



2009 State Report

State: Texas

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In 2003, four state agencies in Texas merged to become a single agency known as the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS). The four legacy agencies were the Texas Department of Health, the mental health section of the Texas Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation, the Texas Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse, and the Texas Healthcare Information Council. This merger led to the largest single state agency nursing workforce in Texas. Our agency vision is: A Healthy Texas. Our mission is: To improve health and well-being in Texas.

The state nursing director role is new in the Texas DSHS, having just been filled in September 2008. The position is situated in the Office of Academic Linkages, which reports to the deputy commissioner of the agency. The state nursing director's role is to provide executive leadership for nurses with the agency including those in both public health and mental health settings. Nurses in public health services in classified nursing positions number approximately 225; although many more nurses fill other positions in public health, e.g., program specialists, managers, directors, etc. The mental health nurse complement within the agency includes approximately 1,200 licensed nurses and approximately 3,000 paraprofessional nursing staff.

David Lakey, MD, DSHS Commissioner has recently approved bylaws for the appointment of the DSHS Nursing Leadership Council. Such an organization has never existed before in DSHS. The council is being appointed at this time and will include a total

of 15 members, including representatives from the DSHS central office, regional, and local public health and mental health settings; state psychiatric and communicable disease hospitals; and two members from academe. The functions of the council will be to address nursing management, practice, and performance improvement functions as well as to promote academic linkages and professional nursing development and education.

Projects/Issues Addressed This Year:

- **Development of state nursing director position.** The nursing director position is new in our agency. The DSHS commissioner was instrumental in the development and approval of this position. The key areas of focus for the nursing director position will be to:
 - Provide executive level leadership and representation internally and externally in matters related to nursing practice in the scope of the DSHS mission.
 - Provide leadership in articulating a joint governance model for articulating the practice of nursing within DSHS.
 - Examine trends in the nursing workforce complement works with DSHS leadership to develop approaches for nursing recruitment, training, and retention.
 - Provide input and oversight of professional development opportunities for DSHS nurses and represent the role of nursing on interdisciplinary professional development planning initiatives.
 - Serve as nursing expert in the development, review, and revision of materials representing DSHS nursing practice internally and externally, including written materials, and reports.
 - Promote mutually-beneficial academic linkages between DSHS and schools of nursing, nursing organizations, and other external interest groups in the state of Texas.
 - Provide DSHS agency-wide coordination and communication of nursing issues.
- **Proposal and approval of the DSHS Nursing Leadership Council.** The council bylaws are approved and the council will include a total of 15 nurses, including representatives from the DSHS central office, regional, and local public and mental health services; state psychiatric and communicable disease hospitals; and two

members from academe. The functions of the council will be to address management, practice, and performance improvement functions as well as to promote academic linkages and professional nursing development and education. The council model is crafted from the literature on shared governance and is an adaptation of such a model.

- **DSHS Annual Nursing Leadership Conference.** The DSHS assistant commissioners have provided resources for the development of a 1 ½ day nursing conference that will occur in July. The conference will have both plenary and break-out sessions with a variety of speakers. The theme of this year's conference is: ***Celebrating Nursing Leadership: Promoting Wellness in Ourselves and in our Communities***. Topics will include leadership skills, workplace issues, health promotion, emergency response, and self-care issues. All sessions will provide continuing education credit.
- **Grand Rounds.** DSHS began agency-wide Grand Rounds CE programs in the fall of 2008. The spring semester of programs are about to commence and will offer CNE credit for DSHS nurses. There is also an effort underway to engineer grand rounds presentations that are more intra-disciplinary in nature and to include more nurses as presenters in grand rounds.
- **Public health nurse job description classification project.** During the past year, each public health nurse job description has undergone an evaluation by a team of nurse representatives with a goal of ensuring that all public health nurses are properly classified. Although no nurses were classified downward, a number of positions were upwardly classified to reflect actual job responsibilities. Most importantly, this project ensured that that various nurses with the same responsibilities and duties are uniformly classified.
- **Texas immunization rates improved.** In March 2009, Texas was named the most improved state in childhood immunizations by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. San Antonio/Bexar County was named the most improved city/county. The awards were presented at the CDC's 2009 National Immunization Conference in Dallas. Texas increased 13.5 percentage points in childhood immunizations coverage rates from 2004 to 2008, based on National Immunization Survey data of children 19 through 35 months of age. DSHS nurses had a significant role in the administration of those immunizations.

- **Texas Disasters.** In the past year, DSHS responded to Hurricanes Dolly, Gustav, and Ike, as well as the severe flooding along the Rio Grande River and fires in west Texas. DSHS nurses had a variety of roles in responding to these disasters, ranging from working within the incident command system of the DSHS Multi-Agency Coordinating Center to serving in operations in immediate post-hurricane efforts on Galveston Island. Nurses also had a major role in many areas of the state overseeing the planning and management of medical special needs shelters.
- **Academic Linkages.** DSHS nurse leaders are currently assessing opportunities for increasing the number of academic linkages between DSHS and schools of nursing within the state. Although the agency already has more than 1,000 undergraduate and graduate nursing students in clinical rotations and internships each year, efforts are underway to increase linkages, especially with graduate students.