

National Foundation for American Policy

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New Research: Foreign-Educated Nurses Play Vital Role in Relieving Shortages at U.S. Hospitals; Entry Blocked or Delayed for Years Due to Inaction in Congress on Green Cards and Lack of Appropriate Temporary Visa Category, Study Finds

Arlington, Va. – Foreign-educated nurses play a vital role in relieving shortages at many U.S. hospitals. However, the entry of most foreign nurses is blocked or delayed for years due to a failure to increase immigration quotas or establish an appropriate temporary visa category for nurses concludes a new study released by the National Foundation for American Policy (NFAP), an Arlington, Va.-based policy research group.

The study “Foreign-Educated Nurses: A Small But Important Part of the U.S. Health Workforce” can be found on the NFAP website at www.nfap.com.

“Despite acknowledged nursing shortages, U.S. immigration policy actually treats nurses worse than other professions,” said Stuart Anderson, executive director of the National Foundation for American Policy. The medical literature shows nursing shortages contribute to death and illness for U.S. patients (See September 2007 NFAP study “Deadly Consequences” for a more detailed analysis on the health impacts of the nursing shortage.) While foreign-educated nurses are only one solution to the nursing shortage, research and interviews find relief from strict immigration quotas would help patients, hospitals and the nation as a whole.

Among the study’s findings:

- Fears that foreign nurses would overwhelm the U.S. labor market and dissuade hospitals from active recruitment of U.S. nurses are unfounded. Foreign nurses represent only 3.7 percent of the U.S. registered nurse workforce, well below New Zealand (23 percent), the United Kingdom (8 percent), Ireland (8 percent) and Canada (6 percent).
- Contrary to concerns that foreign nurses would harm the salaries of U.S. nurses, in an authoritative Department of Labor-funded analysis on the impact of foreign nurses in the 1990s World Bank economist Ruth Levine found “There was no evidence that the increased access to foreign labor under the law had negative short-term effects on the wages, benefits or working conditions in area hospitals . . . In addition, and contrary to common beliefs, we found that foreign nurses were not paid less than U.S. nurses.”
- Nursing salaries are not flat or falling. According to a May 2007 Legislative Analyst’s Office study of nurses in California: “Salaries for registered nurses have increased considerably in recent years. The average annual salary for a full-time nurse increased from about \$52,000 in 2000 to \$69,000 in 2006, an increase of 32 percent over the six-year period (13 percent after adjusting for inflation).”

- The leading country where foreign nurses employed in the U.S. received their initial education is the Philippines, followed by India, Canada and South Korea.
- Approximately 90,000 foreign-educated nurses work in the United States. California ranks first in state of employment for foreign nurses followed by Florida, New York, Texas, New Jersey and Illinois.
- Many foreign-educated nurses attend nursing school intending to work abroad and help their families. Given the important role of remittances, the Philippines and India encourage their nationals to work abroad. A family receiving remittances may be up to 10 times more likely to have a child remain in school.

About the National Foundation for American Policy

Established in the Fall 2003, the National Foundation for American Policy (NFAP) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit, non-partisan public policy research organization based in Arlington, Virginia focusing on trade, immigration and related issues. The Advisory Board members include Columbia University economist Jagdish Bhagwati, Ohio University economist Richard Vedder and other prominent individuals. Over the past 24 months, NFAP's research has been written about in the Wall Street Journal, the New York Times, the Washington Post, and other major media outlets. The organization's reports can be found at www.nfap.com.

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