

State of Connecticut
GENERAL ASSEMBLY



PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE
LEGISLATIVE OFFICE BUILDING HARTFORD,
CT 06106-1591

Task Force to Study Methods to Address the Shortage of Radiologic Technologists,
Nuclear Medicine Technologists and Respiratory Care Practitioners in the State

Meeting Summary

Tuesday, July 16, 2024

1:00 PM on Zoom and YouTube Live

Attendance: Bernadette Mele, Matthew Green, Paul Kidwell, Sajjad Raza, Rep. Cristin McCarthy-Vahey, and Karen Griffiths.

I. Convene Meeting and Review of the Charge

- Bernadette Mele convened the meeting at 1:00 PM and read the charge of the task force. She then turned it over to Matthew Green for his report.

II. Reports and Discussion

- Matthew Green went over the background of nuclear medicine technologists and provided an overview of this field in the state.
- Paul Kidwell asked Matthew Green if Gateway has information about how many people are seeking associate degrees vs certificates for the slots, and if the time it takes is the same for different routes.
- Matthew Green explained that there is a primary path where an individual gets an associate degree by starting it and then finishing it. The secondary path is more convoluted where you already have an associate degree and then get a certificate on top of that.

- Paul Kidwell believes that the certificate program can be offered not only at community colleges but at workforce investment programs. He added there are multiple individuals who already have an associate degree.
- Bernadette Mele gave a background on radiologic technologists as well as the programs that are offered for radiologic technologists.
- Paul Kidwell asked if the programs offered are fully subscribed.
- Bernadette Mele responded that she is not aware of that statistic but is aware that there are a high number of applicants for radiography programs.
- Karen Griffiths stated that the University of Hartford is way over capacity and has too many people applying for the program and can't accept them all.
- Bernadette Mele agreed with Karen and suggested that it is across the board.
- Karen Griffiths and Sajjad Raza presented the respiratory therapist report. Sajjad Raza went over the background of respiratory therapists and Karen Griffiths went over how bad the workforce shortage is. Sajjad Raza discussed the real cost of the respiratory work force shortage. Karen Griffiths went over the programs that are offered to respiratory therapists. Karen and Raza went over ideas that could help with the shortage.
- Paul Kidwell stated that they have surveyed all their hospital members for the vacancy rates and total FTEs for respiratory therapists, nuclear medicine technologists and radiologic technologists. The data is incomplete, but the initial numbers reflect the experiences that the members are facing.
- Thomas Farquhar stated that they have sent out a survey to the radiology group outpatient practices but are still in the data gathering phase. He underscored Paul's point that areas can lose a service for days or weeks if a subspecialty for radiologic technologists is not available.
- Bernadette Mele agreed with Thomas Farquhar and expressed how the shortages are causing burnout for professionals and delays of care for patients.
- Rep. McCarthy-Vahey thanked Bernadette Mele and stated that she does not have information to share today. She inquired about the rate of change for vacancy rates among the data discussed earlier.
- Karen Griffiths agreed with the question and stated that it is a complicated

question that has various inputs about what caused the increase in the need for technologists.

- Rep. McCarthy-Vahey asked who can operate an echo machine in Connecticut.
- Sajjad Raza explained the requirements to run the machine.
- Thomas Farquhar asked about attrition rates for radiologic technologists and nuclear medicine technologists.
- Bernadette Mele explained that some students get into the programs without knowing what they are getting themselves into. While other students have issues with training.
- Matthew Green agreed that the rates are concerning and added that there are no other programs in the state.
- Rep. McCarthy-Vahey had the same question as Thomas Farquhar, if it would be useful to have some conversations with institutions on what they know.
- Bernadette Mele stated that it is a combination of all the above and added that the task force should be looking for financial assistance as an incentive to find us a solution.
- Thomas Farquhar agreed that finance is one thing, but internships have become harder to do since COVID. He believes that the state can find ways to get people to do these internships.
- Bernadette Mele pointed out that radiologic technologists have a lot of competition for clinical spots which becomes a bottleneck.
- Paul Kidwell pointed out that the hospital rates aperture has widened since COVID. He added that nursing is using different strategies to use all hours of the day to alleviate the shortage.
- Bernadette Mele added that the task force has a good foundation and hopes for more information regarding vacancy rate numbers for outpatient and hospital locations, retention.
- Paul Kidwell stated that post COVID, healthcare is competing with employers who have not been used to competing regarding recruiting talent. He asked what students are choosing instead of going to these programs. He pointed

out that pre- and post- COVID, the employment situation dynamic changed and that he believes that the higher education institutions might have a special insight.

- Bernadette Mele suggested that question will be asked at the next meeting where program directors will be invited to come forward and report on their experiences.
- Sajjad Raza stated that the trend for respiratory therapy is decreasing where new hires come into hospital positions for on-board training and then transitioned to a traveling agency.
- Bernadette Mele responded to Paul's statement by saying that students are different to pre-COVID, and they must train a very different person. She added that the students' experiences before college to then going into college should be considered.
- Karen Griffiths suggested that getting involved more with high school students can help alleviate the shortage by preparing students.
- Rep. McCarthy-Vahey asked what Bernadette Mele meant when she says that they are training a different student today compared to pre- COVID.
- Bernadette Mele responded that students were not held to the same standards as the students that were in online courses instead of in-person.
- Karen Griffith agreed with Bernadette Mele and added that students are dealing with increased mental health issues.
- Rep. McCarthy-Vahey thanked them both for their answers and expressed hope that new cohorts of students have these issues decreased.
- Matthew Green stated that he sees a different entry level workforce as they have difficulty filling out full-time positions.
- Rep. McCarthy-Vahey referenced Paul Kidwell's low unemployment point competition.
- Bernadette Mele stated for the next meeting that the task is to come up with more ideas to help alleviate the shortage. She asked Matthew Green, Karen Griffiths and Sajjad Raza if they can procure program directors for the September meeting to provide an update on vacancy rates and discuss state actions that can hold promise in attracting people.

- Rep. McCarthy-Vahey suggested the Office of Workforce Strategy as they have asked some of these questions regarding different professions and they might be able to share some of their insight.
- Karen Griffiths stated that she can reach out to the program directors, to ask for the logistics behind it.
- Paul Kidwell stated that it will be interesting to hear the variation on the practices across the state and that they are reaching out to hospital associations across the country.

III. Adjournment

- The meeting adjourned at 2:00 PM.