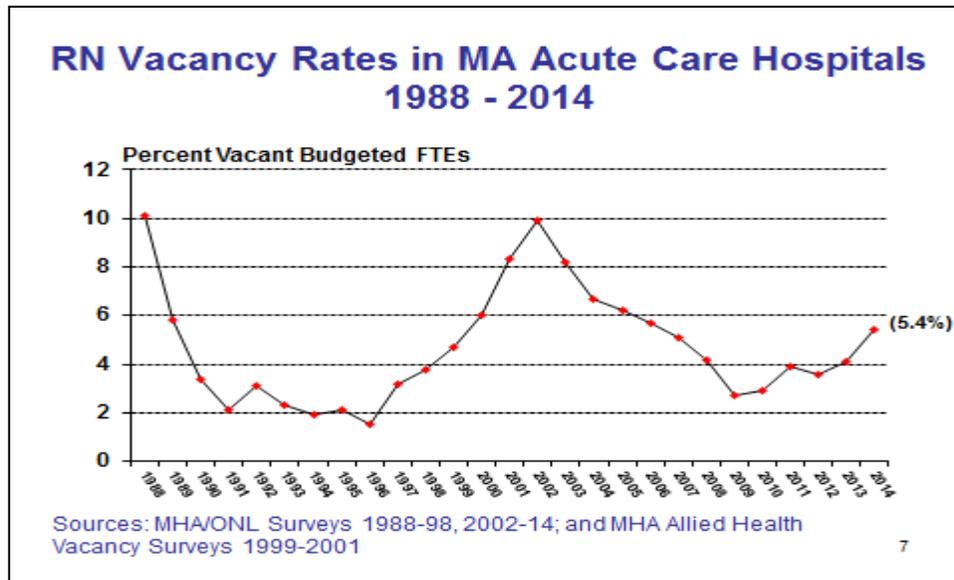
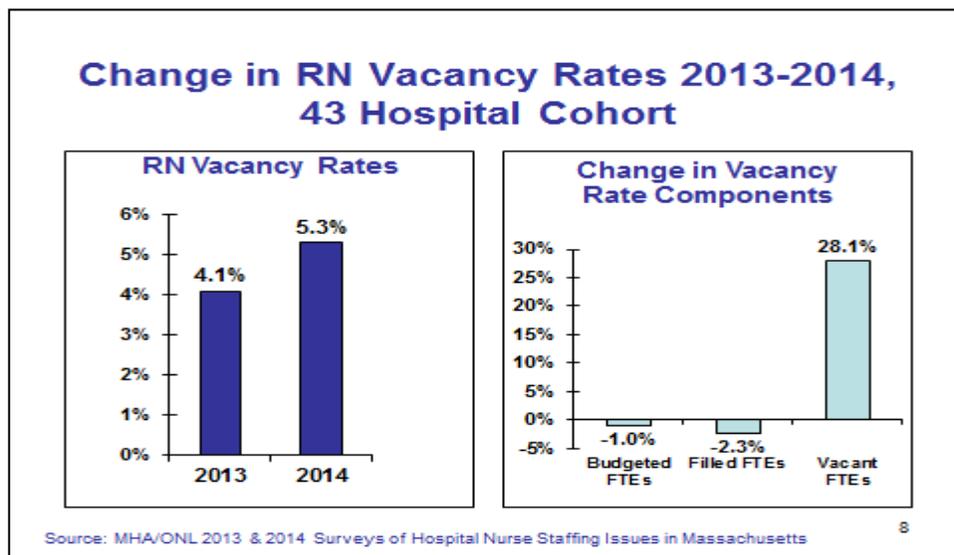


**Massachusetts Hospital Association & Organization of Nurse Leaders MA, RI & NH  
Survey of Hospital Nurse Staffing Issues in Massachusetts, 2014  
Highlights**

- The vacancy rate for Registered Nurses (RNs) in all responding hospitals was 5.3 percent. Acute care hospitals reported a 5.4 percent vacancy rate, and specialty hospitals reported a 2.5 percent rate.
- The acute care hospital RN vacancy rate increased over the 2013 rate of 4.1 percent, and now stands 1.3 percentage points above the median rate of 4.1 percent for the 27 years of data collection. Vacant positions are covered by per diem nurses, staffing pools, on-call staff, overtime, and agency or traveler nurses.

