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For Immediate Release:
January 12, 2012

New publication examines Wyoming's health care workforce needs

Approximately 1 in 4 people living in Wyoming in 2010 were between the ages of 46 and 64. How will Wyoming's health care workforce meet the needs of an aging baby boom generation?

This question is addressed in several ways in "Health Care Workforce Needs in Wyoming: Advancing the Study," a new publication from the Research & Planning (R&P) section of the Wyoming Department of Workforce Services.

With support from state professional health care licensing boards, R&P is now able to measure the number of persons working in more than 30 non-federal licensed health care jobs in Wyoming, such as pharmacists, physicians, registered nurses, and others (see Table on back page).

By examining this new information, along with existing resources, R&P is able to examine the impacts that an aging population, rapidly changing technology, and national health care initiatives have on Wyoming's health care workforce. Some of the key findings of this report include:

- According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 26.6% of all persons living in Wyoming in 2010 were baby boomers between the ages of 46 and 64. This percentage was even higher in many smaller, rural counties, such as Platte (31.5%), Hot Springs (30.9%), Crook (30.6%), and Johnson (29.9%) counties. This may pose a problem in Wyoming's many rural areas, where health care needs are provided by small critical access hospitals that generally provide emergency services, outpatient care, and limited in-patient services. Older citizens who require specialized care may not be able to travel to a hospital that provides the specialized services they need.
- Wyoming currently has a shortage of several health care occupations that are critical to long-term care. For example, if Wyoming uses the ratio of licensed health care workers to population served found in the nation as a whole as the standard, then Wyoming currently has substantial shortages in home health aides (-746); licensed practical & licensed vocational nurses (-575), nursing, psychiatric, & home health aides (-502); and medical assistants (-445). What will health care in Wyoming look like when the population ages and

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requires more long-term care, and many of those currently working in these populations age out of the workforce?

- Wyoming’s higher learning institutions are not providing enough graduates to fill the average annual openings projected for many health care occupations. For example, 444 people completed the necessary degree program to become registered nurses in 2009. However, the latest occupational projections from R&P show an estimated 665 annual openings for registered nurses in Wyoming from 2010 to 2020. This is a baseline projection; the full impacts of the boom generation, national health care initiatives, and changing technology have not yet been identified.

“Health Care Workforce Needs in Wyoming: Advancing the Study” is available online at <http://doe.state.wy.us/lmi/occasional/occ6.pdf>. Print copies are available by contacting Research & Planning at (307) 473-3807. Additional detailed tables for each health care occupation analyzed can be found at http://doe.state.wy.us/lmi/occasional/occ6_appendices.pdf.

For more information on this publication, contact Research & Planning Manager Tom Gallagher at (307) 473-3801 or tom.gallagher@wyo.gov.

Table: Selected Wyoming Licensed Health Care Professions by Worker, Fall 2010^a

Licensing Board and Occupation	Worked in Wyoming Fall ^b 2010	
	N	Column %
Board of Occupational Therapy		
Occupational Therapists	225	1.3
State Board of Dental Examiners		
Dental Hygienists	328	1.9
Dentists	182	1.1
State Board of Pharmacy		
Pharmacists	470	2.7
Pharmacy Technicians	492	2.9
State Board of Physical Therapy		
Physical Therapists	312	1.8
State Board of Medicine		
Physician Assistants	103	0.6
Physicians	794	4.6
State Board of Mental Health		
Certified Addictions Professionals	40	0.2
Licensed Clinical Social Workers	288	1.7
Licensed Professional Counselors	487	2.8
Wyoming Board of Radiologic Technologists		
Radiologic Technologists ^a	757	4.4
Wyoming State Board of Respiratory Care		
Respiratory Therapists	250	1.5
Wyoming State Board of Nursing		
Advance Practice Nurses	227	1.3
Certified Nursing Assistants	5,127	29.8
Licensed Practical Nurses	795	4.6
Registered Nurses	4,698	27.3
All Other		
All Other Licensed Health Care Occupations	1,610	9.4
Total	17,185	100.0

Sources:

Wyoming state licensing boards.

Wyoming Unemployment Insurance tax records.

^aExcludes federal employees. As of May 2010, there were 63 physicians and 265 nurses working as federal employees in Wyoming. Source: Occupational Employment Statistics program files.

^bFall = July through September.



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