



- print >>
- interactive >>
- events >>
- education >>
- direct marketing >>
- drug handbook >>
- television >>
- client tools >>

## Recruiter Community

### Diversity Planning in Nursing Often Overlooked

by **Lisette Hilton**

**Loaded:** June 06, 2006

#### specials resources

[Learn about our Regional E-Zine Sponsorships](#)

[Stay Informed: Sign up for our Recruiter E-Zine](#)

[Check out Career Fairs happening in October](#)

[Deadline Oct 13: Pathways...](#)

[Reach nurses across the country with Power Email](#)

[CE Direct: Give the gift of education](#)

[Post your jobs online quick and easy](#)

Nursing does not reflect the mix of minorities the general population. Nearly 90% of today's nursing population is white, and more than 94% is female, according to the Registered Nurse Population, 2000 (HRSA); yet, only 75% of the U.S. population is white and nearly 51% is made up of women, according to the U.S. 2000 Census.

While the need for a more diverse nursing workforce has been a looming need among the nation's hospitals, the issue has never taken front and center stage, says Karen A. Hart, RN, BSN, senior vice president, Health Care Division, Bernard Hodes Group.

"There has always something else that is more crucial. For example, there was Y-2K and then the bird flu. Don't forget HIPAA. Diversity, unfortunately, has never seemed to be [perceived as] a crisis," Hart says.

A Bernard Hodes Group survey, done in late 2003, indicates that hospitals and hospital systems have a mixed bag - and sometimes half-hearted - approach when it comes to ensuring staff diversify. A survey of 93 respondents indicated that while most hospitals are able to identify their internal staff demographics by race, gender, and age, only half of respondents said that their facility or system had a diversity plan. The survey found that organizational diversity planning is most fully integrated into recruitment and retention planning (74%), versus 68% in strategic organizational planning; 64% in human resources planning; 46% in marketing planning; and 42% in operational planning.

Less than one third of those surveyed say that they measure the organizational impact of diversity plans. In nearly 90% of cases, the human resources department is responsible for diversity management. The diversity leadership in an organization most often reports to the chief executive officer (55%) or HR (31%).

Forty-seven percent of those surveyed have circulated a diversity statement to

administration and employees, and one quarter said in the survey that they have a diversity plan in place.

Half of the study respondents said that competing priorities are the biggest barrier to diversity being "top of mind" in their organization, according to Bernard Hodes Group.

"The bottom line is that, in general, people who responded and who we talked with in the industry are not doing a lot [when it comes to diversity planning]. Some organizations look around and think they have a diverse workforce, but they're not looking, perhaps, at professional groups, such as nursing," Hart says. "A lot of professionals, such as the allied health groups, are not diverse because they have not been afforded the opportunity to go through a particular occupational program."

### **A case for diversity**

Experts say that not only is it important to increase diversity in the nursing workforce to drive more people, in general, into nursing, but nurses who relate to their patients and their communities and speak the same languages as their patients can enhance the patient care experience.

In 2003, the Institute of Medicine (IOM) warned of the "unequal treatment" minorities face when encountering the health system. The data in that report are compelling and alarming. Cultural differences, a lack of access to health care, combined with high rates of poverty and unemployment, contribute to the substantial ethnic and racial disparities in health status and health outcomes, according to "Missing Persons: Minorities in the Health Professions," a report by the Sullivan Commission.

### **Basic steps for diversity planning**

Organizations should first look at their internal demographics, says Hart.

"Then, they can figure out where they are and come up with a plan," Hart says.

Mirroring the community in the nursing workforce is not necessarily the goal, Hart says, because there are usually not enough minority nurses in any given community to achieve that balance. Rather, hospitals should strive to increase the diversity in their current workforces and recruit young people and workers in other areas as future minority nurses.

Bernard Hodes conducted a survey with the National Student Nurses Association in 2004. According the survey of more than 2,000 nursing students, critical challenges minorities find when they want to go into nursing are financial, obtaining mentoring opportunities, and effective and timely career guidance.

"When we talk about diversity, we're not only talking about race, but also gender, sexual orientation, etc. We're looking at the older workforce," Hart says.

Hospitals that are serious about increasing diversity in their nursing workforces should also consider having a diversity council, which is a group within a specific organization looking at all the touch-points of enhancing or advancing diversity, according to Hart.

"It isn't just about recruiting and hiring. It's more about when a diverse person is in an organization, what do you do in terms of advancing that person? The council would also address things like minority retention," Hart says.

Hart recommends that organizations start to "grow their own" diverse workforces by making sure minorities throughout the organization who are not nurses - but would like to be - are aware of available educational opportunities, including scholarships or tuition reimbursement benefits.

Hart and other experts agree that diversity planning needs to be front and center for employers and educational institutions.

The Sullivan Commission calls the nation's failure to counter the lack of diversity in nursing, medicine, and dentistry a "crisis." Nursing, medicine, and dentistry, the 2003 report says, have too little resemblance to the diverse populations they serve, "leaving many Americans feeling excluded by a system that seems distant and uncaring. In future years, our health professionals will have even less resemblance to the general population if minority enrollments in schools of medicine, dentistry, and nursing continue to decline and if health professions education remains mired in the past .... Failure to reverse these trends could place the health of at least one-third of the nation's citizens at risk."

---

**Lisette Hilton is a freelance health care reporter.**

---

**Contact your sales representative for more information!**

**Or contact National Sales: (888) 206-3791**