

Private Colleges and University Nursing Programs in North Carolina

Mary Champagne, PhD, RN, FAAN

American nursing and healthcare are at a critical juncture. We are in the beginning years of a deepening shortage of registered nurses and nurse faculty, and headed toward two possible futures. In one scenario, we look to old solutions or continue as we are: the nurse shortage increases in severity, patient care suffers, and, as noted in the Robert Wood Johnson report (*Healthcare's Human Crisis: The American Nursing Shortage*, April, 2002) a major public health crisis occurs. In the second scenario, we are innovative and proactive in increasing



enrollment in nursing programs, improving the educational level of all nurses, and improving the work environment of nurses; and we leverage public-private partnerships in education, industry, government and philanthropic foundations to enhance our efforts. The result is a recovering nurse supply, nurses well prepared to provide excellent care in our complex and increasingly technologically sophisticated care system, and a sufficient investment in the health of the public that ensures all North Carolinians will receive the nursing care they deserve.

We are presented at this time with the proverbial “window of opportunity,” with choices to make in securing a preferred future to ensure the health of the public. The North Carolina Institute of Medicine (NC IOM), with financial support from The Duke Endowment, has developed a blueprint for our state’s preferred future. The plan is wise and forward thinking, noting that a multi-modal long-term approach is needed, and that all must fully “do their part” if we are to succeed.

Growth of the number of nurses educated at the BSN-level and growth of graduate programs to prepare nurse faculty are key recommendations of the NC IOM report. The private colleges and universities in North Carolina make substantial contributions in each of these areas, and are committed to doing even more. As the report notes, the “privates” educate about one-third of all baccalaureate and master’s prepared nurses in North Carolina. The programs are of high quality-retention, graduation and NCLEX pass rates are high; and remarkably between 75% to 95% of graduates stay in North Carolina to practice. In some instances this reflects a greater than expected benefit, as out-of-state students relocate to North Carolina to practice nursing following graduation.

Expanding Private Colleges and Universities

Increasing the capacity of private colleges and universities is largely tied to the funding mechanisms in place in each to allow for expansion. For the most part our schools are funded through tuition dollars and philanthropic gifts. Starting or expanding programs requires “seed money” for the first few years. Philanthropic dollars are incredibly important in this

Mary Champagne, PhD, RN, FAAN, is Dean and Associate Professor, School of Nursing, Duke University Medical Center and a member of the Task Force on the NC Nursing Workforce. She can be reached DUMC Box 3322, Durham, NC 27710. Telephone: 919-684-3786.

effort. Two recent examples illustrate the impact of private foundation support for growth of private colleges and university nursing programs. Our school, the Duke University School of Nursing (DUSON), was able to re-instate a pre-licensure BSN program which now admits 50 students each year thanks to funding from the Helene Fuld Health Trust. And while 50% of the first graduating class was from “out of state,” 81% stayed in North Carolina and are providing care at the bedside. Philanthropic funds were also critical to our collaboration with the Southern Regional Area Health Education Center to deliver a master’s degree in nurse education to nurses in rural North Carolina. This program, funded by The Duke Endowment, has, in the last two years, graduated over 30 students, who will teach in community colleges and hospitals in underserved areas of our state.

The Importance of Student Support

A unique challenge faced by private colleges and universities is providing sufficient scholarship support to students. The majority of students in the “privates” are North Carolinians, and need help in financing their education. They are not wealthy. I know from my personal experience as dean, that scholarship support often makes the difference between a student pursuing or not pursuing education in nursing. My experience is validated by the comments of other deans and directors in North Carolina’s private colleges and universities. Expanding the North Carolina Nurse Scholars program, extending the state tuition support to second degree baccalaureate and master’s degree nursing students, and enacting the Faculty Fellows Program would markedly impact the ability of private colleges and universities to increase enrollments. Most important to this effort, is philanthropic scholarship support in the form of endowments from private foundations to the private schools of nursing. Philanthropic support of students has long lasting and far reaching effects. This investment in students reaches all the patients they expertly care for over the years of their nursing career; it is an investment with untold dividends.

Hospitals and other healthcare agencies can also play a critical role in supporting students in private colleges and universities. Innovative examples include “loan repayment” programs for students who agree to work in the healthcare agency following graduation, direct scholarships to students, faculty support through actual dollars to the college, joint hospital and school faculty appointments, and provision of clinical staff to supervise students in clinical rotations. Careful analysis will demonstrate that these arrangements, properly structured, result in a winning situation for all parties. Our school, for example, partners with the Duke University Health System (DUHS) in a “loan repayment” program for our baccalaureate students. Using traditional methods, students can borrow total tuition costs for their education, and sign an agreement with DUHS that guarantees employment, and payment of one-third of the loan plus interest for each of three years worked. Financial modeling, which included weighted costs of recruitment and retention of nurses and salary for staff and traveling nurses, demonstrated that DUHS would fully recoup its investment.

The private colleges and universities look forward to working with the many partners involved in the NC IOM Task Force

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on issues that affect us all in increasing and improving the nurse workforce. We support measures to build an interest in nursing as a career, collaborations to enlarge and more efficiently use clinical training sites, improving the scope of practice of APRNs, and enhancing the work environment of all nurses. We aim to do our best in partnering to ensure a highly educated nurse workforce for today and tomorrow. Working together to secure our preferred future, we cannot fail. The best is surely yet to come. **NCMJ**