

## **American Nurses Association Addresses Nursing Shortage at Senate Subcommittee Hearing**

**Washington, DC** -- "America is experiencing a crisis in nurse staffing," along with "an unprecedented nursing shortage," Kathy Hall, MS, RN, executive director of the Maryland Nurses Association, told participants at a packed Senate subcommittee hearing today.

["/gova/federal/legis/testimon/2001/shortage.htm"](/gova/federal/legis/testimon/2001/shortage.htm) on behalf of the American Nurses Association before the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Subcommittee on Aging, Hall noted, "Employers are having difficulty finding experienced RNs who are willing to work in health care facilities." Areas hardest hit include emergency room, critical care, labor and delivery, and long-term care units.

"One of the primary factors for nurse turnover is dissatisfaction with workload and staffing," Hall said, citing findings from ANA's Staffing Survey, the results of which were announced last week. Specifically, the survey found that 75 percent of respondents feel the quality of nursing care in their workplace has declined over the past two years. Nurses surveyed also say they have experienced increased patient care loads.

Another factor Hall cited for high nurse turnover is "the use of mandatory overtime as a staffing tool to cover staffing insufficiencies."

ANA's solutions to the nursing shortage include increasing funding for nurse loan repayment programs as well as the programs related to the Nurse Education Act (NEA). But, as Hall pointed out in her testimony, monetary solutions alone are not enough.

"Improvements in the workplace environment, combined with aggressive and innovative recruitment efforts, are paramount.

"As a professional who has worked as a staff nurse, as well as a nurse administrator, I know that the current staffing problems are directly related to the reluctance of nurses to accept positions where they will not be supported by appropriate staff, [but will be] confronted by mandatory overtime, inappropriately rushed through patient-care activities, and unable to report unsafe practices," Hall added.

The Senate hearing also featured testimony from Dianne Anderson, MS, RN, president of the American Organization of Nurse Executives; Georges C. Benjamin, MD, secretary, Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene; Linda Hodges, dean, College of Nursing, University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences; and Brandon Melton of Denver, CO, on behalf of the American Hospital Association.

Benjamin echoed Hall's remarks. "There are three problems," he noted. "Nurses are not coming into the profession. The ones who are there are not staying in, and those who are there are not happy."

Sen. Tim Hutchinson (R-AR), chairman of the subcommittee, led the hearing, which was designed to shed light on the national nursing shortage and its impact on the nation's health care delivery system, as well as the long-term implications of the projected shortage over the next decade. Presiding with him was Sen. Barbara Mikulski (D-MD), who noted that "real solutions" are needed to tackle the "deep systemic issues that face the health of our nation." If not, she said, "Patient care will face the crisis" brought on by "the impact of an aging population, compounded by the aging of our nurses." The issue, she added is nurse "retention."

Sen. Hillary Clinton (D-NY), who noted that the nursing shortage is particularly acute in

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New York state, discussed issues related to short staffing, whistleblower protections, stagnant wage growth and mandatory overtime. "There is research that demonstrates...that nursing care determines patient outcomes," Clinton said.

Other subcommittee members attending the hearing included Sen. Pat Roberts (R-KS) and John Edwards (D-NC)

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*The American Nurses Association is the only full-service professional organization representing the nation's 2.6 million Registered Nurses through its 54 constituent associations. ANA advances the nursing profession by fostering high standards of nursing practice, promoting the economic and general welfare of nurses in the workplace, projecting a positive and realistic view of nursing, and by lobbying the Congress and regulatory agencies on health care issues affecting nurses and the public.*