



Nursing Faculty Shortage: Training the Next Generation of Nurses

Background

The projected nursing shortage threatens the healthcare of our nation. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that more than one million new and replacement nurses will be needed by 2016. Analysts project that more than 587,000 new nursing positions will be created through 2016 (a 23.5% increase). In Oregon, an additional 15,700 RN job openings are expected statewide over the next 15 years.

The Oregon RN ages along with the general population. The average age of the RN in this state is currently 48 years with the proportion of nurses over 50 more than doubling in the past 20 years. By 2025, 41% of currently licensed RNs will retire. Moreover, by 2020, 60% of nursing educational faculty are expected to retire.

In response to the looming nursing shortage, Oregon schools of nursing increased enrollment by 80% since 2001. However, at the same time nursing faculty grew by only 10%, due in part, to the schools of nursing being unable to attract qualified applicants to fill empty faculty positions.

Problem

The shortage of nursing faculty is currently the barrier to solving the overall nursing shortage. This is a multifaceted issue: First, a nurse needs a graduate or doctoral degree to teach. Graduate education is expensive with tuition being an estimated \$30,000 per year. A master's degrees take a minimum of two years full-time and a doctorate takes at least three. Furthermore, many nurses must work while in school so frequently higher level degrees take even longer. Thus, nurses that seek higher level education to become nurse faculty must take on a huge financial burden and make a major time commitment.

The second issue is nurse faculty salary. Staff nurses working in hospitals make several thousand more a year than new instructor level nurse faculty. Where is the incentive to leave a position where you can make enough money to pay off your student loans and still have enough to survive comfortably in the current economic times? Why would you take a position as nurse faculty taking a large cut in pay and still have the financial burden of hefty student loans?

Solution

The Oregon Nurses Association's Cabinet on Health Policy supports legislation for a loan repayment program for nurses pursuing Master's and Doctoral degrees that teach in a nursing program in Oregon after graduation. The program would forgive 20% of the nurses' school loans per year for 5 years.

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