

Impact on the Nursing Industry as a Result of The Physician and Nursing Shortage

We are living in a time where everyone lives longer and the population consistently is increasing, which means the demand for educated physicians, nurse practitioners and physician assistants are drastically increasing. While the demand for physicians, nurses and doctors is consistently increasing, the supply of these highly educated jobs is not increasing as much as it needs. We have a continuous focus on addressing population health goals like reducing tobacco use and obesity, which means we live longer and need more educated people in the health and nursing industry. This is leading to a serious shortage of these positions in the very near future. In this article we will go more in depth with the predicted physician shortage, reasons for this shortage and the impact this shortage will have on the nursing industry.

The predicted physician shortage

In the United States there will be a shortage of 122,000 physicians by 2032, according to new data by the [Association of America Medical College](#).¹ This is as mentioned because of the rapidly growing demand for physicians, that simply is outgrowing the supply. This trend is the same all over the world, and it is not only in the US that this is going to be a problem. In the report by the Association of America Medical College the key findings are:

- A predicted shortage of physicians up to 121,900 by 2032 in the US alone.
- The main reason for the shortage is a growing and aging population.
- The supply of nurses and physicians is increasing, but not at a fast enough pace.
- Our improved and innovative health care delivery systems that will improve overall health population will not reduce the predicted physician shortage.
- Currently, the US would need 95,900 doctors immediately to remove this problem.
- Underserved and poor areas will experience the shortage more, but the shortage will be felt everywhere.

Reasons for the pending nursing shortage

There are many different factors that are the reason behind the nursing shortage throughout the world. Among the factors are a pipeline of new nurses that has been diminishing because of an educational shortage, drastic population growth throughout the world, more people can afford using physicians and nurses, and the baby boom bubble that now will result in a huge amount of people needing intensive health care services. All while we have reached a point where a significant number of nurses are starting to retire.

The chief of clinical operations for the [SCP](#) thinks a huge problem also will be the time it takes to ramp up the supply of physicians.² In other words, a significant challenge is the fact that we are in huge need for healthcare workers as a result of the demographic changes, but it takes a long time to train and educate new nurses, physicians and in general health care workers to fill the shortage.

¹ <https://www.aamc.org/news-insights/press-releases/new-findings-confirm-predictions-physician-shortage>

² <https://www.scp-health.com/providers/blog/nursing-shortage-effect-on-the-health-care-industry-current-trends-future-growth>

Another significant reason is a scarcity of nursing school faculties, and perhaps the most critical reason for the shortage. In the US alone, more than 70,000 qualified applicants for nursing programs are turned away simply because the number of faculties and their budget constraints prevents the faculties from educating these applicants. This is of course a serious problem, when schools are turning away applicants when we need them the most. Additionally, the following factors have indirectly increased the nursing faculty shortage:

- Lower salaries for educators than clinicians
- An age-delayed trend of nurses getting higher levels of education
- Inability to hire and fill faculty roles due to low salaries to educators
- A significant amount of employed nursing educators is about to retire

There are several other factors that directly are negatively affecting the nursing shortage. First of all, there is hospital acuity. A rise in hospital acuity as a result of patients decline in average length of stay and innovative technology allows for faster assessment, treatment, and discharge. Additionally, there is the aging population. In the coming years, a significant amount of the Baby Boomers will reach retirement, which only will drastically affect the need for healthcare and physicians.

While many Baby Boomers are reaching retirement, so is the nursing workforce. Currently, 55% of the nursing workforce is 50 years or older. In other words, more than half the workforce of healthcare employees are set to retire in the next 10-20 years. At the same time, schools aren't educating enough healthcare workers. This combination can only end up in an increased and significant shortage of healthcare workers.

Last but not least, there is the workload and work environment for health care workers. The health care industry is already in itself a tough industry to work in. Many physicians and nurses are stressed and cannot handle the strong pressure of working in this industry. Additionally, the shortage of physicians and nurses have resulted in hospitals being forced to implement overtime policies and require workers to work even more, in order to be able to handle the number of patients that are being admitted. This only results in more nurses and physicians being stressed. All in all, the increased workload and tough work environment leads to many considering if they should remain in the nursing profession.

So, while we are in a need of more physicians and nurses, not enough are being educated, many are about to retire, and many are leaving the industry because of the workload and work environment. One thing is the fact that we are going to experience a shortage of physicians and nurses, but what impact will that have on the nursing industry?

Impact on the nursing industry

The nursing shortage will have many different effects on the nursing industry, but mainly on patient care. The main goal with is of course always to deliver as good a quality as possible to the patients. The shortage of nurses, physicians and medical doctors will, however, have a negative

impact on the quality that patients can expect. As a result of the shortage, nurses more often than not have to work longer hours and often under conditions that are very stressful. This results in the workers being fatigued, injured and in general a lower dissatisfaction. Naturally, this is not ideal. Nurses and physicians suffering from these factors will be more likely to make medical errors and mistakes. A result and negative outcome of this is that the patient will experience a lower quality. The lower quality will come from several different complications like medication errors, overcrowding in the emergency rooms, and other mistakes. This is especially unfortunate as all of these mistakes are completely preventable if we solve the shortage issue.

There are several different initiatives that can be used to solve the nursing shortage problem. These include:

- More funding options: There is an increased need for funding options for nursing education, so that educational institutes can push out the needed amount of these different job categories.
- Higher wages for these critical jobs: Making the different nursing jobs more attractive by increasing the wages will naturally result in more people seeking to get this kind of job. In order for this to work, however, the educational institutes will need to be able to handle the increased number of applications.
- Increased percentage of minorities: Improving the culturally sensitive care by increasing the number of minorities who end up working as a healthcare worker can improve the work conditions and quality.
- Hiring foreign nurses: Some countries are very good at educating skilled healthcare workers. Countries that are about to experience a shortage of nurses and physicians could tackle this problem by hiring more foreign nurses.

Final thoughts

There is no doubt that the world will experience a shortage of nurses, physicians and medical doctors. While this is certain, there are many different reasons for this shortage. We are in a need of these types of healthcare workers immediately, but it takes a lot of time to increase the supply, and the supply simply will not be able to follow the ever-increasing demand. An unfortunate result of this is that patients will experience the reduced quality that the healthcare workers are able to deliver. Luckily, there are many different potential solutions for this problem. These solutions will not be able to completely remove the problem, but they can significantly reduce how big a problem it is going to be.