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Academic Health Center CEOs Say Faculty Shortages Threaten Health Workforce

Government unaware of growing crisis

WASHINGTON, July 9 - Worsening faculty shortages in academic health centers are threatening the nation's health professions educational infrastructure, according to the latest report by the Association of Academic Health Centers (AAHC). Based on a questionnaire of AAHC members – the CEOs of academic health centers nationwide – the report found that 94 percent of CEOs think faculty shortages are a problem in at least one health professions school, and 69 percent think that these shortages are a problem for the entire institution.

Academic health centers train a major portion of the nation's health workforce in professions including allied health, dentistry, medicine, nursing, pharmacy, public health, and veterinary medicine. A crisis looms: without enough faculty members to teach the next generation of health professionals, the nation's health infrastructure is in jeopardy. Several factors account for the widespread faculty shortages, including retirement among Baby Boomers; low level of interest in academic careers among those entering the health professions; and disparities in salaries between academe and private practice or industry.

These shortages are widespread across institutions, affecting nearly every type of health professions school. Faculty shortages in nursing were rated as most severe, with 81 percent of CEOs declaring them to be a problem, including 45 percent who rate nursing faculty shortages as "very much a problem." Not far behind, 77 percent of CEOs declared faculty shortages to be a problem in allied health, 71 percent in pharmacy, 70 percent in medicine, 67 percent in dentistry, and 55 percent in schools of public health.

Facing shortages, half of respondents reported the need to make institutional changes. Institutional responses included cutting programs, merging programs, and limiting student enrollment. Limiting student enrollment was the most common strategy cited by CEOs.

Asked to assess state government awareness of health workforce issues, including faculty shortages, CEOs gave governors and state legislatures low ratings. However, CEOs expressed the need for federal and state governments to take a great deal of action on health workforce issues.

"The magnitude of the problem calls for a collective response by academic health centers, higher education, and state and federal government," says AAHC President Steven A. Wartman, MD, PhD.

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The Association of Academic Health Centers (AAHC) is a national, non-profit organization that seeks to improve health and well-being through vigorous leadership of the nation's academic health centers.