

POLICY FORUM: INTRODUCTION

The Nursing Workforce in North Carolina: Treasuring One of Our State's Most Valuable Health Care Resources

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I can think throughout my life about the critical role that nurses have played in ensuring that I was as healthy as I could be and that my community had access to health care to meet their needs. School nurses administered vaccinations when I was in elementary school; nurses in the clinic took my vitals and recorded information in my chart when I got my annual physical exam; nurses provided care when an urgent health matter arose.

There is probably no greater example of the valor and critical role that nurses play in keeping our communities healthy than the COVID-19 pandemic. Nurses were on the front lines of the most significant public health crisis in the past century to ensure the sick were cared for, prevention supplies were distributed, and vaccines were given when they became available. While COVID-19 caused many deaths and hospitalizations in our state, nation, and globe, it's hard to imagine how much worse it could have been had we not had brave nurses in hospitals, clinics, and out in the community doing the work that was needed to stem the tide.

In this issue of the NCMJ, we highlight the startling reality that our state faces another looming crisis: a significant shortage of nurses to fill these critical roles, especially in medically underserved communities. Fortunately, we have wonderful institutions across the state that provide innovative and high-quality training to the next generation of nurses to not only provide care for our state's residents, but to also prepare for the next crisis that may come our way. We hope you will enjoy reading about how nursing heroes in North Carolina are stepping up to the challenge of equipping hospitals, clinics, schools, and many other venues with highly skilled and compassionate nurse providers.

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