

As American as apple pie: a recruitment strategy that took an act of Congress!

Do you agree that for most experienced new hires to a hospital, one hospital's gain of an employee is the same as another hospital's loss?

For this story about registered nurses, it is helpful to think of the entire experienced nurse workforce as a pie. And because we are talking about the United States' experienced nurse workforce, let us pretend this is a big American *Apple* pie. The experienced registered nurses are, of course, our slices.

Hospital recruiters have a tough job...think about it: potentially every hospital in America is fighting over the same slice in the same apple pie. When a hospital hires an experienced nurse you can bet there is another hospital in the same town, or across town, just waiting for the opportunity to recruit that nurse to their hospital. Today's new hire is tomorrow's new "apple turnover" for our peers in other hospitals!

Until there are large scale results from efforts to increase the size of our labor pool of experienced registered nurses, hospitals across America are looking *beyond* national boundaries to include internationally experienced nurses (and to a lesser extent, other health care professionals) as part of an overall full time recruitment plan.

Why do we say an international recruitment strategy takes (or took) an act of Congress?

For over a year, visas for qualified registered nurses have not been issued by the United States government during what it calls "visa retrogression." The same retrogression occurred in 2005. The fix from Congressional action then was swift in contrast to today's retrogression.

Highlights of H.R. 5924

Exemption from Permanent Resident visa for health care shortage occupations (i.e., Registered Nurses and Physical Therapists);

Payment of an additional \$1,500 fee for each primary visa for a Nurse Enhancement Fund directed to "grow our own" U.S. nurses; and

Funding of comprehensive programs to create a career ladder to nursing for ancillary healthcare workers, to increase the capacity for educating nurses by increasing nurse faculty and clinical opportunities, and to provide training in collaboration with accredited schools of nursing and academic institutions.

While today's visa retrogression continues longer than expected, there are indications the flow of visas and of nurses may soon resume.

Last Spring, Representatives Robert Wexler (D-FL) and James Sensenbrenner (R-WI) sponsored H.R. 5924, the Emergency Nursing Supply Relief Act. This Act had its first hearing on 12 June 2008.

Both the Chairman Rep. Conyers (D-MI) and the Ranking Member Rep. Lamar Smith (R-TX) attended the hearing and both, particularly Rep. Conyers, expressed concern regarding the nursing shortage and applauded Subcommittee Chairman Rep. Lofgren (D-CA) for addressing the registered nurse workforce in the immigration arena.

Many Members of the Committee described how more nurses need to be trained in America and how working conditions for nurses need to be improved. Near the end of the hearing, Rep. Lofgren reiterated her concerns about the national nursing shortage and she also stressed the need to improve the domestic nurse educational infrastructure.

H.R. 5924 (see text box "Highlights of H.R. 5924") provides for both desired outcomes.

For those hospitals who wish to have international nurse recruitment as an available source for more full time nurses, it was encouraging to see Chairman Conyers and Ranking Member Smith in agreement and, by all indications, apparently supportive of the bill.

H.R. 5924 has a way to go before it is passed by the House, considered by the Senate, and signed by the President.

We encourage everyone to contact their Congressman and ask him or her to co-sponsor or support H.R. 5924. Tell your Members of Congress how important it is to have an international nurse recruitment option *available* for those who wish to pursue international as part of the provision of safe nursing care.

Story contributed by HCCA International's Ted Merhoff, Kathy Langan, RN, Nicki Yorke, and Karla Calderon, RN. To learn more about visa retrogression and/or international nurse recruitment, call Franklin, Tennessee-based HCCA at 1-800-932-4685 or visit www.hccaintl.com.

**Next job fair in the United Kingdom, India, or the Philippines?
Or travel the world from the comfort of your desk!**

When visa retrogression is lifted there are still over 200 steps for an internationally experienced nurse to earn the right to practice in America.

Fortunately there are shortcuts available when the work of international recruitment is completed in advance of a hospital's interview.

HCCA International has moved tens of thousands of health care professionals around the world; we may already be working with nurses perfect for your full time workforce!