Notable Findings from NLN Survey of Schools of Nursing: Program Expansion Stalls; Insufficient Faculty Major Constraint to Expansion of Postlicensure Programs

The NLN’s annual survey of all nursing programs in the United States gathers key statistics including admissions, enrollments, graduations, student demographics, and numbers of faculty. The 2009 annual survey was administered from May to September 2009 to obtain 2007-2008 data. Recent additions include unused educational capacity, constraints on expanding admissions, faculty vacancies and recruitment, and the impact of faculty shortages on educational capacity.

New York, NY (PRWEB) February 9, 2010 -- Since the 1950s, the NLN has conducted an annual survey of all nursing programs in the United States, gathering key statistics including admissions, enrollments, graduations, student demographics, and numbers of faculty. The 2009 annual survey was administered from May to September 2009 to obtain 2007-2008 data.

In announcing the results, NLN CEO Dr. Beverly Malone pointed out some of the new topics addressed by the 2009 survey. "These data are critical to tackling challenges related to the nursing education workforce and nursing education capacity. Recent additions include unused educational capacity, constraints on expanding admissions, faculty vacancies and recruitment, and the impact of faculty shortages on educational capacity."

Findings include:

* Key statistics reflect slowing growth. Expansion in the number of prelicensure RN programs ground to a near halt between 2007 and 2008, with the nation adding only 15 additional programs, a less than 1 percent increase. In addition, in a surprising turnaround, annual admissions to prelicensure nursing programs fell and enrollments were flat for the first time in at least six years. Graduations did increase significantly in 2008, a lagging effect of an upsurge in admissions between 2003 and 2005.
* Demand for admissions continues to outstrip supply. Nearly one quarter (23.4 percent) of US nursing programs of all types reported receiving more qualified applications than could be accepted in 2008. Among prelicensure programs, there was considerably more unmet demand for admissions; more than 119,000 qualified applications - or 39 percent of all qualified applications - were turned away from prelicensure programs in 2008.
* The majority of prelicensure programs are "highly selective." Almost two thirds of ADN and diploma programs (62 and 60 percent, respectively) were "highly selective" - a designation earned by those programs that accept fewer than half of all applicants. Fewer baccalaureate programs (39 percent) fell into that category.
* Shortages of faculty and clinical placements constrain growth. Among schools that did not accept all qualified applicants, postlicensure programs were much more likely to cite a shortage of faculty as the main obstacle to expansion. Prelicensure programs reported that lack of clinical placement settings were the biggest impediment to admitting more students.
* Postlicensure programs are much more likely to report that adding faculty would expand admissions capacity. Almost three quarters of RN-BSN programs, over two thirds of master's programs, and over half of doctoral programs projected that filling all faculty vacancies would positively impact admissions. By contrast, only 41 percent of prelicensure RN and only 29 percent of LPN/LVN programs anticipated that full staffing would allow for expansion.
* Some seats still go unfilled. Just under one in 10 US nursing programs (9.8 percent) reported unfilled vacancies for new student admissions. Of those schools with unfilled spots, 44 percent attributed the vacancy rate to a lack of qualified students; 19 percent stated that "lack of affordability" or "high cost of education" was the main obstacle to student recruitment.

Observed NLN president Dr. Cathleen Shultz, "Nursing Data Review will be invaluable to decision-makers, organizations, and individuals interested in data reflecting the state of nursing education. It will serve a critical role in models designed to project the magnitude of the future registered nurse workforce. The League appreciates the survey responses provided by literally thousands of nursing school deans, directors, chairpersons, program administrators, and their hardworking staff members, without whom this valuable data source could not have been created."

Please note: NLN research data is available to all on the NLN website. NLN DataView™, at www.nln.org/research/slides/index_home.htm, features slides and tables from key NLN data reports as PDFs, MS PowerPoint™ slides, MS Excel™ charts, and JPG images.

Editors and reporters: For interview opportunities, please contact NLN chief communications officer, Karen R. Klestzick, at 212-812-0376.

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