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Online certificate program prepares nurses to educate others

By **Dave Groves**, news editor

When Oakland University Associate Professor Mary Mittelstaedt began her career as a nurse, she enjoyed learning from others who had not only mastered the art of their practice, but had learned how to teach others to do the same.

As the profession advanced and a wide array of specialty areas emerged in nursing practice, Mittelstaedt noticed that the focus on preparing nurses to become educators waned.

Today, the nation faces a critical shortage of nurses, which is complicated by the fact that fewer are available to help educate people entering the profession. Many practicing nurses have significantly enhanced their skills and knowledge relative to the delivery of health care, Mittelstaedt explained, but not nearly enough have been adequately prepared to pass on their expertise.

"I thought, wouldn't it be nice if we had some sort of mechanism to add that to their knowledge base?" she said.

With that in mind, Mittelstaedt proposed that the OU School of Nursing begin offering education courses to nurses with bachelor's degrees who may not necessarily be interested in pursuing a master's degree in nursing education.

Coincidentally, university officials had been hearing from area hospital administrators who needed some way of helping their most talented nurses learn the concepts and skills necessary to become effective nurse educators. The students coming to them needed a hands-on, real-world approach to meet these educational objectives, and hospital administrators needed nurse educators in place as quickly as possible to achieve this goal.

The convergence of these neatly tied situations led to the introduction of a post-bachelor's certificate program in nursing education.

"What the hospitals are seeing just seemed to be a good fit with what we were doing," Mittelstaedt said. "That's how it all came together."

Dianne Norris, associate dean of the School of Nursing, said that as result of a partnership with William Beaumont Hospital in Royal Oak, practicing nurses enrolled in the certificate program will have an opportunity to apply what they have learned in a clinical setting. These nurses, called preceptors, as well as their students, the hospital and its patients stand to benefit.

"What this does, instead of just asking the bedside nurse to take on students, is provide the preparation they need to do that effectively," Norris explained.

"In order for the students to be well served, it helps to have folks in the hospitals well educated."

To accommodate the busy work and family lives many practicing nurses have to balance, the program's three-course track was made available on-line.

Mittelstaedt explained that while this approach will help make great strides in terms of answering a broad need for nursing education, it may also inspire participating nurses to further their own level of expertise.

"A lot of nurses may not have the confidence that they can get through a master's program or even move on to a Ph.D.," she explained. "This is a way to help them see that they can. I mean, isn't this just a wonderful way of seeding that garden?"

Norris added, "If more people decide to go on with a master's degree education, that will be better for the hospitals in terms of the quality of their professional staff and better for the individuals in terms of the growth they can see in their careers."

Response to the online program has been positive, and Norris expects that partnerships with other area hospitals will evolve and student interest grows.

To learn more about the on-line certificate program in nursing education, call Patrina Carper at (248) 370-4068 or e-mail to carper@oakland.edu.

SUMMARY

The OU School of Nursing offers education courses to practicing nurses interested in helping those new to the profession apply what they've learned to patient care.

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