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## Donna Hartweg Discusses Nurse Shortage

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Governor Rod Blagojevich has picked a nurse educator from Bloomington Normal for a Blue chip board to address the nursing shortage. WGLT's Charlie Schlenker has more...

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Charlie Schlenker: The state earlier this year formed a new Illinois Center for Nursing to help address the projected 20,000 body shortfall of nurses expected by the year 2020. On the center's advisory board is Donna Hartweg, the Director of Illinois Wesleyan University School of Nursing. 20,000 people is an awfully large shortage to address especially since loud alarms about the shortage have been sounding for at least a decade now and there's been relatively little improvement in the pipeline.

Donna Hartweg: One of the things that we're trying to understand is not only the need for nurses and looking at that 20,000 person number, but we're also concerned about accrete projections for the demand for nursing because with the Baby Boomers requiring more health care, we expect that there could be an increase of at least 31% in the demand. If we have a 4% decrease in the number of nurses but over a 30% increase in demand, obviously we have some very serious problems.

Charlie Schlenker: You're expecting 4% from retirements or attrition in the field or what?

Donna Hartweg: We're actually producing more nurses now than we were a few years ago but right now we're expecting a major problem with the education of nursing students because the average age of a nursing faculty in this country right now is almost 56 and with that, we're expecting that half of all nursing faculty in the country will retire in the next ten years.

Charlie Schlenker: And that's complicated by the fact that the growth in advanced practice nurses is draining faculty because their salaries are more attractive than nursing faculty salaries, how do you address that?

Donna Hartweg: Well I think the governor has a nice proposal this year by promoting additional stipends to try to decrease that gap a little bit for at least a few faculty but I think we're going to have to look to the remuneration of faculty in a number of ways. One of the things he's also posing that we'll be doing on the center is managing scholarships for nursing faculty as well as looking at loan forgiveness for nursing faculty, so as there are more resources in many different ways for nursing faculty, I think that gap will decrease a little bit. What we saw with the increase in nurse practitioners and other practitioner fields is increased interest at the advanced practice level whether it was nurse anesthesia, nurse practitioners, etc. and with that, fewer and fewer master's-prepared nurses actually began to look at education as an option. And because there's a lot of satisfaction with those advanced practice roles, we don't see folks coming back into education.

Charlie Schlenker: What are some ideas to manage and tweak the supply of nurses?

Donna Hartweg: A lot of states have tried a lot of different things. One is recruitment into nursing and I think we are seeing a surge in interest in nursing thanks to a national blitz, media blitz really, by Johnson & Johnson. I'm—you probably have seen a lot of those ads on television at key periods of time with advertising. I think there are other things that are affecting that. For some really, I think, tops students we're seeing that students who for a while were interested in medicine have not been quite as interested in medicine as some of the issues around managed care have come out. Some dissatisfaction in the medical field I think has led to people beginning to look a little bit more at nursing, so there's a lot of societal factors that affect people's interest. A number of programs have something called accelerated programs, which is taking individuals who have graduated in Biology or even Art, Geology, whatever it is, from an undergraduate program and then creating accelerated programs to get them through the baccalaureate rather than having them go back through and get a second baccalaureate degree. That's just one piece of it though. One is the retention in nursing, and the last state report for Illinois as well as for other national reports are showing that nurses who are out in the field under the age of 30 really have interest in maybe leading the field, particularly in high-stress areas such as critical care and hospital—some hospital-based areas, so you can't just look at recruiting them in, you have to create new practice models in hospitals, in delivery of care to the elderly, that retain nurses who went into nursing for a specific reason but, you know, you've got to keep them in there, so we have to make some changes in practice too.

Charlie Schlenker: Donna Hartweg is a newly-appointed member of the advisory board for the Illinois Center for Nursing. She's also a member of the BroMenn Healthcare System board of directors. I'm Charlie Schlenker, WGLT News.