

## Title:

Allied Health Work Force Shortages Pose Concern

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## Summary:

A shortage of workers in many countries is a major obstacle for health care systems as they attempt to respond effectively to chronic diseases, avian influenza and other challenges, according to a recent report by the World Health Organization.

## Keywords:

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## Article Body:

A shortage of workers in many countries is a major obstacle for health care systems as they attempt to respond effectively to chronic diseases, avian influenza and other challenges, according to a recent report by the World Health Organization.

The United States is affected by this shortage as well. Acute personnel shortages occur in allied health professions such as medical technology and respiratory therapy. Sufficient numbers of these practitioners are not available to deal with the regular flow of patient needs that must be met.

Also worrisome is the threat posed by bioterrorism and the additional demands that such acts would place on a system that already is under strain. If such an event were to occur, laboratory technicians and respiratory therapists would be in high demand. Laboratory tests would be necessary to determine how victims have been affected, and breathing difficulties would have to be treated by qualified technicians.

Nursing shortages have received much public attention recently. Depending on what professions and levels are included, allied health is as large as or larger than nursing. Similar to nursing, many applicants to allied health programs are denied admission because of shortages of faculty, clinical training sites and related resources.

Many students are attracted to a career in a health profession, but the costs of obtaining an education are becoming more of a barrier. Funding for education by

the states is at its lowest in 25 years, and support per student has decreased significantly due to increased enrollment and inflation in the economy. Total tax revenues have declined as a percentage of state wealth.

Another factor is the increased expenses for Medicaid programs, which continue to require a larger share of the overall budget in each state.

As a means of addressing the situation, the Association of Schools of Allied Health Professions is working with several other organizations to advance S. 473, the Allied Health Professions Reinvestment Act of 2005, and H.R. 215, a companion bill. Introduced in Congress in 2005, this proposed legislation is designed to furnish a remedy for the allied health work force problems. If something isn't done soon, the organization warns, there will be an alarming increase in adverse events affecting patients because of an inadequate supply of allied health caregivers.