

March 23, 2009

To: Idaho Nursing Workforce Advisory Council
From: B.J. Swanson, Council Chair
Subject: Nursing Vacancy and Hospital Expansion Survey

After several discussions and a thorough review of our current economic climate, the Idaho Department of Labor's research staff recommend postponing the data gathering phase of the nursing vacancy and hospital expansion survey until Idaho's economy is in better shape.

Idaho is experiencing an economic decline not seen in 26 years. Reports of layoffs, furloughs and reductions in work hours flow into the department daily. Anecdotal evidence suggests these phenomena are starting to impact the health care sector of our economy. As a result, the department's research staff feel now is not the best time to establish a benchmark year for measuring nursing vacancies and hospital expansions.

If the survey is conducted now, hospitals will be asked about staffing and expansion plans in a very unstable environment. As a result, this time frame and any answers the hospitals provide will end up serving as a baseline reference point against which future changes would be assessed and compared. From a statistical perspective, department staff expect shifts in vacancy rates and expansion plans following the recession may cause extrapolations that do not align with supply and demand projections. This normally wouldn't be of concern if the survey were not in its base year. In fact if a survey of this nature had been conducted earlier in 2009, it would be extremely useful in identifying how recessions affect Idaho's nursing work force.

Instead, department staff recommend they be allowed to use the remaining time and resources to:

1. Finish the work for the Nursing Licensing Board which includes enhancing the Board of Nursing's Web-Based Annual Report in September of 2009, revisiting the program director's survey and updating supply projections for nursing and retirement projections for instructors.
2. Continue to seek access to graduate Social Security Numbers for measuring regional placements.
3. Use the remaining time to finalize the survey instrument for the nursing vacancy and hospital expansion survey so it is ready to go when the economy recovers, but postpone the data collection phase until a stable foundation of data will result in some realistic conclusions.

While the department is happy to share its professional opinion about conducting a nursing vacancy and expansion survey this spring, it recognizes the decision to move forward is ultimately the council's. The department research staff await the council's decision and look forward to assisting in the council's research agenda.

I look forward to hearing your thoughts on the matter.