

The Einstein- La Salle Nursing Careers Partnership Program

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The importance of a strong nursing workforce to quality of care has been demonstrated in a number of studies.^{1,2} In a multi-institutional analysis of patient, nurse, and institutional characteristics, Aiken and her colleagues found that a high patient to nurse ratio was associated with increased mortality in surgical patients, as well as with increased likelihood of nurse burnout and job dissatisfaction.³ Needleman also reported an association between nurse staffing levels and poor outcomes in both medical and surgical patients.⁴

An inadequate supply of nurses continues to be one of the key issues facing nursing, and indeed our healthcare system in the 21st century. The factors contributing to the shortage are well documented and include increasing age of registered nurses; alternative career choices in pharmaceutical firms and managed care companies; a continued trend of declining enrollments; and increasing patient demand for nursing services as the “baby boomers” age. Statewide, Pennsylvania healthcare providers continue to struggle with a nursing vacancy rate hovering around 9 percent. Federal health officials have projected that the rate could climb to 30 percent in Pennsylvania by 2020, which would translate into more than 40,000 nurse vacancies at hospitals.

In addition to a general shortage, the recruitment and training of nurses prepared to work with an increasingly diverse population continues to be a major challenge. As the demographics change in the United States, the need for diversity in nursing intensifies. The 2000 report from the National Advisory Council on Nurse Education and Practice (NACNEP) emphasized the importance of a culturally diverse nursing workforce

as a way to reduce health disparities and to increase effectiveness in community outreach initiatives. Nursing schools have accelerated efforts to increase numbers of minority students, but retention of many of these students – especially those with multiple responsibilities and/or substantial financial stress – remains a significant issue.

In 2005, Albert Einstein Healthcare Network and La Salle University announced the initiation of a collaborative partnership to provide high-achieving students from the communities served by Einstein with nursing education, employment, and financial support.⁵ Each year, Einstein will select 10 students on the basis of an interview process designed to evaluate their current performance in school, their interest in a nursing career and their reasons for wanting to work at Einstein. Our goal is to recruit students who express interest in working in an urban hospital, who are stimulated by the challenges of nursing, and who we believe can help build a strong and diverse nursing workforce at our institution. Albert Einstein Healthcare will provide selected students with stipends, paid externships, and nursing positions upon graduation – as well as assistance with school loans. Students will also be assigned a mentor – an Einstein nurse who will help the student balance the competing demands of school, hospital work, and home. The Einstein Center for Urban Health Policy and Research will work with Einstein and La Salle Nursing to coordinate the partnership, assist in the implementation of the program, and evaluate outcomes.

Nationwide, employment-based benefits are being used to address the nursing shortage in both recruitment and retention of nurses. Most hospitals offer nurses a range of benefits beyond those offered to non-nursing employees. However, Spetz and Adams report that nurses often consider these benefits to be less important than the work environment.⁶ In addition to providing financial support to nursing students, the Einstein-La Salle partnership was designed to strengthen the inter-relationships among an urban healthcare delivery system, an academic institution and the surrounding community. In the future, we plan to broaden the program to include educational outreach initiatives with area high schools and to promote the pursuit of nursing and allied health careers for students in our communities.

Although five students have begun the program, it is too early to assess the effects of this relatively new collaborative program. Over time, the plan is to track individual students in their career development and to evaluate the impact of the program on nursing retention and recruitment.

For additional information about the Einstein La Salle Nursing Careers Partnership, contact Mary Beth Kingston at KingstonM@einstein.edu. For more information about the Einstein Center for Urban Health Policy and Research, contact Etienne Phipps at PhippsT@einstein.edu.

References

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