



Tuesday, June 11, 2002

## Partnerships help fix nursing shortage

*The following column, written by Kathleen Emrich, interim dean of the School of Nursing, appeared in The Oakland Press on June 8:*

Do registered nurses make a difference in the quality of health care delivery and positive medical outcomes?

A recent study by Harvard School of Public Health and Vanderbilt University School of Nursing concluded that for certain aspects of care, higher registered nurse staffing levels made a difference. Shorter lengths of stay, lower incidence of urinary tract infections, gastrointestinal bleeding and pneumonia and fewer "failure to rescue" deaths were related to higher numbers of registered nurses, but not to increased staffing by practical nurses or aides.

Specifically, sufficient numbers of nurses to provide eight or more hours of care per 24 hours (including time spent preparing medications, writing reports, as well as direct care) and patient-to-nurse ratios of about 3 to 1 were associated with positive outcomes.

The average patient-to-nurse ratio in Michigan is 4.0-4.99 to 1, putting the state in the bottom group of hospitals, according to Dr. Jack Needleman, lead researcher for the study. On average, the position vacancy rate for registered nurses is 12 percent and has been as high as 18 percent in southeast Michigan.

Area health care delivery systems are collaborating with local schools of nursing to address this alarming shortage of registered nurses. For example, Oakland University's School of Nursing has developed a flexible partnership model that allows it to team up with many of the major health care systems to provide active recruiting, scholarships, loan programs, a variety of student field experiences and innovative clinical opportunities for its students.

Some examples of Oakland's strategies include driving its recruitment efforts to younger age groups. An innovative clinical experience for senior nursing students pairs them with registered nurse mentors and gives them opportunities to participate in helicopter and ambulance transport operations, to work in surgical suites and intensive care units and to become part of the staff in trauma centers and emergency departments. Community leaders like Providence Hospital, William Beaumont Hospitals, Crittenton Hospital Medical Center and St. John Health System collaborate with OU to provide these opportunities and to finance scholarships and loans for students. As a result of this teamwork, OU has been able to increase its nursing student enrollment 16 percent during the last year.

OU and other nursing schools must partner with health care providers to address this critical shortage of registered nurses before it becomes a public health crisis.

### **SUMMARY**

Kathleen Emrich, interim dean of the School of Nursing, wrote this column, which appeared in The Oakland Press June 8, addressing the nursing shortage and how university partnerships with local hospitals has helped increase nursing student enrollment. OU and other nursing schools must partner with health care providers to address this critical shortage of registered nurses before it becomes a public health crisis.

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