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SON and Detroit Riverview partnership transforms nursing education

As the baby boomers age into retirement and health care needs grow, the national nursing shortage crisis will intensify. This becomes even more discouraging once the high turnover rate of new nurses is factored in. The average hospital nurse turnover rate is 8.4 percent, but a staggering 27.1 percent of nurses leave their position within the first year, according to PricewaterhouseCoopers' Health Research Institute. Plus, as today's nurses — whose average age is 45 — reach retirement the shortage intensifies.

OU's School of Nursing and St. John Health are partnering to address this high attrition rate by transforming nursing education through the new Riverview Project. The project deepens real-life nursing experiences for students, while improving community health care services and offering new vocational opportunities to displaced workers.

Collaborative research points to numerous causes for attrition and identifies a three-year window of opportunity (senior year and first two years after graduation) to thwart the problem. With the help of a five-year \$5.3 million educational grant from St. John Health for Transforming Nursing Education, the project makes those three years less stressful and more conducive to real-life training by engaging nursing students through more intensive, lengthier rotations, virtual simulations and support systems leveraging mentors and preceptors.

Reducing turnover and nursing shortages in the community by improving nursing education ultimately improves the quality of health care and increases access. Recent research clearly links well-prepared nurses to lower mortality and failure-to-rescue rates, according to the American Association of Colleges of Nursing.

"We found a gap between what nursing students are taught and actual nursing practice in the community. The world of nursing is hectic and requires much more responsibility than a student normally experiences in rotations," said Linda Thompson Adams, dean, SON. "Nurses are confronted with many stressful situations which students don't always have the critical-thinking skills necessary to react as quickly and effectively as required."

The project will address the gap in three phases:

- Phase 1: A precepted clinical model where students work one-on-one with an experienced nurse through their clinical rotation.
- Phase 2: Additional virtual simulations within three clinical labs and six surgical operating rooms ensure nursing students receive equal experiences in a variety of scenarios to improve teamwork, problem-solving and critical-thinking skills.
- Phase 3: An on-boarding program will include mentoring, support groups and continuing education opportunities in critical thinking, leadership skills and stress management.

"This partnership offers St. John Health the opportunity to collaborate with Oakland University to address important community needs such as job training, economic stimulus in Detroit and an infusion of health care workers in areas of critical shortage," says Mary Naber, senior vice president of St. John's WorkLife Services.

Phases one and two began in winter 2009, while the on-boarding program was in progress. To accommodate the ambitious project, OU students and staff work out of the 45,000-square-foot Detroit Riverview site. Detroit Riverview, a former hospital campus, ceased inpatient operations in 2007 and now provides primary care, urgent care, lab services and a pharmacy. The campus, and OU's nursing program, are part of Neighborhoods Detroit Initiative.

"The entire second floor of Detroit Riverview will be renovated to create classrooms, lecture halls and simulated patient settings for real-life training of nursing students," explains Naber. "What makes the Riverview campus ideal for the program is that the existing Intensive Care Unit, Step-Down Unit and Operating Rooms will be used to give students hands-on experiences that bridge the gap between academic preparations and workplace realities."

"We have more than 20 patient beds where students can practice assessment and fundamental skills," adds Barbara Penprase, director, OU's accelerated second degree program. "Each area is positioned in front of wall mounts that hold oxygen, suction and patient call lights, which is similar to what is used at hospitals during clinical rotations."

According to Thompson Adams, the benefits to the university and the community are obvious.

"At OU, we have limited spots for students and limited clinical sites. The high new nurse attrition rate means wasted resources. Of course, students don't want to lose time and money invested in their education. Working with St. John to transform student and new nurse experiences means everyone can achieve success," she said.

For hospitals, recruiting qualified caring nurses can be both challenging and costly. St. John Health estimates it costs anywhere from \$25,000 to \$60,000 to replace one nurse. Naber sees the Riverview campus as a community-conscious solution to the nursing shortage.

"This partnership provides a pipeline of nurses for SJH to hire," Naber adds. "They train in our facilities, learn the culture and how to provide the highest-quality patient care experience and to care for the whole person — mind, body, spirit. St. John Health wants nurses who have a passion for healing."

SUMMARY

OU's School of Nursing and St. John Health are partnering to address the nursing shortage and high attrition rate by transforming nursing education through the new Riverview Project.

Created by Katherine Land - Deleted (land@oakland.edu) on Friday, April 24, 2009

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