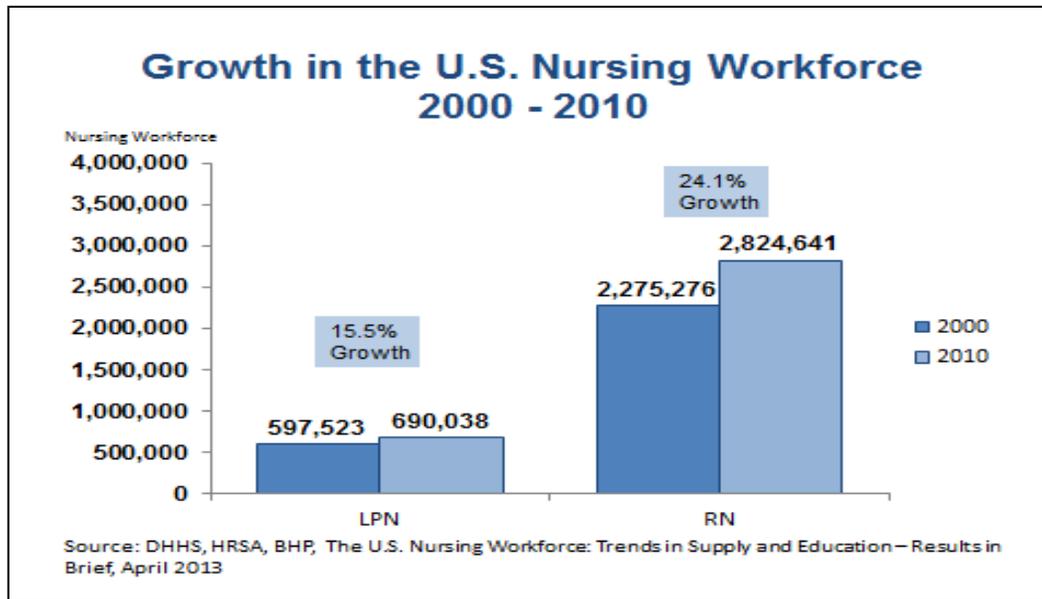


- Among the 43 hospitals that responded to both the 2013 and 2014 surveys, the number of filled RN positions decreased by 2.3 percent, the product of a 28.1 percent increase in vacant positions and a 2.3 percent decline in budgeted positions. The RN vacancy rate for the cohort grew from 4.1 percent in 2013 to 5.3 percent in 2014. Vacancy rates increased in 33 cohort hospitals and declined in 16.



## Observations on RN Supply and Demand Trends

- National studies (Buerhaus, JAMA, November, 26, 2008) suggest that the drop in vacancy rates observed since 2002 was caused by the reentry to the workforce of older, married nurses responding to increasing RN earnings and the toll of relatively high unemployment rates on their families following the 2001 recession. The recession that began in December 2007 and drove the state unemployment rate to 9.3 percent in December 2009 appears to reinforce the trend. Improvements in the hospital workplace and widespread private-sector initiatives aimed at increasing the supply of new nurses have also been cited as affecting the trend, as has expansion of nursing education programs that led to unprecedented levels of entry into nursing over the past decade.



- The most authoritative studies (Auerbach, Buerhaus, and Staiger, Health Affairs, December 2011, and same authors NEJM, March 22, 2012) of projected supply and demand for registered nurses suggest that the recent reprieve in the nursing shortage may be short lived, although that forecast is highly dependent itself on uncertain forecasts about growth in the economy and reduced unemployment:

*“...it seems likely that growth in demand for RNs over the next few years will outstrip the projected growth in the workforce, leading to renewed shortages of RNs in the near term.*”

*Employers and workforce policymakers should not be lulled into complacency by the current absence of a nursing shortage. Instead, they should anticipate that the current positive effect of a weak economy on the RN labor supply is likely to evaporate as the economy improves and that shortage will reemerge.”*

- More recently (NEJM April 18, 2013), the same authors concluded:

*“Despite the projections of severe shortages made just 10 years ago, a combination of policy efforts, a responsive education system, private-sector initiatives, and the effects of a recession has led to unexpected growth in the nursing workforce. If this growth continues, the nursing workforce will be better able to respond to the health care needs of Americans...This outcome*

*is not certain, however, and is less likely if the surge in younger people entering nursing stalls, the workforce continues to grow unevenly across the country, or the nursing workforce is ill prepared to meet the challenges of the fast-changing health care delivery system.”*

