

AHEC Update

NORTH CAROLINA AREA HEALTH EDUCATION CENTERS

Supplying North Carolina with Nurses: AHEC's Critical Role

The need for nurses at all levels of the health care system continues to grow at a pace that outstrips the current supply, both nationally and in North Carolina. For more than 30 years, the North Carolina AHEC Program has worked in close collaboration with academic nursing programs, employers, practicing nurses and a wide variety of nursing organizations to prepare and retain a nursing workforce to meet the needs of the state and its communities (see the full *AHEC Nursing Initiatives* report at www.ncahec.net/about/nursing.htm).

Sustained increases in the production of new nurses and new nurse faculty are major challenges in North Carolina. Forecasts for supply and demand of RNs estimate that by 2015 the nurse shortage is expected to be almost 20,000, and by 2020 the RN shortage could exceed 32,000 (*North Carolina Center for Nursing, 2007B*). The forecasts make clear the importance of innovative programs and partnerships to meet the escalating demand for health care in the state. Below are some examples of how AHEC is responding to these needs.

Innovative Programs and Partnerships:

RN Refresher Program – Return to Practice in Less Than a Year

Since 1990, the NC AHEC RN Refresher Program has provided registered nurses who have been out of the workforce with an opportunity to update their clinical knowledge and skills and return to clinical practice – in less than a year. The self-paced program, which has trained almost 1,100 nurses since its inception and includes clinical and didactic sections, is a proven alternative for registered nurses and is the program of choice for NC nurses who wish to return to professional

Nationwide, nearly 488,000, or 16.7% of registered nurses were not actively working in nursing in 2004, according to the 2004 National Sample Survey of Registered Nurses.

practice (full report at www.ncahec.net/about/nursing.htm). The program includes opportunities for skills labs such as intravenous therapy and human patient simulation. Enrollment is at an all-time high and is expected to increase further when the didactic portion of the program is offered online at the end of 2008.

Sixty-five percent of the non-practicing nurses complete the entire program within one year. The per capita cost to the state of returning a nurse to work via the RN Refresher Program is approximately \$5,247, which compares favorably with the state's per capita contribution to students in the state's public institutions of higher learning.



Agnes Aller, RN, MA
Cape Fear Hospital,
Wilmington

"I am thrilled to be an active nurse again. I feel that I stand a little bit taller and walk a little bit straighter as I pursue this wonderful art of nursing. I would encourage other nurses to consider the RN Refresher Program."



Suzanne Collins, RN, MS, CWOCN
Carolinas Medical Center,
Charlotte

"The AHEC RN Refresher Program is a well-organized and structured re-entry into basic nursing practice. I will never forget the support and respectful optimism provided by the staff at AHEC and all whom I met as preceptors on my medical unit."

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Innovative Programs and Partnerships continued...

Expanding Enrollment in NC Schools of Nursing

The UNC schools of nursing, the nursing programs within the NC Community College System, and the schools of nursing at NC's independent colleges are all significantly expanding enrollment. One critical issue is the capacity of the state's hospitals and other clinical facilities to provide high quality clinical experiences for these students. AHEC has taken the lead to develop and coordinate increasing capacity. The NC Nursing Summit, convened by AHEC in October 2007, underscored the need for more effective use of existing clinical sites, development of new sites, and innovative ways of expanding the number of clinical faculty.



ECU nursing students gain practical skills working with a human patient simulator. Photo credit: Cliff Hollis, ECU News Information

Increasing Nurse Faculty – Clinical Teaching Associate Program

AHECs are working collaboratively with schools of nursing and clinical agencies to expand on the Northwest AHEC and Eastern AHEC models of clinical teaching associates (CTA). AHEC has recently provided funding for a CTA initiative at Mountain AHEC. These RNs serve as clinical adjunct faculty for schools of nursing and accept responsibility for groups of students at a clinical site. CTA courses also prepare these nurses for preceptor roles.

Clinical Site Development Grants – Human Patient Simulation

With the support of the NC legislature, each year the NC AHEC Program allocates grant funding among the NC schools of nursing. In 2007-2008, one of the projects was a highly successful program at East Carolina University's School of Nursing in partnership with Pitt Community College. Students from both schools gained experience with human patient simulation, and faculty learned how to teach with simulators. Sixteen new clinical site development projects were funded for 2008-2009, including two projects using human patient simulation: UNC-Charlotte in partnership with Stanly Community College/South Piedmont Community College, and WakeMed in partnership with Wake Technical Community College.

For more information about the AHEC nursing programs, contact the nurse educators at your AHEC.

North Carolina Area Health Education Centers

Area I AHEC

Rocky Mount
www.arealahec.org

Charlotte AHEC

Charlotte
www.charlotteahec.org

Eastern AHEC

Greenville
eahec.ecu.edu

Greensboro AHEC

Greensboro
www.gahec.org

Mountain AHEC

Asheville
www.mahec.net

Northwest AHEC

Winston-Salem
northwestahec.wfubmc.edu

South East AHEC

Wilmington
www.seahec.net

Southern Regional AHEC

Fayetteville
www.southernregionalahec.org

Duke AHEC Program

Durham
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Wake AHEC

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