

NURSING EDUCATION Report

Nursing Education for Urban Hospitals:

Bringing More Nurses Into City Hospitals

New Jersey's urban hospitals face unique issues in attracting qualified nurses to work there. Two years ago, Newark-based Cathedral Healthcare System (CHS) and Essex County College forged a solution to ensure that new graduates of the college's esteemed nursing program become valued members of the CHS health care team.

In 2003, Cathedral Healthcare Services Inc. on behalf of CHS received a \$420,778 grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to implement "Nursing Education for Urban Hospitals," a 36-month nursing education program in partnership with Essex County College in Newark. The grant was made through the Foundation's New Jersey Health Initiatives (NJHI) Workforce Agenda program. It provides for a total of 35 urban residents to complete a two-year nursing program at Essex County College, work in paid summer externships at CHS hospitals, and then be ready to enter the workforce upon graduation.

The goals of the "Nursing Education for Urban Hospitals" program are to increase the number of students who are eligible

to enter the two-year nursing program, to reduce the attrition rates of the nursing program in the first and second years, to maintain educational quality, to prepare the students better for the urban hospital experience, and to increase the number of two-year nursing students who are job-ready to work in urban hospitals.

The program combines coursework and clinical experiences, expanded courses and support systems for pre-nursing students, mentoring from Essex County College faculty, additional support and substantial financial assistance for students, and most importantly, paid summer externships at CHS hospitals where students learn clinical skills. Once the students graduate from the two-year program, they are invited to work at one of CHS' facilities for a period of two years. CHS' hospitals include Saint Michael's Medical Center, Saint James Hospital, and Columbus Hospital, all in Newark.

This past May, the program's first class of 13 graduates proudly stepped up to the podium and received their associate's degrees in nursing from Essex County College. They had completed the two-year nursing program at the college and summer externships in CHS hospitals. They are now ready to enter the CHS workforce with a head start on nursing in the "real world."

Throughout their two years in college, special courses were added to enhance student retention. Ongoing counseling, direction, and guidance were available for students. Mentors helped students address both personal and systems-based issues that could serve as barriers to program completion.

"Right from the beginning, Cathedral was very enthusiastic about this project and about working with Essex County College," says Mary Beth Rose, R.N., nurse recruiter for CHS. "We began the project at a time when the nursing shortage was starting. We saw this as a way to obtain quality patient care for our patients while providing job opportunities to members of the hospitals' local communities."

Ms. Rose says that the benefits to both patients and students have been incredible.

"The program enabled us to develop relationships with our students, to be involved with them during every step of their education," she adds. "Now that the first class has completed the program, they are better prepared to work in Cathedral hospitals. They know the facility, the people, and even where they want to work. They

are ready and willing to begin their nursing careers, and we are thrilled that they will be working with us in Cathedral hospitals."

Our First Graduates

"Congratulations and keep up the good work!" to our first graduates of the "Nursing Education for Urban Hospitals" program. These 13 completed a two-year nursing program at Essex County College and summer externships at Cathedral Healthcare System hospitals. We are proud of them and look forward to working with them as colleagues in Cathedral hospitals:

Eunice Amisshah
Surayah Bint James
Roan Campbell
Fiona Finley
Gilbert Morumbwa
Stella Nyairo
Gladys Nyaboro
Mari Pazhoor
Beatrice Peku
Terence Pilgrim
Patricia Policastro
Judith Rivera
Rose Zayas



Participants in the "Nursing Education for Urban Hospitals" program, include (seated, l-r) Gladys Nyaboro of Jersey City, Eunice Amisshah of Newark, Beatrice Peku of Irvington, Rose Naves of Bloomfield and Stella Nyairo of Jersey City, (standing l-r) Mary Kinyanjui of East Orange, Patricia Policastro of Bloomfield, Fiona Finley of East Orange, Rosemarie Villanueva of Harrison, Gilbert Morumbwa of Elizabeth, Mari Pazhoor of Bloomfield, Terence Pilgrim of Irvington, Judy Rivera of Newark, and Roan Campbell.

