



# VIEW*S*&VISIONS

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## What Does the Future Hold for the Health Care Workforce?

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Dr. Laura Clayton, PhD, RN, CNE, is a professor of nursing education at Shepherd University. In 2012, she was selected as Shepherd University's Faculty of the Year and finished as one of the finalists for the West Virginia Professor of the Year award.

Dr. Clayton is actively involved in the medical community in West Virginia's Eastern Panhandle, serving as chairperson of the board of directors at Shenandoah Community Health Center, and as a member of the Health and Human Services Collaborative Health Workgroup of Berkeley County, the Eastern Panhandle Medical Reserve Corps and the Martinsburg Veteran Affairs Research Council. She also teaches CPR for the American Heart Association and volunteers as a nurse, providing care to the homeless, at a free clinic. She has published several articles and has presented at state, national and international conferences.

She received her bachelor's degree in nursing from Alderson-Broadus College and earned her MSN and PhD from West Virginia University.

Just because you may have health insurance does not guarantee that you will be seen by a physician when needed because of the increased demand for health services by Americans.

The U.S. population is aging rapidly. Beginning in 2011, Baby Boomers began turning 65 and became eligible for Medicare. It is estimated that 70 million Americans (20 percent of the population) will be 65 or older by 2030.<sup>1</sup> Individuals older than the age of 65 require twice as many health care services as those younger. In addition, the U.S. population is expected to grow by 13 percent by 2025.<sup>1</sup> Estimates suggest 50 percent of the population will have one or more chronic illnesses (such as diabetes or heart disease) by 2030.<sup>2</sup> Individuals with chronic illnesses require more frequent physician visits and use health care services. This is coupled with an estimated shortage of 124,000 physicians and 500,000 registered nurses (RNs) by 2025.<sup>3</sup> In addition, the Affordable Care Act predicts the need for an additional 31,000 physicians to care for the newly insured 3.2 million Americans. Health care professionals today want a balanced lifestyle and flexible schedules compared to the 24/7 mode of years ago. All of these factors increase the demand for quality health care.

Inadequate access to health care results in:

- Patients receiving non-emergent care in emergency departments or urgent care centers;
- Longer wait times for appointments, surgery or specialty care;
- Lack of timely access to health promotion or disease prevention treatments;
- Longer travel distances for care; and
- Shorter appointments resulting in escalating health care costs and decreased patient outcomes.

The future of health care in America will require health disciplines to work together in a coordinated effort to provide holistic, evidence-based, quality care that is safe and effective. Advancing medical technology and improving the health care delivery are two of America's most urgent and complex societal challenges, especially as health care costs continue to rise.

### Advancing Medical Technology

Technology has revolutionized how health care is delivered and will continue to shape the future of health care.

Patients are able to do e-scheduling, e-visits, e-referrals, and electronic secure messaging with their health care providers. Diagnostic imaging results are sent directly from the scanner to the physician and the patient's electronic health record, without films or reports that could get lost in transit. Patients at home can be linked with the doctors and nurses through use of telehealth, which collects and monitors patient data such as blood pressure, pulse, weight, oxygen level, or blood glucose. Immediate responses to changing health data allow members of the health care team to respond quickly before emergencies occur. Robots are used by specialists to assess and treat patients located at a remote site and are being used to perform surgery. Health technology also has been developed to remind individuals of an appointment, to take their medication, allow interactions with family members or caregivers, and assist individuals to remain independent and live at home. As the use of technology expands, health care professionals must embrace its use in the delivery of cost-effective, quality health care.

### Improving Health Care Delivery

The health care workforce must find new ways to improve the delivery of health care demanded by Americans, increasing the provision of primary care, use of integrated care models,



home care visits and changing educational preparation of health care professionals.

### Providing Primary Care

Primary care has been shown to improve the quality of health care and reduce costs. However, many physicians choose not to enter primary care, instead choosing more lucrative specialty practices. Physicians also have a tendency to practice in urban areas, 81 percent; despite 20 percent of the U.S. population living in rural areas.<sup>4</sup>

Because of the primary care physician shortage, nurse practitioners (NPs) and physician assistants (PAs) provide the front-line care that physicians have historically performed. NPs and PAs are qualified to provide routine medical care, such as diagnosing sore throats, performing physical exams, managing high blood pressure or diabetes and prescribing medications. In addition to physician offices, NPs and PAs are frequently found in walk-in clinics, retail drug stores and work environments. NPs also run nurse-managed primary care clinics in rural areas, where they provide the only accessible health care to area residents.

