

Guest Column for June 2009

Terra Helps Reduce the National Nursing Shortage

The American Association of Colleges of Nursing is concerned about the shortage of Registered Nurses and has published the statement: "The United States is in the midst of a nursing shortage that is expected to intensify as baby boomers age and the need for health care grows. Compounding the problem is the fact that nursing colleges and universities across the country are struggling to expand enrollment levels to meet the rising demand for nursing care."



Susan Kajfasz

Many people are not aware of the national nursing shortage or how it will affect them. Some resources say there are more than 135,000 vacant nursing positions in the United States and could reach as high as 500,000 by 2025. In our area alone, the Ohio Hospital Association is predicting a shortage of 31,977 by 2020. The number of new licenses issued by the Ohio Board of Nursing indicates a severe decline over the last ten years. In 1995, there were 4,456 new RN licenses issued in Ohio. In 2003, there were 3,060, a disconcerting 31 percent decrease. Added to that, the average age of a nurse in Ohio is 47. Nationally, 55 percent of nurses reported their intention to retire between 2011 and 2020 as the baby boomers reach age 60.

What is contributing to this crisis? The aging population is the biggest contributor. The second key factor is that a shortage of qualified nursing school faculty is restricting nursing program enrollments. A third contributing factor is insufficient staffing levels of nurses in hospitals which raises stress and negatively impacts job satisfaction driving many nurses to leave the profession. While sicker patients who require more attention are driving the growing demand for nurses in hospitals, opportunities for nurses are also increasing in other settings.

In addition to the problems of the shortage is of course patient care. It has been found that the shortage of registered nurses, in combination with an increased workload, poses a potential threat to the quality of care. Consumers reported that the most important issues affecting medical error rates are workload, stress or fatigue among health professionals, too little time spent with patients and too few nurses.

There are strategies to address the shortage. In Ohio, the State Board of Regents is awarding grants to help nurses further their education to help with the faculty

shortage. This is also occurring at the national level. Locally, here at Terra, the first nursing class of 2008 graduated 19 students. To date, all 19 of these students have passed the state licensing test and are working in South Carolina, Kansas, Missouri, Cleveland Clinic, and almost all of our local hospitals. In May, 2009, Terra graduated 23 students of which 10 already have full-time jobs in our local area. The nursing program has proactively looked at the nursing shortage and will now be admitting two nursing classes each year as opposed to one. This year, the first class will be admitted in the fall semester and our second class will be admitted in January with the hope of graduating 50 nursing students annually.

We are a small program but we are very proud to be a part of the nursing shortage solution with Terra Community College.

Respectfully submitted,

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