

COMMUNITY COLLEGE TIMES

Nursing programs still face space, faculty shortages

BY CARISA CHAPPELL, *Published July 6, 2009*

Wait lists have become the norm for nursing programs at community colleges, with most two-year institutions citing an overwhelming shortage of adequate classroom space.

An increased need for health care combined with a wave of looming retirements have created a shortage of nurses throughout the country. Despite job losses in major industries, hospitals, long-term care facilities and other care settings added 27,000 new jobs this past February, the same month in which 681,000 jobs were eliminated nationwide, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Community colleges play an integral role in training future nurses for the local workforce despite challenges with capacity and faculty recruitment. Developing solutions to overcome these obstacles has become the top issue at many two-year nursing programs.

“Our space was built in 1968 for a class size of 25. Now, we have a class size of between 72 and 80,” said Janet Anderson, director of Lane Community College (LCC) Foundation in Oregon.

She said that when a doctor who was part of the college’s fund raising campaign came to look at the nursing department space, he was surprised and compared it to Cook County Hospital in Chicago in 1952 and agreed that something needed to be done to alleviate the space shortage.

LCC recently launched a capital campaign to fund four new initiatives, including a new health and wellness center. The campaign will also raise money for faculty and student scholarships.

While LCC awaits its new center, the college has developed a “jerry-rigged” simulation lab for the short term, Anderson said. Even with the temporary lab, the nursing department struggles to serve as many students as possible. Typically, there are some 350 application for 72 slots, Anderson said.

“We have to be very creative to get them all into labs in their first and second years,” she said.

Students in LCC's nursing program can also benefit from a partnership with the Oregon Health and Sciences University. LCC nursing students in good standing can automatically gain admittance into the university's bachelor's degree program and can transfer their credits toward the baccalaureate.

Other partnering colleges include **Clackamas Community College**, Mt. Hood Community College, Rogue Community College, Umpqua Community College and Southwestern Oregon community College.

Even two-year institutions with larger facilities can use more space for their nursing programs.

"It's always an issue with space," said Brenda Spring, assistant dean of nursing at Hinds Community College (HCC) in Mississippi. "We're over capacity but we'll deal with it."

MCC maxed out after taking in about 120 nursing students on one campus and 50 on the other, Spring said. One solution that seems to be working is offering varied times that students can take classes.

"We're thinking of alternate ways to deliver the program, including a night and weekend LPN program," Spring said.

While some colleges are offering more online courses to help alleviate space issues, MCC hasn't had many requests for online classes, adding that a significant number of students don't have computers or may lack the skills needed for an online program.

Though not a good fit for MCC, online courses are key for some colleges. The Kentucky Community and Technical College System launched a new modularized online nursing program this summer that enables students to take "mini-courses" exclusively online to be completed in three to eight weeks.

Clinical experiences for students is another issue that nursing programs face.

Carmella Condino of Arapahoe Community College's (Colorado) nursing department said that the college hopes to secure grants to fund mobile buildings that will enhance its lab to offer more such hands-on learning.

"Our enrollment is driven more by clinical assignment availability over the two-year program. More and more nursing schools are being approved in Colorado, especially in the metropolitan Denver area, so there is more competition for an already tight market for clinical," Condino said.

A shortage of nursing school faculty is also restricting nursing program enrollments. That was the topic of recent discussion at a roundtable comprising

four deans from nursing programs in Indiana, including Ivy Tech Community College.

While lower salaries are one factor among several reasons for the faculty shortage, the group said that the solution should be multifaceted. Some solutions at the state level include hospital and health care institutions helping nursing schools by recommending clinical faculty and coordinating the availability of those potential instructors, hospitals allowing staff experts to teach students at the hospitals and allowing nursing schools to test new models of clinical education and allowing faculty to contribute through online teaching.

HGCC's Spring said that when she started working at the college, there was a severe shortage of faculty. There were 10 faculty positions open in the nursing department and only 14 applicants.

The faculty situation at HCC has become fairly stable over the past two years, which Hinds attributes to a \$12,000 salary increase for nursing faculty that was approved in 2007 by the state. The college also tries to be as flexible as possible with faculty's schedule requests. Many of them work during the day and prefer to teach at night or on weekends, she said.