

What's Up with Healthcare Training in Alaska

The Context of The Last Frontier

- Outside Southcentral AK, state's sparse population distributed over vast distances and in extreme weather settings
- Indigenous peoples primarily located in remote communities and economically depressed urban neighborhoods
- Impacting societal elements: poverty clusters, unemployment, low education levels, geographic isolation leads to substantial rates of substance abuse, physical abuse, and a plethora of diagnosed and undiagnosed mental health disorders

The Last Frontier context

- Aging population (Senior Tidal Wave)
- Overall population level is relatively flat to negative trend
- Providence Health System is Alaska's single largest private sector employer
- In 2005, average cost to recruit and relocate key health care professionals is \$35 thousand.

The Last Frontier context

- 5 of top 10 fastest growing occupations are in allied health
- Training infrastructure expanding but is unlikely to ever meet AK's healthcare workforce needs
- AK's small population=high cost healthcare training programs become even higher in AK due to small scale of operation. Additionally, unlikely to be capital outlay from State to establish most graduate medical education programs

Alaska Care Delivery Strategies

- Healthcare facilities in regional hubs
- Smaller town use visiting specialists' clinics available on six to twelve week cycles
- Remote locations have primary care delivered by allied health professionals—community health aides, telemedicine technology, and, most recently, a controversial HIS dental therapist program

Alaska Healthcare Worker Training Strategies

- For 50+ years Alaska has looked to collaborative regional opportunities to both provide training opportunities for Alaskans and serve as a source of trained employees.
- UA system leadership established senior position for health related programs
- Given lack of traditional residential training options, specific pathway to AK health care careers have been mapped

Alaska Healthcare Worker Training Strategies

- Pathways include distance-delivered programs (about 20% of programs were delivered by distance). UAA's Allied Health Sciences division is tasked with designing and developing such programming for rural Alaska. Expands use of blackboard and other web-based tools (*Elluminate Live*).

Alaska Healthcare Worker Training Strategies

- UAA's School of Nursing houses an Area Health Education Center which is responsible for strengthening health workforce in underserved communities. Specific goals: encourage AK's youth to pursue related careers; facilitate clinical rotation opportunities in underserved sites; and, improve access to continuing education for health professionals in underserved areas. Work is underway to add AHECs in Bethel, Fairbanks, and the Mat-Su Valley.

Alaska Healthcare Worker Training Strategies

- UAA partners with the UW MEDEX NW Physician Assistant program to provide entry into PA training and a degree completion program for practicing PAs.
- WWAMI graduate medical education program will grow to a total “school” population of 80 Alaska participants by 2010.
- Limited additional “access” to health profession training through Alaska WICHE Prof. Student Exchange Program participation.

Alaska Healthcare Worker Training Strategies

- Critical related workforce need is specific to Behavioral Health to: increase workforce supply from certificate to doctoral level; improve articulation across the system; increase cultural competencies; and, ensure currency of curriculum content.

Alaska Healthcare Worker Training Strategies

- School of Nursing expanded its capacity in 2002 by adding a third cohort of 40 students to its annual production.
- Recruitment and Retention of Alaska Natives into Nursing initiative
- “In Alaska” training for allied health occupational areas: dental; medical office/out patient; laboratory; radiology; emergency services; pharmacy; community health; nutrition; and, direct care.

Alaska's Healthcare Workforce Development

- Alaska-centered with respect to time, place, and culture
- Efficient in terms of cost vs. production
- Ensures best use of resources already in place by enhancing relevant knowledge and skill sets
- Depends on industry/government partnership and investment