



# Meeting Minnesota's Workforce Needs

## Healthcare

September 2012

### FACTS:

- Minnesota's healthcare industry makes up nearly 13 percent of all jobs in the state.
- Statewide, the healthcare industry is expected to grow by nearly 33 percent during the next 10 years, much faster than the overall growth rate of 13 percent across all industries.
- Minnesota ranked 17th nationwide in the number of individuals employed in healthcare and related occupations in 2011.
- Registered nursing is expected to add more than 12,500 new jobs during the next 10 years—more than any other occupation in the healthcare industry.
- There are 248,790 employed in healthcare practitioner, technical and support occupations.

### OVERVIEW

Minnesota companies – of every size and in every region of the state – depend on the 31 Minnesota State Colleges and Universities to prepare and maintain a skilled workforce, increase employee productivity and support new business growth. In partnership with the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce and the Department of Employment and Economic Development, Minnesota State Colleges and Universities held 44 listening sessions in six industry sectors across the state in April and May 2012.

More than 1,300 individuals representing businesses, community members and educators attended and offered ideas and feedback about current and future workforce needs. Expanding and deepening engagement with industry partners will enable Minnesota State Colleges and Universities to better meet current and future workforce needs. Specifically, the listening sessions were designed to:

- Understand workforce needs of business and industry;
- Align the supply of graduates with employers' needs;
- Align the skills and knowledge needed by employers with what is taught in instructional programs and
- Improve student awareness of employment markets.

In Healthcare, nine meetings were convened with more than 280 attendees. About half of the attendees represented businesses. Employers focused on the following occupational program groups:

- Registered Nursing
- Advanced Practice/Specialty Nursing
- Practical Nursing
- Nursing Assistants/Aides/Support
- Dental Hygiene/Dental Assistants
- Clinical Laboratory
- Respiratory Therapy
- Radiology

Following is a summary of the employer conversations across the industry sessions divided into seven themes. Additional information from the statewide occupational reports can be accessed at: [www.mnscu.edu/business/workforceassessment](http://www.mnscu.edu/business/workforceassessment).

Industry themes and direct quotes from employers can be found at: [www.mnworkforceneeds.org](http://www.mnworkforceneeds.org).

## PRELIMINARY FINDINGS: HEALTHCARE

### Industry Trends

- Financial cuts are a prominent challenge in the healthcare industry. Many speak of having “to do more with less.” Reimbursements for long-term care are being cut while demands for care are growing. Workloads are increasing with a push toward greater efficiency. The need to hire is not always matched with the financial capacity to hire.
- Employees constantly need to adapt to rapidly changing technology, including medical devices and electronic medical records. For this reason, the need for IT skills has increased. Technology is also changing the delivery of care, and many employers predict a movement to telemedicine and electronic visits, also known as e-visits.
- The roles of healthcare professionals are changing as the healthcare industry moves from an acute care model to a community care model. Nurses will be working ‘at the top of their degree’ and taking on new roles with the possible development of new supporting occupations.
- With an aging population, there is a greater demand for geriatric, palliative and hospice care. The need for more chronic disease management is also encouraging a shift to preventative care and self accountability for health behaviors that lead to chronic disease.

*“Because of the growing complexity of care and the interdisciplinary nature of that complexity, having really strong and effective communication skills and teamwork skills would be a great advantage.”*

—Employer,  
Metro meeting

### Workforce Trends and Challenges

- **General Workforce Shortage:** Many employers are having difficulty filling healthcare positions. It is even more difficult to find suitable candidates for LPN, advanced practice, specialty and clinical lab positions.
- **Licensed Practical Nurse Shortage:** Many employers struggle to fill the huge demand for LPNs. This is especially true in long-term facilities. There is high turnover in LPN

positions because a large number quickly pursue an RN degree and then move to other positions. Additionally, many LPNs assume leadership positions—rather than hands-on positions—within long-term care facilities.

- **Retention:** Employers face high rates of turnover for LPNs, certified nursing assistants (CNAs), and RNs. This is particularly challenging for employers in Greater Minnesota; they find it challenging to attract qualified nurses because they cannot always offer salaries that are competitive with the salaries offered in the Twin Cities. Additionally, as mentioned above, many LPNs and CNAs become RNs for career advancement opportunities. This creates a constant shortage in LPN and CNA positions.
- **Retirement:** Many nurses are approaching retirement age, but are delaying retirement. This makes it difficult for employers to strategically hire and train new employees in preparation for a wave of retirements. This, too, fuels concern about an increase in shortages of experienced workers.
- **Long-Term Care:** Long-term care facilities, in particular, have difficulty attracting and retaining healthcare professionals. Because long-term facilities are not reimbursed at the same rates as hospitals, they cannot always provide competitive compensation. Additionally, the image of long-term care is generally seen as less “glamorous” than other healthcare environments. Employers need more healthcare professionals who are dedicated to a career in geriatric care and/or in nursing home facilities.

Students also need a greater understanding of the nursing home model, which includes the social model of aging in addition to the medical model of aging.

- **Advanced Practice and Specialties:** There is growing demand for nurse practitioners (NPs) and physician assistants (PAs). Rural facilities, in particular, have difficulty recruiting an adequate number of NPs and PAs. There is also a growing need for specialty RNs, such as those specializing in diabetic and neonatal care.
- **Lab Technologists:**
  - Laboratory employers are seeing similar workforce needs for technologists as those listed for employers of nursing professionals.

