursing and healthcare roles that are most in demand so priorities can be identified, and resources aligned. However, the State has not shown an interest in conducting a demand survey of healthcare employers that would provide a holistic picture of the workforce to better understand if we have the workforce to meet our state's healthcare needs.

The last statewide demand survey was conducted in 2019 by CCNW. The CCNW led and funded the efforts of implementing a statewide employer demand study; and collaborated with the four statewide healthcare trade associations, and the five workforce development boards to operationalize this "first of its kind" statewide nursing and healthcare workforce demand study. Results from this study can be found at http://www.ct.sentinelnetwork.org. The results not only shared that various nursing roles were the most in demand but identified twelve other healthcare roles which needed immediate attention. A sample of the qualitative data revealed that for Acute Care Hospitals alone, employers indicated that (18) individual occupations were experiencing "exceptionally long vacancy" periods before hire. Considering that these data were captured BEFORE the Covid-19 Pandemic, one can only imagine the current time period to fill these vacant nursing and healthcare positions.

Connecticut must capitalize on using the available data to make informed, data-based decisions to address our nursing and healthcare workforce challenges. To view previously published Nursing Supply & Education Reports from CCNW, visit https://www.ctcenterfornursingworkforce.com/data-reports.html. To view previously published reports from the CTData, visit: *http://nursing.ctdata.org*.

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