

The University of North Carolina System and Nursing in North Carolina

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For over a year, North Carolinians committed to ensuring a strong nursing workforce within the state have met to review data, study “best practices” in our own and other states, and make recommendations for how North Carolina institutions that educate and employ nurses can best serve our citizens. The University of North Carolina (UNC) is committed to taking the steps necessary to address both the number of nurses needed and the appropriate educational level for those nurses. Board of Governor’s Chair J. Bradley Wilson charged the Committee on Educational Planning, Policies and Programs of the Board of Governors to examine the current nursing shortage in North Carolina and to make recommendations for UNC’s role in responding to the shortage. The statewide NC Institute of Medicine Task Force on the NC Nursing Workforce has been critical to UNC’s examination of its own role in responding to the nursing shortage issue. Now that the Task Force has completed its work, Chairman Wilson has appointed a special committee of the Board of Governors to review their findings and develop a set of recommendations for UNC’s response to the nursing shortage issue.

Nursing Education Programs and Enrollment

UNC has nine campuses providing prelicensure baccalaureate nursing (BSN) degrees. The same nine campuses also offer Registered Nurse (RN)-to-BSN degrees and, in addition, Fayetteville State University (FSU) and UNC at Pembroke (UNCP) have a joint RN-to-BSN degree program. FSU and UNCP are planning to establish prelicensure BSN programs on each campus to provide increased access to students seeking baccalaureate degrees in nursing in their regions. Two campuses, UNC at Chapel Hill (UNC-CH) and Winston-Salem State University (WSSU), have developed

accelerated BSN programs for students who already have a bachelor’s degree in some other field, but with intensive study for 14-16 months these students can receive a BSN degree that will qualify them to sit for the nursing exam.

UNC responded to the nursing shortage in the late eighties and early nineties by increasing enrollment and the number of graduates at the bachelor’s-level, doubling the number of BSN graduates between 1990-91 and 2000-01 (509 to 1,017). Similar to the national picture, the enrollment and number of graduates at the baccalaureate level began a slow decline in the late nineties. For fall 2003 we have seen a dramatic reversal of this enrollment trend with a 16 % increase over 2002 to 2,303 students, the largest enrollment in undergraduate nursing ever for UNC. The number of baccalaureate graduates has continued to decrease, but we expect a reversal of that trend once these enrolled students complete their programs. At the master’s level the number of graduates more than doubled between 1990-01 and 2000-01 (100 to 253). Master’s enrollment for fall 2003 has climbed to 794, the highest level ever. The number of graduates for fall 2003 was 244, which was an increase over 2001 but slightly below the previous high of 253. UNC now has doctoral programs at UNC-CH and East Carolina (ECU), and the Board of Governors has approved UNC Greensboro (UNCG) to plan a new doctoral program in nursing. Enrollment in doctoral work is growing. Sixty-two students were enrolled fall 2003, and seven students received doctorates in 2002-03. UNC is well aware that the expansion of nursing

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programs will require additional nursing faculty, and has particularly focused on producing master's-level (MSN) students in nursing education to respond to the needs for faculty in the community colleges in North Carolina. In addition to the site-based programs, two UNC campuses, ECU and UNCG, offer an online MSN in nursing education accessible from anywhere in the state.

Creating More Nurses and Nursing Faculty

The core recommendations from the Task Force for UNC are for more nurses, for higher levels of education for current and future nurses, and for producing more faculty members for nursing programs at the associate and bachelor's levels as well as for our graduate programs. This means that UNC campuses should expand the number of students enrolled in prelicensure BSN programs and accelerated BSN programs to increase the number of RNs in North Carolina. UNC's contribution to raising the educational level of nurses in North Carolina will involve more nurses coming into the profession at the BSN level, an expansion of the number of nurses enrolled in RN-to-BSN programs, and an expansion of nurses enrolled in master's and doctoral programs. The nursing faculty shortage will be addressed by expanding opportunities in master's and doctoral programs. At the master's level it will be particularly important to expand opportunities in MSN programs in Nursing Education because that credential is crucial for the community colleges to be able to expand their programs to meet accreditation requirements. The Task Force on Nursing recognized this as a critical contribution of UNC campuses.

The Office of the President has been supportive of increasing access to baccalaureate and master's programs using online technologies, having allocated over \$500,000 to the campuses to expand online access at both levels in the past two years.

Each of the existing undergraduate programs turns away qualified students because of limited faculty, space, or insufficient clinical sites. The requirement for a 10:1 student/faculty ratio in clinical courses is not consistent with existing enrollment patterns on the campuses and, in this difficult budgetary climate, makes it harder to expand. Some of the campuses have received support from local hospitals that provide classroom space, clinical preceptors or funds to hire additional faculty, and such partnerships need to be explored further. The Area Health Education Centers (AHEC) has been very supportive and helpful in seeking additional clinical sites.

Throughout the year, we have explored with the deans of nursing the conditions that preclude the production of more nurses at every level. The issues are many. There is a need for faculty development funds for existing faculty to learn new skills or for master's trained faculty to seek doctoral degrees. For most campuses, faculty salaries are an issue, making recruitment difficult. Doctoral-level (PhD) trained faculty have opportunities for high-paying positions outside the academic environment. Some campuses have no space to grow larger programs or no large classrooms to accommodate larger classes. Additional

graduate fellowships are needed to meet the financial needs of students engaged in doctoral study. All of these issues are compounded by the extensive budget cuts our campuses have faced over the past three years even as the university has received new enrollment funding.

Articulation

UNC supports the nursing programs at the community college campuses and recognizes the importance of seamless articulation of students from the community college Associate Degree in Nursing (ADN) programs to four-year programs. Increasingly, such needs are being met through bilateral or system-wide agreements, and we agree that it is time for another review of general and specific articulation issues as they relate to nursing. We also recognize the need to expand enrollment at every level, including licensed practical nurses (LPNs) and nurse aides.

Student Support

Another need is the expansion of the Nurse Scholars scholarship to provide more support for those students in the program. Graduation rates would be improved if students did not have to work while in school. A Nursing Fellows program modeled on the NC Teaching Fellows program could provide resources to campuses to support nursing students. Rather than a four-year program, this could be a two-year upper-division program for universities as well as a two-year program for ADN students.

UNC and the NC Center for Nursing have provided support for the College Foundation of North Carolina to establish an online module directed to students seeking a career in nursing. Information about existing programs and scholarship support is available at that site (www.CFNC.org). This is part of a larger effort that will need to be expanded to make career opportunities in nursing known to a wider group of students as they make career choices. It will be very important for this work and the work of others to promote a more diverse nursing workforce that will include more underrepresented minorities as well as males.

Conclusion

While our focus has been on those recommendations for UNC, other recommendations are of equal importance, particularly those focusing on retention in the workplace. Our nursing deans look forward to working with the committee on advanced practice nursing proposed in the report.

Few of these recommendations come without costs. The University of North Carolina intends to take the recommendations of the Task Force seriously and to craft the biennial budget request to maximize the use of limited state funds to address the shortage that exists and is anticipated in the future. We are fortunate to be in a state that recognizes that the health of its people is critical to its future. **NCMJ**