Successes Abound During First Two Years

"Nursing Education for Urban Hospitals," a joint program of Cathedral Healthcare System (CHS) and Essex County College, has achieved several significant successes in its first two years: The college's nursing program drop-out rate decreased by 62.4 percent, from 50 percent to 18.8 percent; new courses and mentorships were developed to enhance student retention; paid summer externships at Cathedral hospitals put students in the front line of nursing, giving them valuable opportunities to sharpen their clinical and critical thinking skills.

"Add these together and you reach the successful bottom line of the 'Nursing Education for Urban Hospitals' program: Thirteen new nurses working in Cathedral Healthcare System's hospitals," says Janet Czermak, RN, coordinator of the program. Ms. Czermak has worked tirelessly on building the program, serving as the point person between Cathedral and Essex Community College.

This past May, these 13 became the first graduates of the NJHI-funded program that aims to place more nurses into urban hospitals. They are the first class to complete the two-year program, which will continue with another class graduating in spring 2006.

Now finishing up its second full year of operation, the "Nursing Education for Urban Hospitals" has met many of its goals:

- To increase the number of urban students who are eligible to enter a two-year nursing program
- To maintain education quality and prepare the students better for the urban hospital experience
- To increase the number of two-year nursing graduates who are job-ready for urban hospitals.

"To meet these objectives, faculty and staff of Essex County College and Cathedral Healthcare System worked collaboratively to provide an educational experience for students that has them better prepared for employment as soon as they graduate," says Marlene Dey, chairperson of the Nursing Department at Essex Community College.

Through integrated coursework, guidance and mentoring, practical experience, and real summer jobs at Cathedral hospitals, students were immersed into the field of nursing and embraced its challenges.

A number of significant accomplishments were realized in order for the program's goals to be met. These include:

- Linkages between departments of Essex County College and CHS helped to raise awareness of the program. The college



(l-r) Professor
Janet Czermak,
project director,
with students
Stella Nyairo and
Gladys Nyaboro.

received 260 inquiries about the program from potential students.

- Special courses were developed to enhance student retention in the program. Eight hours of Nurse Entrance Test (NET) preparation for 180 students in three years will be provided. One hundred students will be qualified for admission in the nursing program as evidenced by passing scores on the NET in June 2004 and June 2005. Support services — including test-taking tutorials and mentoring — were offered for students.
- The program helped maintain the rates of students who passed the NCLEX exam to between 90 and 100 percent.
- Twelve members of the class of 2005 completed summer externships at CHS's hospitals.
- An Informal group discussion and focus group were held between students and faculty/staff members of Cathedral and Essex County College to address concerns and help staff better plan upcoming activities, gauge indicators of program success, evaluate students' performances, and reinforce learning in the summer externship portion of the program. Students enthusiastically said they were treated as and began to feel "like real nurses" during their externships. The externships also solidified many students' desire to continue in nursing and gave them many opportunities to help them decide which nursing specialty they wish to pursue. A survey questionnaire was also used.

- The program provided an excellent educational opportunity for urban residents (50 percent are from Newark, 29.2 percent from the urban communities of East Orange, Irvington, and Orange, and the remaining 20.8 percent from other municipalities) and minorities (80 percent are black, 16 percent Hispanic, and 4 percent Asian). The program created an opportunity for individuals desiring a second career to choose nursing. A high representation of students were age 30 and over (64 percent).

- Because this grant program was available, students who might have otherwise dropped out of the program were able to return for assistance and re-entry into the program.

"We anticipate that because of this program, there will be about 35 new nurses working in Cathedral hospitals by fall 2006," says Mary Beth Rose, R.N., nurse recruiter for CHS. "That is how we measure the success of this program — by the 35 talented, dedicated nurses who have chosen to make our urban hospitals their first place of employment as they continue on their nursing journey."

From the suggestions garnered from the informal group discussion, focus group, and survey questionnaire, the faculty/staff were able to improve the organizational and educational structures of the program. Plans are to continue the program past its 2006 completion date and to graduate more nurses to work in urban hospitals.

FOR MORE Information

INDIVIDUALS WHO WISH TO BE CONSIDERED FOR THE "NURSING EDUCATION FOR URBAN HOSPITALS" PROGRAM MAY CONTACT JANET CZERMAK AT ESSEX COUNTY COLLEGE AT **973-877-1871**.