

WISCONSIN HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION, INC.



October 1, 2010

To: Legislative Council Study Committee on
Health Care Access – Representative Fred Kessler, Chair;
Senator Luther Olsen, Vice-Chair

From: Judy Warmuth, Vice President, Workforce

Re: Workforce Shortages in Primary Health Care Providers in Wisconsin

This study committee has heard about the current and predicted future shortage of physicians – rural and urban, specialist and primary care. Beyond these shortages, the Wisconsin Hospital Association (WHA) has concerns about similar current and predicted shortages of physician assistants, advanced nurse practitioners, nurse faculty, and nurse leaders; each of which poses unique challenges to Wisconsin's healthcare workforce.

When asked, our member hospitals indicate that positions for physician assistant and nurse practitioner high on the list of those most difficult to fill. Nurse practitioners are registered nurses with advanced education that provide direct care and treatment to patients. Physician assistants are healthcare professionals licensed to practice medicine with supervision of a physician. These practitioners provide care in office settings, but also work in emergency rooms, urgent care and inpatient settings. Health care organizations are finding new and essential roles for nurse practitioners and physician assistants, which is accelerating the demand for these professionals.

Nurse practitioners and physician assistants are well received by patients. They achieve good clinical outcomes and can be educationally prepared in much less time than a physician. But with the increase in demand for their skills, they have become much more difficult to find, recruit and hire.

Programs that prepare these practitioners are clustered in the southern portion of the state. Graduates have often only had clinical learning experience in metropolitan areas, with a result that they are less likely to be familiar with and look for work in central and northern Wisconsin regions. While recruiting these professionals is difficult in all areas, hospitals report having the greatest difficulty finding them in these parts of the state. The future health of rural Wisconsin in particular requires all of us to do a significantly better job at preparing professionals interested in and willing to practice in rural health care.

Physician Assistants (PAs) There are currently three educational programs in Wisconsin that graduate physician assistants: UW-Madison, UW-LaCrosse and Marquette University. A fourth program is being developed by Carroll University in Waukesha. At the end of the 2007-2009 biennium, the Wisconsin Department of Regulation and Licensing reported 1,807 licensed PAs. Physician assistants work in rural and urban settings, in physician office practices and in hospitals. The Office of Economic Advisors, Department of Workforce Development (DWD), predicts 27 percent growth in positions for PAs between 2008 and 2018.

Advanced Practice Nurses (APNs) Generally, APNs are nurses with graduate education that provide care directly to patients. In Wisconsin, APNs are not licensed as a separate group, but certified by their professional associations. For that reason, it is unclear exactly how many are practicing in the state. A close estimate is the number certified by the Department of Regulation and Licensing (DRL) as advanced practice nurse prescribers (APNPs). Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists, Certified Nurse Midwives, Clinical Nurse Specialists and Nurse Practitioners are all eligible to be APNPs. At the end of the 2007-2009 biennium, the DRL reported 3,146 APNPs. All the APN specialties listed above are difficult to recruit and hire in Wisconsin.

While PAs and APNs are used throughout Wisconsin, they are often critical providers in parts of the state where access to physicians is limited. Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists offer an example. In most of Wisconsin's rural hospitals, they are the sole provider of anesthesia services.

Nurse Faculty and Nurse Leaders Two other types of nurses with Master's or greater degrees are those nurses that teach in nursing programs and those in leadership positions in clinical facilities. Both are also in short supply and difficult to recruit. The Committee has previously heard a report from Dr. Marilyn Kaufman about the shortage of nurses prepared at both the doctoral and Master's level that are needed to serve as faculty in the more than 40 nursing programs based in Wisconsin. Over the past 8 years, eight new nursing programs have opened in Wisconsin, and all of the existing programs have expanded capacity. While great news for employers and residents as Wisconsin has steadily grown its RN workforce, the demand for faculty has increased with this growth. In her report, Dr. Kaufman indicates that the vacancy rate for full-time nurse faculty with a PhD in Wisconsin now stands at 26%. This is very serious statistic that will clearly impact the ability of nursing programs to continue educating the direct care nursing workforce needed in Wisconsin, as well as the four types of Master's prepared nurses described above.

Hospitals also report to WHA that chief nursing officers, directors of nursing, and often nurse managers are expected to hold a Master's degree. It is unknown how many nurses currently hold these positions. Again, hospitals report these positions as hard to recruit and fill.

There are twelve programs in Wisconsin that prepare nurses at a Master's degree level and higher. Included with this testimony is a map showing the location of all nursing

programs in the state. The Office of Economic Advisors does not report on specific nursing positions, but does expect greater than 19 percent growth in RN jobs in Wisconsin in the decade between 2008 and 2018.

