Partnership with local hospitals pays off
in more RCC nursing graduates

Thanks to an ongoing collaboration with regional hospitals, Rogue Community College has been able to significantly increase the number of students who enter and graduate from its nursing program.

“Over the past four years, 45 more brand-new Registered Nurses entered the workforce than would have if there had been no support from the hospitals,” said Linda Wagner, RCC Nursing Department head.

Annual financial assistance totaling $142,500 has enabled RCC to hire additional classroom and clinical faculty and boost enrollment to record levels. With an aging population and many nurses nearing retirement, Oregon is facing a critical nursing shortage, which Rogue is helping to address through increased training. Asante Health Systems and Providence Medford Medical Center each allocates more than $65,000, with Ashland Community Hospital providing the balance.

"Providence is proud to invest in the nursing program at Rogue Community College," said Tom Hanenburg, Providence chief executive officer. "The national nursing shortage is a concern, and we are happy to proactively partner with Rogue to provide more nursing opportunities for local students."

Gregg Edwards, chief people officer for Asante, also noted the importance of creating partnerships between hospitals and educational institutions.

“We rely heavily on RCC as a source of new nurses,” he explained. “There’s a tremendous shortage of nurses in Oregon, and the role RCC plays is particularly crucial. But what is also important is the quality of the graduates coming out of the program,” Edwards added. “We have been just delighted with the quality of RCC’s graduates, and it’s wonderful to be able to provide support.”

Ashland Community Hospital President and Chief Executive Officer Mark Marchetti also weighed in on the partnership with RCC.

“All the hospitals in the Rogue Valley recognize the seriousness of the nursing shortage and the importance of helping where ever we can to address the shortage,” he said.

The number of students accepted into the RCC nursing program reflects Oregon State Board of Nursing guidelines for student-faculty ratio, said Cheryl Markwell, associate dean. Without the financial boost from area hospitals, RCC could enroll no more than 24 first-year students.

(over)
With the additional faculty, advising and program support, however, RCC was able to accept a record 36 students this year. And for the past two years, 100 percent of RCC nursing graduates have passed the national licensure exam.

“The hospitals’ support is totally key,” Markwell noted. “Without their partnership we could not take additional students. Our goal is to train as many as possible,” she continued. “The majority of RCC’s graduates get hired locally as soon as they graduate. That’s because the program has rigorous standards and high quality.”

RCC President Peter Angstadt described the partnership as a prime example of how the college and regional employers work together to educate skilled professionals.

“We are very grateful to the healthcare providers for their assistance,” he said. “Nursing is an expensive program to operate, but it’s vitally important. RCC plays a major role in our area preparing excellent healthcare providers. By helping with funding the hospitals allow us to educate more nurses, which will become even more important in the future,” Angstadt concluded.

With the average age of Oregon nurses at 48, and many others indicating plans for retirement within the next 5 years, the state is confronting a workforce crisis. And by 2025, the U.S. Census Bureau projects that Oregon will have the fourth highest proportion of elders in the nation. Rogue has responded to the challenge and boosted nurses training enrollment by using high tech simulation tools and joining a statewide nursing education consortium with an effective, creative curriculum. Training is comprised of about 50 percent classroom sessions and 50 percent lab/clinical site work.

Through collaborative efforts and grant funding, acquisition of a second SimMan, a computerized simulation instrument, has increased clinical training capacity and strengthened student skill learning, Markwell said. Using this technology, instructors and their students can build an infinite number of nursing scenarios. Simulation training, which is used by the military and pilots, has been shown to reduce errors.

“It’s an extremely realistic learning experience in a controlled, safe setting,” Markwell said.

The first SimMan has been housed the past two years in the Smullin Health Education Center at Rogue Valley Medical Center, but RCC is remodeling a site at the Riverside Campus for an additional shared simulation lab.

RCC is a member of the Oregon Consortium for Nursing Education, which also helps maximize training resources. The partnership, comprised of community colleges and public schools of nursing, was established in response to the nursing shortage. Faculty from eight community colleges and the Oregon Health & Sciences University School of Nursing created a shared curriculum.

Community college students have the option of completing the Associate of Applied Science degree in nursing and being eligible to sit for the RN licensure exam, and/or continuing their studies with distance delivered senior-level OHSU and other university coursework required for the bachelor’s degree.

###

N07-11