

# Jim Sensenbrenner: Giving our nurses a helping hand

Posted on Tuesday, Jul 25, 2017

No matter what the circumstances are surrounding a visit to a hospital or medical facility, nurses are the first people a patient sees for treatment. They listen, comfort, and administer vital services that keep our health care industry functioning.

There are approximately three million nurses in the United States, making them the largest segment of the health care workforce in the country. These men and women are on the front lines of health care, providing the quality support and services we need to stay healthy. And while nursing it is currently one of the fastest growing occupations in the nation, the demand for nurses is outpacing the supply and the nation is facing a severe shortage here in Wisconsin, and nationwide.

According to a 2015 [Georgetown University study](#), despite the economy creating 1.6 million job openings for nurses through 2020, the United States will face a deficit of nearly 200,000 nursing professionals.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that there will be 1.2 million vacancies for registered nurses between 2014 and 2022. Further, it predicts that the shortfall will be more than twice as large as any nursing shortage experienced since the introduction of Medicare and Medicaid in the mid-1960s by the year 2025.

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In Wisconsin, [data produced by the Public Policy Forum](#) shows that the state will need to grow its registered nurse workforce by 24 percent between 2010 and 2020 to meet demand. The gap between supply and demand is estimated to be 10,500 by 2030. This discrepancy will be most devastating in the state's rural areas, where it is often more difficult to recruit and retain health care professionals due to

location and salary constraints.

Current and worsening nursing shortages are driven by various factors, including an aging population and workforce, and an inadequate and expensive educational infrastructure.

As the Baby Boomers grow older, they demand more health care services. The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that between 2012 and 2050, the population of those over the age of 65 will be nearly 84 million. Further, Americans in this demographic are retiring at an increased rate. That includes those in the health care industry, leading to the large number of nursing shortages we're experiencing. As significant numbers of Baby Boomers leave the workforce, there aren't enough people to take their place. This is largely due to an education system that turns away applicants to nursing programs and medical and physical therapy schools and cannot employ enough qualified instructors in these programs.

Together, these factors have created an alarming problem that must be addressed. While no one piece of legislation can solve each issue contributing to America's nursing shortage, there are steps Congress can immediately take to help alleviate some of the pressure on the industry.

One such step is increasing the amount of foreign-trained nurses allowed into the United States on temporary work visas to help fill the thousands of nursing positions left unfilled. I recently introduced the Emergency Nursing Supply Relief Act, which would do just that.

This legislation expands the amount of available visas to up to 8,000 for qualified applicants and provides immediate relief for hospitals facing shortages.

America's health care industry faces a lot of uncertainties, but ensuring there are enough nurses to care for our nation's patients shouldn't be one of them. The Emergency Nursing Supply Relief Act is a common sense response to this growing problem and takes pressure off the thousands of medical facilities struggling to keep up with the ever-increasing demand for professional nurses.

Nurses are the driving force behind effective, quality care in the United States. It's in America's best interest to act quickly and find solutions that will not only help this vital industry, but also benefit the millions of American health care consumers who depend on nurses every day.