

NEWS RELEASE

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SURVEY: CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES UNABLE TO TRAIN ENOUGH ALLIED HEALTH WORKERS, DESPITE STUDENT DEMAND AND WORKFORCE NEEDS

Partnerships with Health Providers Could Expand College Capacity to Train Workers, According to Eight in 10 Deans Surveyed

SAN FRANCISCO — A survey released today of deans of allied health programs at California community colleges casts new doubts on the state's ability to produce the health care workers it will need in coming years. The survey, conducted in November and December 2010 by Goodwin Simon Strategic Research, includes individual phone interviews with 33 deans of the nearly 100 health programs at community colleges around the state and was funded by a grant to Fenton Communications from The California Wellness Foundation.

The survey focused specifically on programs for the approximately 50 allied health professions (such as laboratory and x-ray technicians, nursing aides, respiratory therapists and medical secretaries) that make up 60 percent of all health jobs.

In September 2009 *Help Wanted*, a report by Beacon Economics (also funded by a grant to Fenton from The California Wellness Foundation) found that California's allied health industry will be a key driver of economic growth, with a collective earning power of more than \$116 billion and generating \$9.6 billion in payroll taxes by 2030. Currently, the allied health sector in California employs more than 600,000 workers earning \$23.3 billion in wages.

Help Wanted also revealed that California will need approximately 988,000 allied health workers by 2030, yet the state's education system is only on track to train 634,000 allied health workers.

The new survey of college deans confirms this trend, despite the fact that these programs offer much promise: **72 percent of deans report that allied health training programs are their school's most sought after**, and **97 percent report that those graduates are usually successful in finding employment** in their field.

Yet **only six percent of colleges were able to accept all qualified applicants** for allied health programs in 2009 and 2010, and only one in four accepted all or most. In fact, **one in four community colleges had to eliminate one or more allied health training programs** during the past two years, while one out of five reduced the number of slots in their programs.

"It is clear from our interviews that community colleges have struggled during the economic downturn to offer students – and employers – all the programs they would like," said Amy Simon, lead researcher and partner at GSSR. "And while deans also recognize that there is a demand from both students and the economy to increase the number of allied health professionals, they don't indicate that this will be easy."

When asked why colleges had to turn qualified applicants away, a majority of deans cited a lack of funding as "extremely" or "very important" (64 percent), in addition to the specific **lack of**

clinical space to help students finish their coursework (53 percent) and **lack of funds to hire instructors** (57 percent).

According to deans, said Simon, “One potential solution to the lack of clinical space and instructors is through increased partnerships with health providers, who can offer both – and will be the beneficiaries of a well-trained workforce once the economy recovers.” **Sixty-five percent of deans said that too few partnerships with health care providers were an extremely or very important reason why they had to reject qualified applicants.**

Some public-private partnerships already exist throughout the state, where health providers provide various supports, equipment, and/or expertise to local colleges to help them increase the training capacity of their allied health programs. For example, MemorialCare, a not-for-profit health care system that includes four Southern California hospitals, realized that nearly half of its respiratory therapists were nearing retirement. Meanwhile, Orange Coast College, the Costa Mesa community college that supplies all the county’s respiratory therapy graduates, lacked clinical instructors.

Through a partnership, MemorialCare now provides and pays for a respiratory therapist instructor and also has helped with student recruitment and stipend processes, and economic assistance for qualified students who work for them for at least two years. OCC, in return, expanded the number of students in the program to meet the hospitals’ needs. In addition to producing 24 additional graduates between 2008 and 2009, MemorialCare estimates that hiring OCC graduates instead of contractor replacements will save nearly \$1.4 million in four years.

“We’re all in this together, so we need to work together to collectively solve the short-term shortages of seats for aspiring college students and the long-term shortages projected in our health professions,” said Kevin Ballinger, the dean of the consumer and health sciences division at OCC. “Our partnership with MemorialCare has been a win-win – especially for students.”

According to Gary L. Yates, president and CEO of The California Wellness Foundation, growing the allied health workforce has the potential to improve patient care by reducing wait times for appointments or lab test results – and the opportunity to create a more ethnically diverse and culturally competent workforce.

“For the people of California – all Californians – to receive the best possible health care, we must grow a health workforce that that speaks the languages of its patients and understands their cultural practices and concerns,” Yates said.

The survey found that 82 percent of deans see their allied health students as generally reflecting the ethnic and racial mix of people living in their local area – a number that is higher than with other health professions. Since these positions often can be stepping-stone jobs within the health field, “investing in allied health training programs now will produce a more diverse workforce overall in years to come,” Yates said.

For more information and the full report, visit: www.CalHealthJobs.org.

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