- Respondents commented that technologists are playing a more prominent role in the healthcare team, and therefore require stronger soft skills.
- Some employers are experiencing a shortage of technologists while others are not.

- **Future Skills:**

- The ability to work with geriatric populations. These populations include many patients with complex conditions and multiple diagnoses.
  - An understanding of technological and IT skills. This includes understanding the delivery of patient care through telemedicine.
  - The ability to demonstrate leadership skills.
  - More advanced training and greater understanding of molecular biology for lab technologists.
- Several respondents are very positive about the quality of applicants they have seen recently.

### Workforce Skill Needs/Gaps: Occupation-Specific Skills

- Employers note that new hires are able to diagnose separate conditions, but have difficulty synthesizing multiple morbidities. Employers expect that new hires possess strong clinical skills to deal more appropriately with multiple morbidities.
- Respondents state a need for candidates to have more extensive training and/or experience with:
  - Electronic medical records, basic computer literacy and other medical technology.
  - Cultural sensitivity training, language training and cross-generational training.
  - Geriatric care to work with the aging population in general and in long-term facilities in particular.

### Workforce Skill Needs: Experience and Credentials

- There is a trend in acute-care settings to hire bachelor-level registered nurses (RNs). Long-term care is more flexible in hiring bachelor- or associate-level RNs and relies more heavily on licensed practical nurses (LPNs) and nursing assistants.

- Employers seek candidates who have had previous job and/or volunteer experience. Ideally, this experience would be in the healthcare field, but other experiences are valuable, too.
- Employers expect to do on-the-job training for new hires to reinforce educational training.
- Several employers commented that lab technologist students need more practical training.

### Workforce Skill Needs/Gaps: General Skills

- **Patient Care:** Many employers feel that an increasing number of students are entering nursing due to high salaries or an interest in technology (as opposed to the primary goal of helping people). Employers feel such workers do not exhibit the expected level of care for patients and their families. Therefore, entry-level hires need stronger skills in patient care and communication. This includes increasing their ability to be hospitable, advocate for patients, anticipate needs, resolve conflict and communicate effectively.
- **Professional Communication:** As healthcare moves toward a more team-oriented approach, employees need to be able to communicate effectively with other professionals, such as doctors, nurses, and social workers. Interpersonal communication and conflict resolution are frequently cited as crucial skills that are often lacking in new hires. Some employers attribute this to the younger generation having less experience with face-to-face communication.
- **Professional Work Ethic:** Employers look for candidates who are able to hold themselves accountable, are adaptable and have a strong work ethic. Some employers feel that professionalism is lacking in new hires, and some suggest this is due to generational differences.
- **Additional General Skills/Training:**
  - Employers say candidates need more training in basic job application and interviewing skills.
  - Nurses are often required to assume management and

*“We look for, especially in a nurse, a sense of leadership because they really are, on the floor, on the unit, they are the leader of that healthcare team.”*

—Employer,  
Duluth meeting

- supervisory roles as they enter the field. This is difficult for new hires that lack leadership training.
- Healthcare professionals synthesize and analyze complex information. Therefore, analytical and problem-solving skills are extremely important.
  - All employees need strong multitasking and time management abilities as workloads and/or caseloads increase.
  - Students need to be trained on the financial aspects of healthcare to better understand reimbursement and how their healthcare decisions will financially impact the system.

### Incumbent Workforce: Current Continuing Education

- Current topics to address training for incumbent workers include new technology, computer skills, electronic medical records, and diversity. Employers have also sent employees for specialist training.
- For current training, employers tend to prefer hiring external trainers. Some employers also use simulators or internal mentorship programs.
- Recertification is a large portion of continuing education for incumbent workers. Employees often pursue recertification independently and can often take necessary classes online.

### Incumbent Workforce: Needs and Challenges in Continuing Education

- Incumbents need additional training in soft skills areas, such as leadership, supervision, interpersonal communication, cross-generational communication, adaptation, customer service and goal-setting.
- Additional training is also needed to enhance technical skills. This includes topics such as basic computer programs and technology, electronic medical records, dementia care, and ER care. Additional refresher courses are also needed for nurses re-entering the workforce.

- Employers emphasize the importance of short-term and in-house training due to cost and time constraints. Some employers suggested a two- or three-day training camp with certification; an option of taking a practice test to ensure recertification; and more simulation training.

## Preliminary Action Items

### Educational Partnerships

- Improve connections with businesses to recruit college and university students.
- Employers recommend inviting industry members to speak to students.
- Business and higher education need to support educational opportunities for K-12 students to learn more about industry.

### Program Suggestions

- Explore program design that creates dual track for technician-level training and upper division skills.
- Incorporate learning materials that cover business and soft skills, such as budgeting, working on teams, managing projects and meeting customer or client needs.
- Create a solid network of business and education professionals to increase the numbers of students who participate in internships and the number of faculty who spend time in industry.

*“Well, from a high school perspective and out of the pipeline it’s also very helpful when employers and educators at that level can get together so that students at an early age can really develop their awareness of some of these expectations. You can plant those seeds, they’ll build and they’ll grow.”*

—Employer,  
Winona meeting

- Employers encourage higher education to continue to offer project-based work in the classroom. Specifically, graduates who have had experience consulting with clients during coursework are much better prepared for the work place.

For more information:

## Thank you to the following meeting hosts:

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[www.mnscu.edu/business/  
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