



NOV 29 2013

Rockville MD 20857

The Honorable Tom Coburn
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Coburn:

Thank you for your letter relating to the Government Accountability Office's (GAO) findings regarding the Health Resources and Services Administration's (HRSA) workforce projections. Timely information about health care workforce trends and projections is important to informing policy decisions designed to help ensure patients have access to providers. Since receiving the GAO report, HRSA has taken action to implement GAO's three recommendations and has asked GAO to close these recommendations.

As documented in HRSA's Strategic Plan, fully deploying our resources to strengthen the health care workforce to meet the needs of patients is integral to the agency's overall mission of improving health and achieving health equity. (Please refer to <http://www.hrsa.gov/about/strategicplan.html> for additional information about HRSA's Strategic Plan.) In addition, HRSA is committed to providing Congress and the public with meaningful data on the health care workforce. As such, through the National Center for Health Workforce Analysis (NCHWA), this year HRSA has published:

- *Projecting the Supply and Demand for Primary Care Practitioners Through 2020*, which provides workforce projections based on delivery of care by physicians, nurse practitioners, and physician assistants. The publication of this report completes GAO's first recommendation.
- *The U.S. Health Workforce Chartbook*, which provides information on the demographic characteristics, geographic distribution, education and training, wages, and employment of health workers in 35 health professions.
- *The U.S. Nursing Workforce Report*, which analyzes the current supply and training pipeline of licensed nurses, the nation's largest health profession.

While the workforce projections reports discussed in the GAO report are an important source of information about the workforce, they are not the sole source of data used by HRSA and HHS to identify areas of need. For example, through the NCHWA, HRSA has:

- Expanded the Area Health Resources Files to include data on the health workforce at state and national levels. We also improved the analytical tools, and have made the data downloadable at no cost to the public;
- Supported the first ever National Sample Survey of Nurse Practitioners which will lead to a better understanding of this profession. A brief with key findings as well as a public use data file will be available in 2014;
- Developed guidelines for more consistent health workforce data collection, adopted by nearly a dozen professions, through the Minimum Data Set (MDS) initiative. The first

product of this effort will be a high quality comprehensive data set on physicians assistants which will be available in early 2014; and

- Collaborated with nearly every state to strengthen their capabilities to collect and analyze health workforce data and identify their priority health workforce needs. This includes support for state Primary Care Offices (PCOs), Area Health Education Centers, and the provision of direct technical assistance to states.

In addition, HRSA works with the states to identify Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSA), which measure primary care, dental, and mental and behavioral health shortages across the country. These designations are updated at least once every three years and provide HRSA with updated information about conditions “on the ground.” These designations are used to determine eligibility for access to health care providers through programs such as the National Health Service Corps (NHSC) and Nurse Corps, and they are used as one of the tools to target funding to institutions that train clinicians who serve in these medically underserved communities.

The attached documents provide additional information that responds to your request. Thank you for your interest in ensuring timely workforce projections from HRSA. Identical letters were sent to other signees.

Sincerely,



Mary K. Wakefield, Ph.D., R.N.
Administrator