

## Allied Health: Supply and Demand

*Seventeen hospitals in seven counties – Ashtabula, Cuyahoga, Harrison, Lake, Lorain, Medina and Summit– participated in a survey by the Northeast Ohio Nursing Initiative (NEONI) on allied health staffing. Survey responses are based on 2004 data.*

### What is an allied health professional?

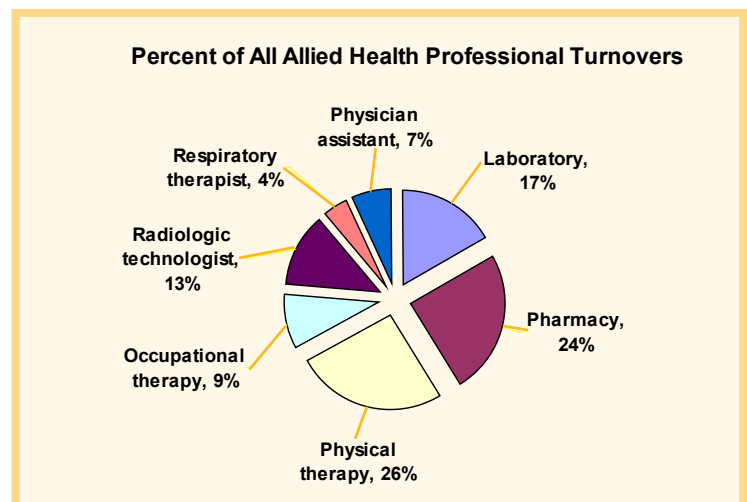
Allied health professionals are healthcare practitioners with formal education and clinical training who are credentialed through certification, registration or licensure. They collaborate with physicians and other members of the healthcare team to deliver high quality patient care services for the identification, prevention and treatment of diseases, disabilities and disorders. There are over 200 allied health careers, including occupational therapy and respiratory therapy. This survey explores a dozen of the most in-demand allied health careers in Northeast Ohio.

### How many allied health jobs are available?

Participating hospitals reported a total of 2,306 budgeted full-time equivalent (FTE) allied health positions of which laboratory technicians/technologists (30 percent), particularly medical technologists (MTs), are the most common, followed by radiologic technologists (13 percent), respiratory therapists (12 percent) and pharmacists (11 percent). Projecting this to all 32 hospitals in Northeast Ohio, there are an estimated 4,300 budgeted FTE allied health professional positions in Northeast Ohio.

### What are turnover rates for allied health positions?

The turnover rate for allied health positions, defined as separations other than retirement, averaged 14 percent at Northeast Ohio hospitals during 2004. The highest turnover rates as a proportion of all current FTEs in that occupation in 2004 were among physical therapist assistants (35 percent), physical therapists (26 percent), and occupational therapists (24 percent). The positions with the highest turnover rates as a percent of all allied health professional turnovers were physical therapists, medical technologists (MT), and radiologic technologists.



Note: Laboratory includes cytotechnologists, medical laboratory technicians and medical technologists; pharmacy includes pharmacists and pharmacy technicians; physical therapy includes physical therapists and physical therapist assistants; and occupational therapy includes occupational therapists and occupational therapist assistants.

## Which allied health professions have the highest vacancy rate?

Hospitals reported a total of 204 vacant allied health professional positions during the fourth quarter of 2004, equating to an overall vacancy rate of 8.9 percent. Allied health professions with the largest vacancy rates included physical therapists (19 percent), pharmacists (14 percent) and physical therapist assistants (13 percent).

## What strategies are used to fill vacant allied health positions?

With relatively high allied health turnover rates, and subsequent vacancies, hospitals use various strategies to temporarily fill these positions until permanent replacements are found. All hospitals reported using overtime to fill vacant allied health positions. Increasing the hours part-time staff work and using on-call personnel were each used by 94 percent of hospitals. While rated the least commonly used strategy compared to others, agency staff were still used by a fairly high percentage of hospitals, at 82 percent. The most effective strategy for filling vacant allied health professional positions, according to survey respondents, was increasing the hours part-time staff work, followed by overtime, enlisting the help of on-call staff and using agency staff.

## What are the implications?

Allied health turnover and vacancy rates, averaged for the dozen most in-demand professions in Northeast Ohio, are higher than those for registered nurses in the area. Yet in contrast to the nursing

shortage, recognition of allied health professional shortages is just beginning to be understood. Many allied health positions require a high level of education, which takes several years to complete, suggesting an urgent need to recruit individuals into these fields before shortages worsen. As the population ages and new technologies become available, the demand for services provided by allied health professionals is unlikely to abate.

**Filled Versus Vacant FTE Allied Health Positions at Northeast Ohio Hospitals**

