

We Need Nurses!

So why did New Jersey schools turn away 1,400 qualified applicants last year?

By Mary Jasch



terms of teaching other nurses. They go into business,” says Egreczky. The base salary for a certified RN anesthetist is \$150,000; nurse midwife, \$90,000; nurse practitioner, \$85,000; clinical nurse specialist, \$85,000; and master’s- prepared professor, \$65,000 to \$70,000. New graduates start out in a hospital at about \$60,000. In academe, someone with a new doctorate starts at \$60,000 to \$65,000.

With such a shortage, the average 49.7-year-old New Jersey nurse who works a 10-hour day is stressed out. Only 3.6% are 30 or younger. Retirement is looming for the majority of nurses who will be 61 in 2020. “We don’t have nurses in the pipeline to replace and match that, and at the same time we have growing demand for nurses across all sectors of health care whether it’s direct care or working for other companies that support health care or faculty positions, educators, clinician researchers,” says Susan Bakewell-Sachs, dean of the School of Nursing, Health and Exercise Science, professor of nursing at the College of



Susan Bakewell-Sachs

New Jersey in Ewing. “In all of those areas, we’re going to experience a shortage.”

In 2006, there were 17 known vacant nurse faculty positions. The faculty shortage is expected to quadruple in five years. How will students go through clinical hours taking care of real patients in real clinical settings when the allowable ratio of students to faculty is just 10 to one?

About 9% of nurses in the state attain master’s-degree status and

Most people don’t stop to think about this: when you’re sick in the hospital, you see the doctor for 15 minutes a day if you’re lucky. The majority of your care comes from a nurse, whose training allows him or her to spot some kind of crisis in development in the absence of the doctor. “You want to have a nurse who can see the blood pressure going up before your heart stops. It’s all of that and much more,” says Dana Egreczky, vice president of workforce development for the New Jersey Chamber of Commerce.

Now the stark reality: the consistent and skilled care we have come to expect from nurses is becoming less and less of a sure thing. In New Jersey, approximately 111,400 licensed registered nurses (RN) and 23,000 licensed practical nurses are active – a 17% shortfall of what is needed. A 49% shortage of 42,400 RNs is predicted for 2020. Bottlenecks in the nursing pipeline are the main reason for the supply problem: one at entry to the

baccalaureate degree, the other, a dwindling nursing faculty. Little incentive exists for change.

Fewer trained nurses in health care facilities result in costly falls, bedsores, infections, and deaths—and a bigger hit to business’s bottom line. “With rapidly escalating health care costs becoming the number one concern of businesses, the State Chamber is involved in the nursing shortage because without skilled nurses, those health care costs are going to go sky high,” Egreczky explains. “Accidents currently cost businesses millions of dollars per year both in terms of additional insurance premiums and in lost productivity due to increased absenteeism.”

Nurses are knowledge-based professionals. In New Jersey they become educated with a four-year B.S.N., a two to three-year hospital-based diploma, or an associate’s degree. Almost 66% opt for the latter two degree options and then take a test to earn their RN designation.

Many nurses now get turned away when applying for a baccalaureate

degree because of the paucity of faculty and clinical sites for teaching. Last year New Jersey schools turned away 1,400 qualified applicants.

Most new nurses head straight for a clinical position. Some are approached by industry. Some eventually go for a B.S. and, perhaps 15 years later, a masters and PhD. Nurses take a long time between degrees. Multiple factors divert nurses from a fast track to advanced degrees, including lack of exposure and not understanding a full career trajectory, financial realities, taking time off from work, caring for family, and lack of funding available to both support themselves and pay tuition.

Nurses with advanced degrees who can work in clinical environments as researchers, high level administrators and clinicians are in great demand. “The non-competitive salaries of college faculty are a critical reason why those nurses who do eventually obtain higher degrees just do not stay in the true nursing field in

about 1% earn doctoral degrees. The majority of nurses, who have two or three-year degrees, can't become nursing educators. They have very little incentive to get graduate degrees because, in clinical settings, the pay does not increase much. And hospitals have little incentive to pay a two-

staff nurse in a hospital. So why in the world would somebody want to go on, pay all this money for a PhD to make less in the end? Why do we have a faculty shortage? There it is."

"If you come out of a doctoral program and you've got \$80,000 to \$100,000 in debt and you're looking at

on their job and they're the primary bread winner, there may need to be stipend support too."

The chamber is looking into ways to improve nurse faculty salaries and to come up with creative solutions for sharing nurses from industry to become part-time faculty. "Our real

go back to school to become nurses and nurse faculty."

Hassmiller adds that The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation is committed to making New Jersey the No. 1 state in this country for nursing and nursing education. "We absolutely cannot get there without the help of

Sue Hassmiller
Senior Program
Officer and Team
Leader Robert Wood
Johnson Foundation



"State policymakers have at least two tools to use to ease the nursing crisis, on both the supply and demand side. They can raise salaries for nursing faculty in the state —policymakers, specifically governors and legislatures, in other states have done this. They can also provide funds directly – as scholarships, fellowships or student aid—so New Jerseyans can go back to school to become nurses and nurse faculty."

year nurse to go back to school to get a bachelor's degree for maybe a 50 cent differential.

"You have it in your mind to teach nursing because it's a really neat thing to do, respectable, you'll give back," says Sue Hassmiller, RN, senior program officer and team leader at Robert Wood Johnson Foundation in Princeton, a philanthropy committed to improving health policy and practice. "But a PhD faculty member can make less than a

position that will pay you \$100,000 and a faculty position that might pay you \$65,000 or \$70,000...? The investment just doesn't pay," says Bakewell-Sachs, noting the lack of support for higher education in nursing. "We are going to have to look at loan forgiveness and better salaries, and scholarship support for nurses who are seeking masters' degrees and doctorates. Maybe they can get tuition support, but if they have to cut back

focus is to increase the number of nurse faculty in this state," says Egreczky.

Trenton needs to open up new faculty lines, suggests Hassmiller, to meet the demand. "State policymakers have at least two tools to use to ease the nursing crisis: they can allocate money to raise salaries for nursing faculty in the state – other states have done this," she says. "They can also provide scholarships, fellowships or student aid – so New Jerseyans can

the governor, the legislature, the business community and consumers."

Bakewell-Sachs urges the administration to recognize that nurses are indispensable. "There's no doubt that the surgeons who took care of Gov. Corzine saved his life," she says. "There's also no doubt that the nurses who cared for him in the critical care unit saved his life. It takes a team to do that and the majority of that minute-to-minute care came from nurses." ► **FNJ**



Powering Your Prosperity

Building a brighter tomorrow

Over the years, it's been our privilege to deliver the energy that has helped make New Jersey a great place to live and do business. And we look forward to powering the growth of the Garden State for years to come.

Jersey Central
Power & Light
A FirstEnergy Company