

Nursing Shortage: ‘It Boils Down to Capacity’

During the last 10 years, there has been no lack of attention paid to the global nursing shortage. Nevertheless, an important question remains: is the problem getting better?

Marion Broome, dean and distinguished professor at the Indiana University School of Nursing (IUSON), says the struggling economy is alleviating the problem – for now.

“Some nurses were working part-time and now are working full-time – and some are postponing retirement – so that’s created a situation where the need is being at least partially met temporarily,” she asserts. “But, as the economy gets better in the next few years, the demand for health care professionals will be greater than it’s ever been.”

There are approximately 2,000 nursing vacancies in the state. Many experts predict that number nationally will reach one million by 2020.

Nursing enrollment in Indiana has increased 20% since 2000. So, why is meeting demand such a challenge? Each year, nursing schools are rejecting applications, largely because of a shrinking pool of educators. Simply put, applicants outnumber teachers, who can earn significantly higher salaries applying their trade in other positions (such as research or management).



Other factors contributing to the nursing shortage include career options outside the hospital setting (such as working in doctors’ offices) and the impending retirement of Baby Boomers (both nurses and educators).

Still, progress is being made. Bethel College (Mishawaka), Indiana Wesleyan University (Marion) and Indiana University received federal funding from the Department of Health and Human Services to boost faculty at their nursing schools. Students who commit to four years of teaching after graduation can retire up to 85% of their loan principal and interest.

Another approach to addressing the nursing shortage involves innovative partnerships among several Hoosier hospitals and universities.

Key collaborations

Broome praises clinical partners for the support they lend higher education institutions.

“It’s astounding how closely the education and health

system communities work together – in Indianapolis especially – but I think all over the state,” she observes.

Just a few of the partnerships taking place throughout Indiana include:

- **Marian University (Indianapolis) and St. Vincent Health** began offering a 16-month online, accelerated bachelor degree nursing program this fall. Curriculum combines online learning with clinical training at St. Vincent Indianapolis Hospital. Individuals who have earned a baccalaureate degree in a different field are encouraged to enroll.
- **Indiana University** – As part of the Practice Education Partnership, students and IUSON faculty work with nursing staff onsite at six local hospitals for one semester. Through another program, Clarian Health provides funding to add IUSON faculty members. In addition, two instructors teach undergraduate and graduate courses, courtesy of St. Francis Hospital.
- **Ivy Tech** – A two-year RN program in New Castle enables students to earn an associate of science in nursing degree. Henry County Hospital serves as the site for the majority of clinical rotations. Academic coursework is split between the Danielson Learning Center at Indiana University-East and New Castle Chrysler High School. The hospital’s foundation donates more than \$100,000 annually to Ivy Tech for scholarships, faculty positions, clinical training space and more.
- **Purdue University (West Lafayette)** – Health care engineering and interdisciplinary collaboration with hospitals and other community partners drive the four-year doctorate program in nursing practice. Participation is open to post-baccalaureate registered nurses, students currently pursuing their master of science (MS) in nursing and advanced practice nurses with MS degrees.

The role the faculty deficit plays in the global nursing shortage and the need for enhanced collaboration was highlighted at the Nursing Education Capacity Summit that Broome attended along with nursing professionals from across the country.

“This is not just a nursing problem,” she emphasizes. “It will take a lot of partnerships between business and health care, the community, schools of nursing and the different consumer groups to solve this problem. We (educational institutions) certainly have our own part to do in developing curriculum that is high quality, technologically driven and streamlined, but some issues we can’t address on our own.”

Gain more history and insight into the state’s nursing shortage by reading the roundtable discussion in the March/April 2003 issue of *BizVoice*®.



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INFORMATION LINK

Resource: Marion Broome, Indiana University School of Nursing, at www.nursing.iupui.edu

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