

# New York State's Nursing Workforce

## AHEC's Role in Reversing the Crisis

**Carol S. Brewer, PhD, RN, NYS AHEC System Nursing Director**  
**Mary J. Sienkiewicz, MBA, NYS AHEC System Deputy Director**

"We don't promote what we do with lots of passion...we want to get paid for what we do...want to be respected because it warrants that, but at the same time, you've got to be able to put out there [that] this is the career path that you chose. It's not my second choice...it's my first and only choice to be a nurse and there's a reason for that. The humanity that is nursing is not well publicized."

*Nurse, Manhattan-Staten Island  
AHEC focus group*

Today's nursing workforce shortages can be attributed to many factors including, but not limited to, workplace demands that have a negative impact on retention, academic institutions with insufficient faculty capacity to expand enrollment, and challenges associated with recruitment. The aging nursing workforce and competition with alternative careers has led to estimates of severe ongoing shortages well into this century. Graduations have just recently surpassed levels of a decade ago, an encouraging but not sufficient trend to stave off future problems. An aging nursing workforce is expected to significantly reduce its workforce participation in the next 15 years, just as the Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that RNs will be among the fastest growing professions.

During the past year, the New York State AHEC System has engaged in a strategic planning process for nursing to

determine priority areas for AHEC to address at the local, regional and statewide levels.

An analysis of NYS data, "Examining New York State Nurses: A Regional Analysis of the 2000 National Sample Survey of Registered Nurses," was completed in fall 2003 by Carol Brewer, PhD, RN, Timothy Servoss, MA and Thomas Feeley, PhD (available on-line at: [www.ahec.buffalo.edu/newsletters/Final\\_Nursing\\_Report.pdf](http://www.ahec.buffalo.edu/newsletters/Final_Nursing_Report.pdf).) The process continued in early 2004 with 10 focus groups of 60 nurses in urban and rural areas conducted by eight AHECs, in their respective regions. Most focus groups were mixed, composed of practicing nurses, nurse educators, and/or nurse managers/administrators. Additional interviews were conducted to augment the responses from managers.

Six questions were posed to focus groups that were developed from the following problem statements: 1) *What are the AHECs' priority concerns regarding nursing workforce development in their respective regions?* and 2) *What are the commonalities in their concerns?* Three analysts—two qualitative researchers



*L to R: Margaret Walker, MA, RN, Associate Dean Academic Affairs REOC/SUNY Brockport; Barbara Zittel, PhD, RN, Executive Secretary to the New York State Boards for Nursing and Respiratory Therapy; Connie Jastremski, RN, MS, MBA, Chief Nursing Officer and VP of Patient Care Services, Bassett Healthcare; and Carol S. Brewer, PhD, RN, NYS AHEC System Nursing Director; at the NYS AHEC System Advisory Board meeting on September 29, 2004.*

(Linda Kahn, PhD and Luis Zayas, PhD, UB Department of Family Medicine Research Institute) and Carol Brewer, PhD, RN, performed content analysis of the data transcript that identified key issues and major themes in the areas of recruitment, education and retention.

The New York State AHEC System Advisory Board, charged to advise the New York State AHEC System regarding the workforce issues facing the health care system in New York State, focused its September 28, 2004 meeting on a draft strategic plan that presented goal statements and possible initiatives for their input. The morning session featured the following speakers who addressed best practices and current

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issues in nursing education, retention and recruitment. Connie Jastremski, RN, MS, MBA, Chief Nursing Officer and VP of Patient Care Services, Bassett Healthcare, spoke about the magnet hospital concept and what it means for nurse retention. Barbara Zittel, PhD, RN, Executive Secretary to the New York State Boards for Nursing and Respiratory Therapy spoke about the Board of Nursing's proposal for all RNs to have a BSN 10 years after graduating, as well as opportunities to work with AHEC. Margaret Walker, MA, RN, Associate Dean of Academic Affairs REOC/SUNY Brockport, spoke about educational articulation agreements and bridge courses to facilitate LPNs to complete associate degree programs.

The Advisory Board worked in small groups (facilitated by Peter Beatty, PhD, Central Region Office Director, NYS AHEC System, Ronald Brach, Executive Director, NYS Legislative Commission on Rural Resources, Bonnie Kaido, MS, Director of Bed Management and Patient Support Systems, Bassett Healthcare, and Chair, Catskill Hudson AHEC, Jean Moore, MS, Director, Center for Health Workforce Studies, and Joseph Orlando, FACHE, Senior Vice President, North Bronx Healthcare Network, Jacobi Medical Center, and Chair Bronx-Westchester AHEC Board of Directors) to discuss and prioritize the nine goals that evolved from the focus group exercises and the possible initiatives generated during the planning process.

As a result of the focus group and Advisory Board input, three major strategic goals have been established. The New York State AHEC System will:

- contribute to nursing education through involvement in statewide and regional dialog and planning to improve access to education, including technology and distance education and enhancement of nursing

program capacity, particularly as it relates to faculty shortages,

- promote retention through advocating and promoting workplace best practices, and
- advance recruitment through presenting a positive image of nursing, and providing pre-professional exposure to nursing careers, information about scholarship and funding opportunities, and support for mid-career, displaced and/or downsized workers.

The New York State AHEC System Executive Council is currently engaging in a process to prioritize the many possible initiatives that will address the aforementioned goals. The process we have undertaken will strengthen the AHEC approach and commitment to nursing issues, validate the goals and provide a focus for the many potential efforts that could be used to address the nursing shortage.