

From Bill Applegate via Kathy Murphy:

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301-443-3376

Nursing Workforce Expands as Average Age of RNs Increases, HRSA Survey Finds

The number of licensed registered nurses (RNs) in the United States grew by almost 8 percent between 2000 and 2004 to a new high of 2.9 million, but the average age of the RN workforce continues to increase, according to a report just released by HRSA.

The report, called The Registered Nurse Population: Findings from the March 2004 National Sample Survey of Registered Nurses, includes data comparisons from seven recurring surveys, 1980 through 2004. The 2004 survey found that real earnings for RNs grew significantly for the first time in over a decade.

“While we are encouraged by the growth in the number of RNs, we are concerned about the aging of the nursing workforce and how this will impact the future supply of nurses,” said HRSA Administrator Betty Duke. “The survey is a valuable tool in keeping these trends on the nation’s radar screen.”

The average age of RNs climbed to 46.8 years in 2004, the highest average age since the first comparable report was published in 1980. Just over 41 percent of RNs were 50 years of age or older in 2004, a dramatic increase from 33 percent in 2000 and 25 percent in 1980. Only 8 percent of RNs were under the age of 30 in 2004, compared to 25 percent in 1980.

The survey also found that:

- * More than 83 percent of RNs with active licenses were employed in nursing in 2004, the highest employment rate since 1980.
- * Average annual earnings for RNs in 2004 were \$57,785. In comparable dollars over time, RNs’ salaries rose almost 14 percent since 2000, the first significant increase in “real” earnings since 1992.
- * The number of RNs with master’s or doctorate degrees rose to 376,901 in 2004, an increase of 37 percent from 2000, and up from 85,860 in 1980.

Published every four years by HRSA’s Bureau of Health Professions, the survey is the preeminent source of statistics on trends over time for the nation’s largest health profession. Data in the survey cover educational background, practice specialty areas, employment settings, position levels, job satisfaction and salaries, geographic distribution, and personal demographics such as gender, racial/ethnic background, age and family status.

To order a copy of the survey report, contact the HRSA Information Center online at <http://ask.hrsa.gov> or call 1-888-ASK-HRSA. For more information on HRSA’s health professions programs, visit www.bhpr.hrsa.gov.

