



## Demand strong for health care pros

By JIM HOOK Senior writer

The recession has not hit the medical field as hard as other sectors of the local economy.

While the Chambersburg area unemployment rate has topped eight percent, employment in the medical field is at a record high.

"It's not recession proof, but it's definitely resistant compared to most of the rest of the sectors (in the economy,)" said Ryan Horner with the Pennsylvania Center for Workforce Information. "Demand for health care has continued to rise. I don't see that trend changing going forward either."

Job security and good benefits attract a wide array of talent to the field, but Jared Fisher, a 21-year-old registered nurse in the emergency room at Chambersburg Hospital, urges caution.

"You have to like the job," he said. "You can't do it just for the money, or you'll get burned out real quick."

Fisher said he likes the caring aspect of the medical field, and his clinical duty in the emergency room showed him where he wanted to be. He earned his associates degree from Penn State/Mont Alto and is halfway to his bachelor's degree.

"Enrollment to the nursing program is pretty vibrant," said Carranda Barkdoll, Mont Alto campus coordinator for nursing.

The program attracts empty nesters returning to the workplace, people changing careers and teen-agers right out of high school, she said.

Penn State/Mont Alto typically takes 60 students a year from a pool of 140 to 160 applicants, according to Michael Harp, director of enrollment management. This year the school received nearly 200 applications.

Jobs have been virtually guaranteed for graduates, he said.

"All of our students would have job offers before they were out of school," Barkdoll said. "This year it was more difficult to get a job straight out of school."

Consumers have put off elective procedures, so outpatient loads have declined, she said. Those nurses have fallen back to caring for patients in the hospital and graduating nurses have had a harder time finding empty slots.

"At Summit Health, we are hiring selectively with a special emphasis on positions that provide direct patient care," said Jessica Walter, director of public relations for Summit Health. "Turnover is low right now. However, if a position opens, we are taking a close look to see if it needs to be filled right away."

Summit Health, the largest private employer in

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Franklin County, has 3,005 employees. Employment has fallen from 3,076 in March.

"There has been some natural attrition over the past few months," Walter said. "This includes employees who retire or move away."

Summit Health operates Chambersburg Hospital (1,812 employees) and Waynesboro Hospital (594). Only federal employer Letterkenny Army Depot has more workers in the county.

Wellspan, operator of Gettysburg and York hospitals, has not had a hiring freeze or layoffs, according to Gettysburg Hospital spokesman Will Lavery. Wellspan employs 8,300 people and has 200 job vacancies in Adams and York counties.

Nearly 40 percent of the 52 CareerLink job listings for Franklin County on Monday were in the medical field.

Health services and private education is the only "supersector" in local private industry to add jobs in the past year, according to Horner. The supersector in June employed 9,300 people, as many as worked at manufacturing jobs.

"It is at a record job level," he said. "It's as good as it's ever been. By far that is the strongest performing supersector."

The supersector includes people employed in the medical field as well as those employed by private schools. Jobs in health services far outnumber jobs in private education, he said.

Where the local health-education supersector grew by 200 jobs in a year, manufacturing discharged 1,600 workers.

In the most recent monthly data however the supersector did not grow in employment.

"We don't typically see movement from May to June," Horner said. "No change is the average. That is not cause for concern."

The stalled growth in part reflects private schools closing for the summer, Horner said. Because there are so few employers in Franklin County in the supersector, health services employment and private education employment are not separated.

The two sectors are separated in the Harrisburg-Carlisle region. From May to June, health services grew by 400 jobs while private education lost 900.

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#### Federal grant

Nursing is one of the most popular programs at Penn State/ Mont Alto, according to admissions director Michael Harp.

He said there are two difficulties in expanding the program -- finding qualified faculty and having enough clinical spots for students in area

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medical institutions.

Secretary of Labor Hilda L. Solis recently announced that \$220 million from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 would fund training in high job growth areas. Public schools and private nonprofit agencies would compete for money to train people in nursing, allied health, long-term care and health information technology.

"An important part of our nation's continued economic recovery is ensuring that workers have the necessary skills to enter high growth industries," Solis said. "Health care continues to offer workers opportunities to enter career-track jobs, earn good wages and make a positive impact on the communities in which they live and work."

Summit Health is open to the grant, according to a hospital spokeswoman.

"Summit Health is always interested in programs that will help strengthen our mission of improving the health and well-being of the people in our community," said Jessica Walter, director of public relations for Summit Health. "A few of the programs that we are currently pursuing could possibly benefit from the grants, so we are investigating the opportunities available to us."

A notice of the grant solicitation is available at [http://www.doleta.gov/grants/find\\_grants.cfm](http://www.doleta.gov/grants/find_grants.cfm) and <http://www.grants.gov>. For more information on the array of Department of Labor

employment and training investments and opportunities, visit <http://www.doleta.gov>.

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