

Sustainability of the workforce: government policies and the rural fit.

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Abstract

OBJECTIVES: Critical workforce issues among health care workers have raised public concerns about the ability of health care systems to provide adequate service. Services, however, are influenced by geographical and social factors. One important source of variation is rurality. This study evaluated the perception of the applicability of health human resource policies for rural areas. **METHODS:** An exploratory design was used. Twenty-one nurse administrators and 44 staff nurses from a sampling of 19 rural health care settings were interviewed. Hospitals with less than 100 beds were targeted. **RESULTS:** The government policies most frequently mentioned by study participants were the goal of 70% full-time employment, the new graduate policy and the late career initiative. Each presented challenges to managers attempting implementation. Urban bias is apparent in health care policy including health human resource policies. Little data is available about rural health care workers because health care statistics tend to be reported regionally. **CONCLUSION:** Rural institutions have difficulty accessing government funding intended to build sustainable workforces. Policies meant to be broadly implemented across jurisdictions may not fit the needs of rural institutions and their clients. Health care databases should include a rural variable to enhance understanding about this population.