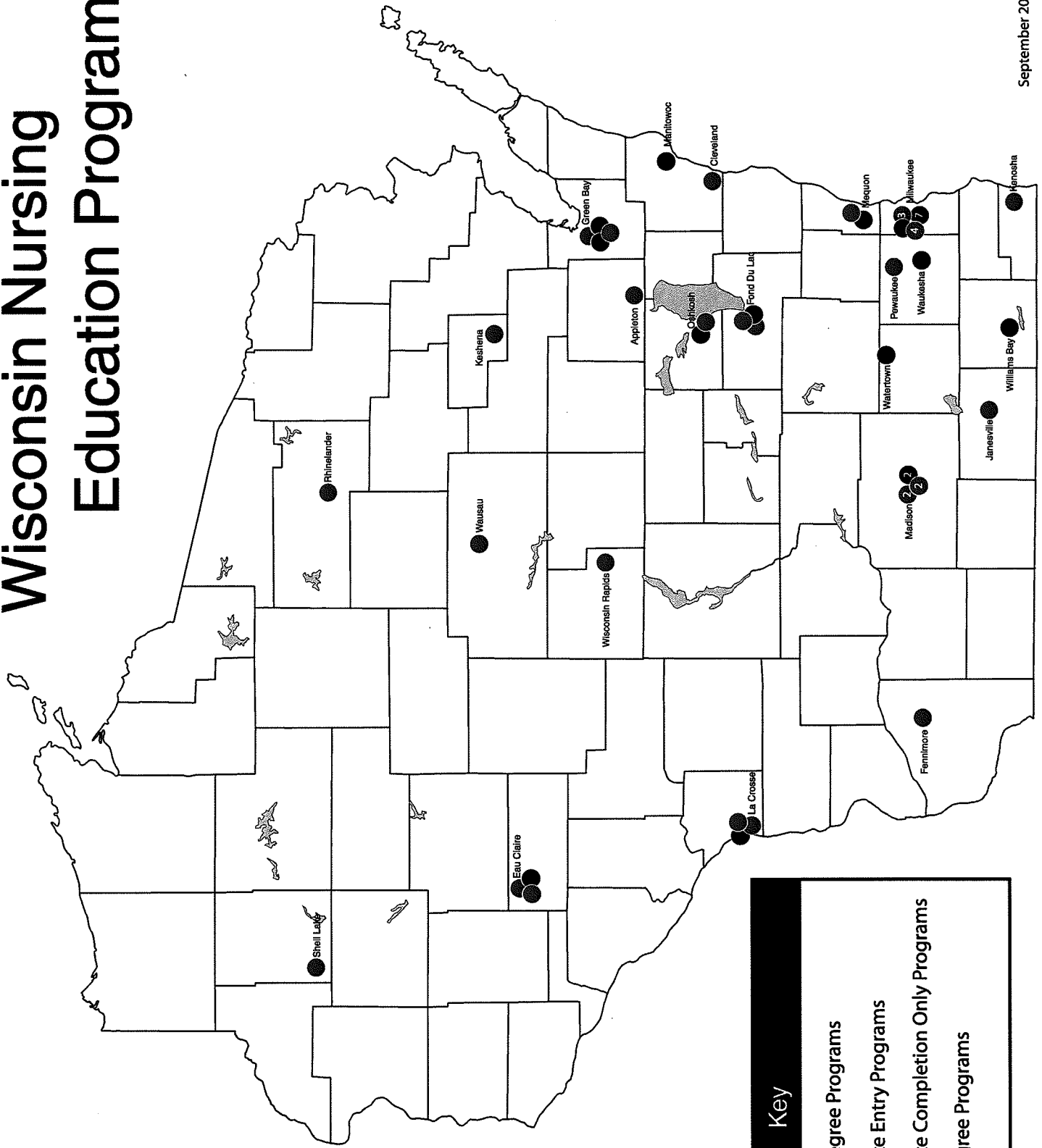
Access to health care in Wisconsin will hinge on our state's ability to have an adequate supply of physicians. But it clearly also requires more physician assistants, advanced practice nurses, nurse leaders and nurse faculty. These practitioners are already in scarce supply and the number of positions open to them is predicted to grow significantly by 2018. Our educational system is not meeting current demand and is unlikely to meet the predicted future growth.

What needs to be done?

- Increase the number of Physician Assistants and Master's prepared nurses in Wisconsin.
- Assure that new and existing programs for these professionals provide the opportunity for clinical experiences in rural and urban care delivery models.
- Encourage current employees and new graduates to practice in Wisconsin.
- Offer support for Bachelors of Science-prepared nurses to obtain a Master's degree.
- Require a workforce survey for all health professions at time of license application and assure the capacity and ability to use survey data to forecast our workforce supply and demand.

WHA looks forward to the opportunity to work with all interested stakeholders to address these and other critical issues related to improving and expanding Wisconsin's healthcare work force.

Wisconsin Nursing Education Programs



Key

- Associate Degree Programs
- Baccalaureate Entry Programs
- Baccalaureate Completion Only Programs
- Master's Degree Programs