

# Pathways to Middle-Skilled Allied Health Care Occupations

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# Introduction

- Health care has seen consistent job growth over last couple decades
  - Many entry-level opportunities
- Institute of Medicine prior efforts to understand the allied health workforce
  - 1989 Report: “Allied Health Services: Avoiding a Crisis”
  - 2011 Workshop: “Allied Health Workforce and Services”
- Focus on health care jobs with pre-baccalaureate entry-level requirement
  - Subset of allied health careers
  - May or may not involve direct patient care
  - Roles vary considerably
  - May not require specialized skill at entry-level

# Defining Allied Health (1)

- Term first popularized with Allied Health Professions Personnel Training Act, 1966
- No general agreement on single list of occupations
  - Association of Schools of Allied Health Professions identified 66 occupations
  - Health Professions Network identified 45 occupations
  - Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs identified 28 occupations
- Generally does not include physicians, pharmacists, dentists, or nurses

# Defining Allied Health (2)

- Public Health Service Act of 1944

“Trained professionals...who share in the responsibility for the delivery of healthcare services or related services, including services relating to the identification, evaluation, and prevention of disease and disorders, dietary and nutrition services, health promotion services, rehabilitation services, or health systems management services.”

- Institute of Medicine Report in 1989: “Allied Health Services: Avoiding a Crisis”

“The amount of autonomy in the workplace, the occupation’s dependence on technology, the substitution of one level and type of personnel for another, flexibility in the location of employment, degree of regulation, and inclusion in accreditation standards for facilities”

- Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010

“An individual who graduated with an allied health professions degree or certificate, and is employed as an allied health professional in a health care setting”

# Supply and Demand

- Jobs requiring at least a post-secondary non-degree award projected to have largest growth over next decade
  - Jobs requiring less than high school degree also among largest and fastest growing jobs, but among lowest paid workers
- Projections by occupations
  - Oversupply of respiratory therapists, occupational therapists, dieticians and nutritionists
  - Slight oversupply of physical therapists and optometrists
  - Potential undersupply of opticians
  - High demand for technologists and technicians, and health care support occupations (supply data not available)
- Data availability and limitations
  - No minimum dataset for health workforce
  - Disparate data sources with varying quality of information, completeness and variable definition
  - Need for better data to monitor size, distribution, demographic and work characteristics

# Transforming Health System

- Aging Baby Boomer population
  - Living longer
  - Growing prevalence of chronic disease
  - Increasing desire to age in place
- Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health Act of 2009
  - Push to increase adoption of health information technology
  - New tasks emerging as providers learn to use and navigate tools
  - Change interaction between providers and patients
- Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010
  - Shift away from hospital-based care to primary care settings
  - Accountable Care Organizations and Patient-centered Medical Home models increase need for patient navigation, care coordination and case management

# Education and Training (1)

- Information Technology Professionals in Health Care Program
  - Funds allocated under American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009
  - Train new workforce of health IT professionals to accelerate adoption of health IT
  - Community College Consortia to Educate Information Technology Professionals in Health Care Program specifically concentrated on middle-skilled health occupations
    - Roles: practice workflow and information management redesign specialists, clinician/practitioners consultants, implementation support specialists, implementation managers, technical/software support, and trainers
- Expansion of Physician Assistant Training Program
  - Funds allocated under Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010
  - Offset education costs for physician assistants going into primary care
- Health Profession Opportunity Grants
  - Funds allocated under Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010
  - Covers educational costs for recipients of Temporary Assistance of Needy Families and other low-income individuals to train into well-paid and/or high demand health care jobs
  - Most common occupation: “nursing assistant, aide, orderly or patient care attendant”

# Education and Training (2)

- Community colleges play an important role in educating allied health workforce
  - Shorter education commitment and lower costs
- For-profit institutions growing role in awarding pre-baccalaureate certificates and degrees for health careers
  - Attract minority, older students, and otherwise disadvantaged students
  - Returns to educational investment are questionable with evidence of high unemployment, lower earnings, and high debt burdens
- Partnerships between employers and educational institutions may help ensure individuals get required competencies
  - Jobs to Career Initiative to promote skill and career development of frontline health care workers
  - Joint multi-employer training fund where employers with similar needs pool resources to retain, educate and train employees (e.g., Hospital Employee Education and Training program)
- Apprenticeship programs not common, but pathways under exploration
  - Dept of Labor identified 10 apprenticeship programs: home health aide, home care aide, pharmacy technician, and medical transcriptionist



# Career Pathways

- Unclear career ladders in allied health fields
  - Emerging entry level aide and assistant positions
  - Increasingly large educational gaps between levels of health care careers
- Ongoing efforts to define early health science career pathways
  - National Consortium for Health Science Education developed clearinghouse of tools to implement educational programs meeting needs of over 300 health science careers
  - National Association of State Directors of Career Technical Education Consortium identified five health science career pathways with common career technical core, knowledge and skill sets
- Career transitions may be challenging if current job is highly specialized
  - O-NET attempted to identify career clusters, but unclear how easy to move across clusters
  - Challenges for military veterans translating skills and gaining credentials in civilian sector

# Regulation

- Commission on Accreditation for Allied Health Education Programs covers 2100 entry-level education programs in 28 health science occupations
  - Several occupations have their own accrediting body
- Credentialing through exams, certificates and licenses ensure health care workers have basic competencies and will not harm patients
  - Varies by state and by occupation, which makes mobility difficult
- Scope of practice laws state what a person can and cannot do in their occupation
  - Laws vary by state and turf wars exist, which again makes mobility difficult

# Challenges and Opportunities

- Emerging health care occupations with transformation of health system
  - Increasing opportunities related to health IT implementation and related data collection
  - Roles changing to help coordination of care across a complex health system
- Need for interprofessional education for effective team-based care
  - Interprofessional Education Collaborative setting core set of competencies for interprofessional collaborative practice
  - Yet many students in pre-baccalaureate programs do not have access to these opportunities and must learn skills on the job
- Shortages and maldistribution
  - Lack of long-term career opportunities or lack of support and mentorship
  - Training resources may be expensive or not accessible in underserved communities or rural areas
  - Overall unemployment is low compared to national average, but high among entry-level positions
    - Potentially reflection of job quality
- Health care field facing “degree creep” where occupations require higher level educational attainment to practice

# Conclusions and Recommendations

- Allied health field is important and growing segment of health care workforce, but despite prominence in health care team, allied health workforce is understudied
- Demand outlook is good, but the long-term career opportunities and job outcomes for entry-level positions is questionable
- Five recommendations to build case for middle-skilled career in allied health:
  1. Raise awareness of career opportunities in allied health at earlier stages
  2. Increase interprofessional dialogue to ensure right competencies are delivered
  3. Increase research and discussion around career pathways especially for lowest skilled and low paying occupations
  4. Explore apprenticeship opportunities
  5. Create panel of experts to regularly monitor pulse of allied health workforce

# Questions? Contact:

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