



LifeSpan claims workforce incentives urgently needed to care for Maryland seniors in 2007

Vacancy rate, pay and training will have profound effect on senior care

(Columbia, Md.) — December 23, 2006—Fewer people are entering health care professions throughout Maryland everyday, yet more and more people—especially seniors—need these services. “Maryland began to seriously examine this problem with the Governor’s Healthcare Workforce Summit back in 2003, and although the work to date has been commendable, if we don’t create meaningful health care workforce incentives, address vacancy rates, pay and training in 2007 those most vulnerable—seniors—will suffer,” said LifeSpan President Isabella Firth.

LifeSpan Vice President of Public Policy Danna Kauffman said the most direct route towards meeting needed goals would involve stabilizing funds and increasing Medicaid reimbursement rates for senior care. “While we recognize Maryland must address the needs of children and the uninsured, for example, the problem facing seniors is no less important,” said Kauffman. “When only basic needs are met—and we are barely doing that today with Medicaid reimbursement rates being cut for the past four years—it has a ripple effect on care.”

Adequate pay and training for personal and professional advancement are also essential to filling vacancies and providing adequate care. “It all comes down to priorities,” said Firth. “That’s why we launched our ‘Honor the Promise’ campaign to encourage the adoption of four key action items by State officials to ensure Maryland delivers proper care to its rapidly growing senior population.

“While improving access to senior care is first on our list, it is closely followed by creating workforce incentives to address increasingly dangerous staffing needs in critical health care,” Firth added. “We also need to dramatically speed up Medicaid eligibility approval and reduce unnecessary senior care administrative burdens.” Honor the Promise pledge postcards asking elected officials to endorse the four key action items in the campaign are being made available statewide.

LifeSpan is also sponsoring a special event Jan. 15 when the Washington Wizards take on the Utah Jazz in Washington, D.C. Reduced ticket prices are being offered to LifeSpan seniors, members and member facility employees. “This is a simple act to honor those who care for others,” Firth acknowledged. “But we need many, many more of these individuals.”

How many?

Like most states, Maryland has long been experiencing a skilled healthcare worker shortage. This will have a profound, negative effect on Maryland seniors. “That’s why we made this one of our four key action items needed to honor our promise to care for seniors,” Firth added, noting the 2003 summit claimed a senior population increase from 514,300 in 1990 to an expected 1,328,510 in 2030—a 158 percent increase. In addition, the vacancy rate for nurses in Maryland was nearly 16 percent—1,900 full-time nurses—in 2002, according to the Maryland Hospital Association. “We see similar numbers for Licensed Practical Nurses and other occupations relevant to senior care,” said Firth. “And the problem is growing.”

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