NPs are typically better trained in providing patient education on how to manage chronic illness than physicians, according to Dr. Roland Goetz, president of the American Academy of Family Physicians. NPs and RNs emphasize holistic care, spending time discussing health promotion and disease prevention strategies with their patients. Holistic care is imperative, as nearly nine out of 10 American adults lack the skills necessary to manage their health.<sup>5</sup> These individuals are frequently unable to locate health care providers or services, complete health forms, share health information, return for follow-up appointments, understand health information, take prescription medications as directed, manage chronic diseases or engage in self-care. It is essential for health care professionals to provide health information that is clear, concise, and culturally relevant and presented in the patient's primary language.



There will be a growing emphasis on the importance of home care as many Americans want to remain independent or live in their homes until they die. RNs play a significant role in home care as they serve as life coaches, helping patients adapt to changes in their health status or retirement, visiting new mothers and babies, or providing care and education. Assisting in the provision of home care will be direct care providers such as nursing assistants, home health aides, personal and home care aides. It is estimated that 10 to 12 million new and replacement direct care aides will be needed in the United States during the next 10 years, a 35 percent increase.<sup>6</sup>

### Developing Partnerships for Integrated Care Delivery

A “medical home” or “patient-centered medical home” is a promising model aimed at transforming the organization and delivery of primary care. Such practices link together the patient and their loved ones with a group of health care professionals, including primary care physicians, NPs, PAs, social workers, dietitians and pharmacists. This integrated delivery of health care requires all members of the team to communicate and coordinate services, instead of the disjointed care that occurs today. It is believed that integrated care models will ensure the provision of evidence-based, compassionate, quality care.

### Education of Health Care Professionals

Most health care professionals in the United States are white, despite the increasing diversity of the U.S. population. Blacks, Latinos, and Native American health care professionals are grossly underrepresented. Many culturally diverse patients, including those who do not speak English fluently, often delay seeking care for fear they will not be understood or understand the information provided to them. It is crucial for health care professionals to become more diverse in order to meet the needs of our changing population and improve their health indices.

It is essential for health care professionals to have expanded clinical learning opportunities in non-hospital settings, such as primary care physician offices, community health centers and out-patient clinics. Health care professionals need to have collaborative learning experiences across disciplines, so that they value the roles of other members of the health care team and embrace the use of integrated delivery models of care. In addition, health care professionals need to have an understanding of the use of genetics for screening, lifestyle changes, aggressive disease surveillance, preventive treatment and use in patient-specific medication regimens.

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## The Economic Engine: Higher Education Fueling West Virginia's Economy

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enter directly into the local and regional economy through the creation of new jobs, local purchases, upgrading and renovating laboratories and as salaries for students and graduate assistants.

It is time to reengineer ourselves once again in order to thrive, in spite of economic adversities. We must learn how others throughout history, facing equal or worse challenges, succeeded in educating their human capital and translating that into economic growth. In this global economy, those with the most proactive, innovative and entrepreneurial cultures will lead. Those who fuel the economic engine of their respective states, will position themselves to be leaders in this great nation. We, in West Virginia, must continue to invest in higher education to ensure the unlimited future of this state and the bright minds that propel us forward. ∇

## What Does the Future Hold for the Health Care Workforce?

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In summary, the American health care workforce is faced with many challenges as they seek to meet the increased demands for health care, despite the inadequate growth of health care providers. The future of health care will require health disciplines to work together in a coordinated effort to provide holistic, evidence-based, quality care through use of advancing medical technology, improved delivery models and educational preparation. ∇

### Footnotes:

- <sup>1</sup> United States Census Bureau.
- <sup>2</sup> Johns Hopkins University. (2004). *Chronic conditions: Making the case for ongoing care.*
- <sup>3</sup> Beurhaus, P., Staiger, D., & Auerbach, D. (2009). *The future of the nursing workforce in the United States: Data, trends, and implications* and Dill, M. & Salsberg, E. *The complexities of physician supply and demand: Projections through 2025.* Association of Medical Colleges.
- <sup>4</sup> The Council of State Governments. (2011). *Health care workforce shortages in rural America.*
- <sup>5</sup> United States Department of Health and Human Services – Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. (n.d.). *Quick Guide to Health Literacy.*
- <sup>6</sup> American Society for Health Care Human Resources Administration (ASHHRA). (2012). *The future of the health care workforce.*