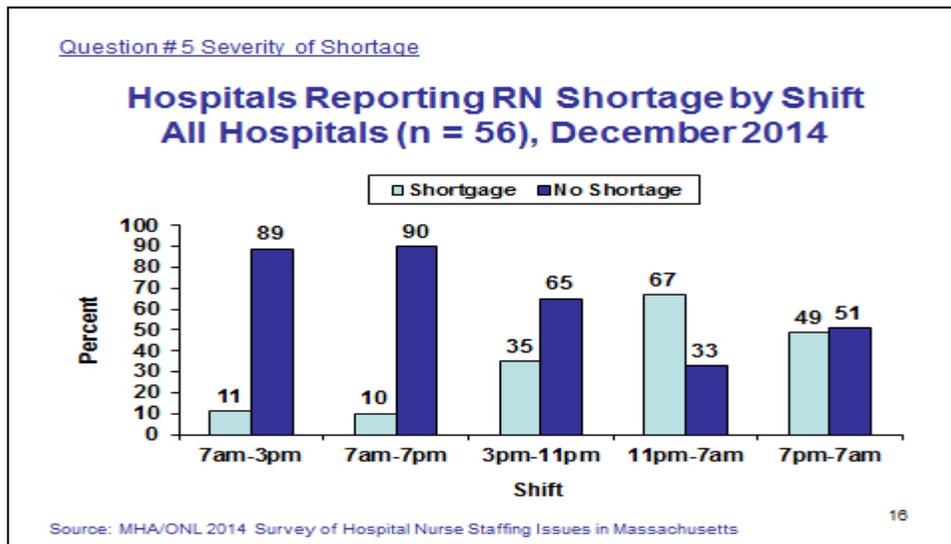
- New research from Auerbach, Buerhaus, and Staiger (Health Affairs August 2014) found that about one-fourth of surge in the RN workforce to 2.7 million RNs in 2012, 500,000 above the 2.2 million forecasted in 2000, can be explained by changes in the retirement age decisions of RNs:

*“We found that in the period 1969-90, for a given number of RN working at age fifty, 47 percent were still working at age sixty-two and 9 percent were working at age 69. In contrast, in the period 1991-2012 the proportions were 74 percent at age 62 and 24 percent at age 69. This trend, which largely predates the recent recession, extended nursing careers by 2.5 years after age fifty and increased the 2012 RN workforce by 136,000 people.”*

- At the time the 2014 MHA/ONL survey was fielded in December 2014, the National Center for Health Workforce Analysis issued its report, The Future of the Nursing Workforce: National and State-Level Projections, 2012 -2025<sup>1</sup>. The report projects that, at the national level, “...*the change in RN supply between 2012 and 2025 is projected to outpace demand* (by 340,000)” and estimates that RN supply in Massachusetts will grow from 78,800 to 85,900, outpacing demand by 400 RNs.

### Other Survey Findings

- Hospital nursing is a 24-hour, 7-day a week service. As reported in past years, the RN vacancies typically are concentrated in evening and night shifts. In the 2014 survey, 67% of hospitals reported shortages on the 11pm-7am shift and 49% on the 7pm-7am shift. Day shift shortages were only reported by about 10%. The share reporting off-shift shortages increased markedly from 2013 to 2014, particularly for the 11pm-7am shift (from 40% in 2013 to 67% in 2014) and the 7pm-7am shift (from 32% to 49%).



- RN vacancy rates were highest in home health services, PICUs, emergency departments, operating rooms, and adult ICUs. The lowest rates were in post-partum/nursery units, skilled nursing units, pediatrics, PACUs, and rehabilitation services.

- Hospitals reported that operating rooms, labor & delivery, PICUs, emergency departments, and post-partum/nursery were the services that took longest to fill open RN positions, measured by the share reporting 60- or- more days to fill open positions. Fifty-one (51) percent of hospitals with operating rooms and 46 percent of hospitals with labor & delivery services reported that it took 60 or more days to fill open RN positions. Pediatrics, rehabilitation services, medical/surgical units, ambulatory care services, and PACUs reported the highest rates of positions filled in fewer than 30 days. Forty-three (43) percent of hospitals reported filling pediatric service positions in fewer-than-30 days and 36 percent reported filling rehabilitation service positions in fewer-than-30 days.
- RN overtime use was reported to have increased compared to the prior year by 27 percent of respondents, remained the same for 49 percent, and decreased for 24 percent. Use of agency and traveler RNs was reported to have increased from the previous year by 40 percent of respondents, remained the same for 34 percent, and decreased for 26 percent.

The survey results are based on the responses of 59 of 96 hospitals that received the survey in December 2014. The respondents included 52 acute care hospitals and 7 specialty (non-acute care) hospitals. The acute care hospital respondents account for 82 percent of the state's acute care hospital inpatient discharges. Response rates for specific survey questions may be fewer than 59.

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<sup>i</sup> <http://bhpr.hrsa.gov/healthworkforce/supplydemand/nursing/workforceprojections/nursingprojections.pdf>