Report: Employers Surveyed on Activities to Promote Advanced Education and Diversity in their Nursing Workforce

Boston, Mass. – According to a recent study of Massachusetts health care employers, 90 percent of acute care hospitals have a formal goal to increase the proportion of nurses with bachelor’s degrees (BSN) in their workforce, but fewer than half require new hires or current nursing staff to achieve that level.

The 2013 survey of Massachusetts health care employers – acute care and community hospitals, skilled nursing facilities, and visiting nurse associations – provides an overview of the various activities employers are undertaking to promote advanced education and diversity in their RN workforce.

Massachusetts has set a goal of boosting the percentage of nurses with bachelor’s degrees (BSN) from 55% to 66% by 2020. Studies show that higher proportions of BSN-prepared nurses are associated with lower rates of medication errors and mortality. Research also shows that BSN-prepared nurses have stronger critical thinking skills and make better care decisions.

The findings were released in the MA Action Coalition’s Report on Employer Practices Survey Results, prepared by a team of nurse practice leaders and nurse educators convened by the Massachusetts Action Coalition (MAAC). With the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education and the Organization of Nurse Leaders of MA & RI as co-leaders, the MAAC is engaging health care providers, nurse educators, and public sector leaders to effect and support changes in how nurses are educated, trained, and practice in order to better serve the health care needs of the Commonwealth.

The report’s key findings include:

- The overwhelming majority of hospitals surveyed have established a goal for increasing the proportion of BSN nurses in their workforce, yet far fewer have policy requirements for advancement of RN education of new hires or incumbent workers.
- The majority of hospitals offer financial assistance to nurses actively progressing to the BSN or higher. Tuition reimbursement was the most common assistance, with most employers prorating reimbursements for part-time nurses.
- 90% of hospitals reported offering work-life support for nurses pursuing the BSN, such as flexible scheduling with time off for class (65%), library resources (55%) and technology assistance (45%).
- On average, hospitals that reported a formal relationship with a college or university nursing program reported a higher percentage of BSNs in their workforce compared to hospitals without this formal partnership.
- 83% of hospitals report that recruitment and retention were the main focus of their academic progression and workforce diversity efforts.
- Just over a quarter of respondents (28%) reported an institutional goal to increase the diversity of the nursing workforce. Magnet and teaching hospitals were more likely to have a goal to promote diversity compared to community hospitals. Among those without a goal, the vast majority stated that their workforce (not specifically RN workforce) already reflected their patient demographics.
- Post-acute, skilled nursing facilities and visiting nurse associations are struggling with increasing the academic preparation of their RN staff. Resources for incentives in these settings are not as generous as those offered by acute care hospitals. It was reported that there is a lack of policies, goals, infrastructure and resources.