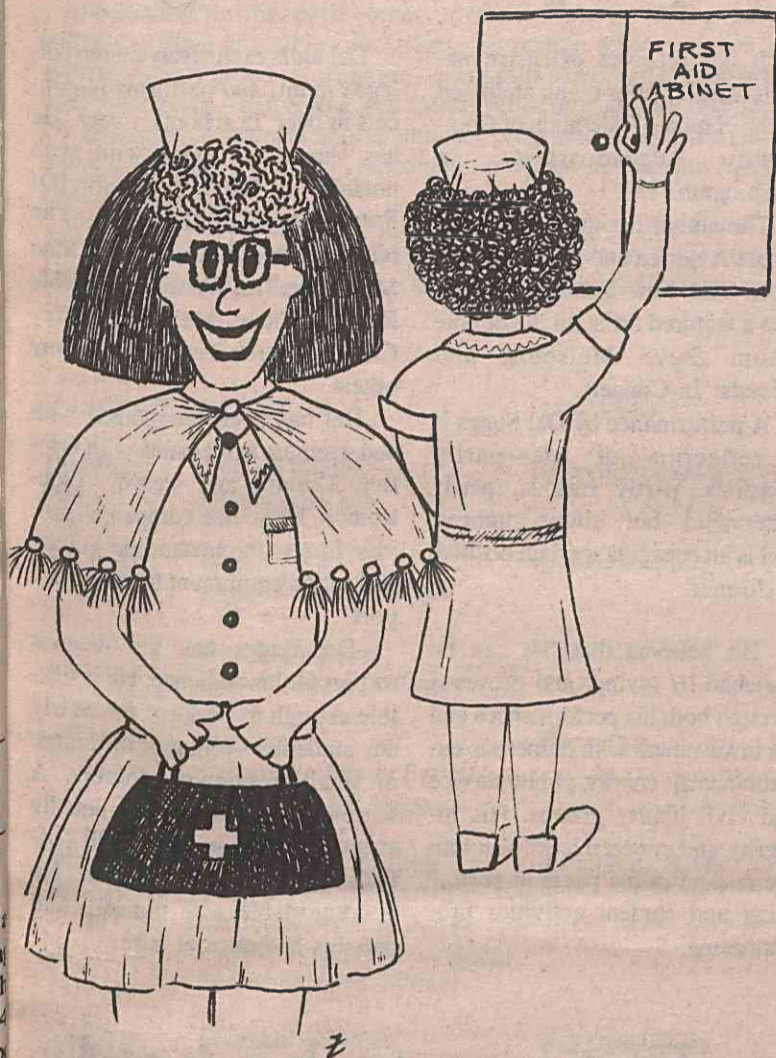


Op-Ed

# Nursing shortage worsening, hospital study shows

- EMERGENCY -



from the North Carolina Hospital Association

The nursing shortage is growing worse across the state, a study by the North Carolina Hospital Association suggests.

All regions of North Carolina show a higher percentage of nursing vacancies per hospital bed than was true a year ago, the association reported. In March 1987, hospitals responding to a similar study by the association showed a 5.8 percent average ratio between nursing vacancies and beds.

Last month, that figure had risen to 8.3 percent. The ratio was up in each of the North Carolina Hospital Association's six districts. Beds were counted only if they were open and ready for patients; beds taken out of use by the hospital were not included.

A total of 69 of the associations 145 member hospitals responded to the survey.

Hospital leaders' perceptions also suggest that the nursing shortage is taking a turn for the worse. Some 62 percent of those responding said they felt that the nursing shortage is becoming more severe. Another 28 percent said they felt the shortage was "about the same" as last year.

The association's 1988 study also looked at the number of budgeted nursing positions at hospitals that were vacant last month. On average, 12 percent of all nursing positions were vacant at hospitals responding. Whether a hospital had a shortage is not related to the size of the hospital or its location, the study shows.

"Small hospitals had nursing vacancy rates ranging from zero to 27 percent," said C. Edward McCauley, president of the hospital association. "Larger hospitals had virtually the same range — zero to 24 percent of their nursing positions vacant. We saw no differences in rates among regions of the state. That indicates the nursing shortage is affecting the entire state, not just isolated hospitals."

To help hospital reduce their nursing shortages, the North Carolina Hospital Association has begun publishing a monthly newsletter with ideas on how to recruit and retain nurses and other allied health professionals.

The newsletter, NCHA Manpower Memo, includes innovation from around the state and nation. The most recent issue reports on: a \$200,000 cooperative effort by Forsyth Memorial Hospital and North Carolina Baptist Hospitals, both in Winston-Salem, to attract

junior and senior high school student to health professions; a nurse-physician committee at Cabarrus Memorial Hospital in Concord; scholarships for students interested in becoming nurses offered by Northern Hospital of Surry County in Mount Airy, Rowan Memorial Hospital in Salisbury and Wilson Memorial Hospital in Wilson; and flexible scheduling and a preceptor program to help orient new nurses at Rowan Memorial.

Ratios between nursing vacancies and staffed hospital beds among hospital responding in the North Carolina Hospital Association's six districts for 1987 and 1988:

District I (Mountains)—3 percent in 1987, 5.4 percent in 1988

District II (North Central)—6 percent in 1987, 9.2 percent in 1988

District III (Metrolina)—8.6 percent in 1987, 10.6 percent in 1988

District IV (Triangle)—7 percent in 1987, 9.7 percent in 1988

District V (Southeast)—3.4 percent in 1987, 9.2 percent in 1988

District VI (Coastal Plain)—3.4 percent in 1987, 5.4 percent in 1988

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