

## Special Audio Report Transcript

Headline: California Lags in Nurse-to-Resident Ratio, Despite Increase in Nursing School Graduates

Report/Produced by: Mina Kim  
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### Text:

California needs more working nurses for its residents. That's the finding of a recently released report card that gives the state a 'D' grade for its ratio of registered nurses to the overall population. This is a special report for *California Healthline*, a daily news service of the California HealthCare Foundation. I'm Mina Kim.

The report card by the California Institute for Nursing & Health Care graded 23 California regions. It found that the state averages 644 working registered nurses per 100,000 people. That's worse than the national average of 859 nurses per 100,000 residents, and just half the number recommended for an 'A' grade from the U.S. Department of Labor Statistics.

Deloras Jones is executive director of the California Institute for Nursing & Health Care, or CINHC. She says the state's ratio of working nurses to residents has changed little since 2004 -- when her group last did the study - - even though there's been a significant increase in the number of nursing school graduates.

***(Jones): "Since 2004, educational capacity has increased 67%. Well to our surprise, even though we've added so many more nurses to our workforce, we're still a 'D'."***

Jones says the economic downturn and a large number of older nurses delaying retirement are among the factors contributing to a lack of available nursing jobs. And to be clear, she says the 'D' grade is not reflective of the state's nurse-to-patient ratio in hospitals. Jones says on that front the state's doing a pretty good job. So why does it matter if the state isn't currently meeting its nurse to population ratio? Again, Deloras Jones.

***(Jones): "There are seven million Californians that are currently without insurance. Almost five million of them will be coming on the health plan rolls, and we need to be sure we're going to have the healthcare providers out there as we plan for health care reform in the state of California."***

Jones says the tight job market is causing nursing graduates to look out of state for work. She worries others are leaving the profession altogether in despair.

Hospitals are reluctant to spend time and money training new nurses when other, more experienced nurses are available, says Pamela Lassetter, assistant director of the Fresno Regional Workforce Investment Board. Fresno received an 'F' from CINHC's report card for having 450 working registered nurses per 100,000 people. Lassetter says the region's large impoverished population, combined with a drop in safety-net care reimbursement rates, has hit hospitals hard.

***(Lassetter): "They can't even afford to train these new nurse graduates because it takes an experienced nurse to train a new nurse graduate so you're kind of caught between a rock and a hard place."***

Lassetter says Fresno's Workforce Investment Board is piloting a program that enables nurse graduates to get more training and experience through a partnership between local hospitals and community colleges.

With nursing graduates struggling to find work, DeAnn McEwen questions whether increasing educational capacity is the answer. McEwen is a member of the Council of Presidents on the California Nurses Association's Board of Directors. She says the real problem is how top hospital administrators are making budget decisions, which she sees as focused more on administrative salaries and marketing than on patient care.

***(McEwen): "We have to look at revenue. There are licensed beds in this state that aren't being staffed. That's where the jobs are!"***

McEwen also wonders what effect the ratio of working registered nurses to the overall population has on patient care.

CINHC's Deloras Jones says more study is needed to determine the effect on health outcomes, and says the report card raises other important questions.

***(Jones): "How do we compare the health outcomes in this state to other states, and how does it relate to other factors such as the number of licensed beds, but also the physician density in an area?"***

Jones says she hopes the report card will serve as a reminder that the state's nursing shortage has not been fixed.

This has been a special report for *California Healthline*, a daily news service of the California HealthCare Foundation. If you have feedback or other issues you'd like to have addressed, please email us at [CHL@CHCF.org](mailto:CHL@CHCF.org). I'm Mina Kim, thanks for listening.