

Grant Outcome Report

Strengthening the Rural Nursing Workforce in New York State

The Problem

Meeting the demand for registered nurses (RNs) in New York State—expected to exceed supply by 37,000 in 2015—would require that an additional 4,000 nurses graduate annually. In particular, rural counties in upstate New York are experiencing severe shortages and challenges recruiting and retaining RNs: the RN vacancy rate in regional health care facilities is currently 15%, up from 9% in 2007. Moreover, according to a report issued by Senator Charles Schumer, upstate New York hospitals could be dangerously understaffed in an emergency, with nearly 500 fewer full-time equivalent nurses than needed to meet health care demands in the Southern Tier. To address this nursing shortage, NYSHealth awarded Hartwick College's Department of Nursing (the College) a grant to support the development of a flexible, accelerated nursing degree program targeting local adult and second-degree students.

The accelerated degree program was designed as a new nursing education option in a region of upstate New York with no existing program of this type. This project was intended to prepare baccalaureate-educated nurses to enter the workforce more quickly than traditional four-year programs. Recruited from the adult, second-degree, or career transition population of upstate New York, graduates of the program were expected to be more likely to remain in the region, which in turn would alleviate the severe nursing shortage and add to the economic wellbeing of the region.

Grant Activities and Outcomes

Under this grant, the College recruited a nursing faculty member as part of the larger goal of setting up the program. Initially, the College also sought funding from other sources, including the Health Resources and Services Administration's (HRSA) Nurse Education, Practice, and Retention grant program; the Appalachian Regional Commission's Area Development grant program; and in-kind support from the College and Bassett Healthcare, a major employer in the area and a project partner. These additional funds were needed to support the designing of the new curriculum, hiring of three full-time equivalent nursing faculty members, marketing of the program, and recruiting of students.

KEY INFORMATION:

GRANTEE

Hartwick College

GRANT TITLE

Strengthening the Rural Nursing Workforce

DATES

November 25, 2008 – July 12, 2011

GRANT AMOUNT

\$83,030

FUNDING

Special Projects Fund

The original objective was to enroll 10 students in the first cohort of the accelerated nursing degree program. Upon completion of the program, it was expected that these newly trained nurses would enter the workforce in approximately 18 months, thus substantially impacting the critical issue of nurse recruitment in local health care settings. Of the original 10 students who enrolled, 9 students were still participating in the program at the close of the grant period.

The College did not receive the HRSA grant to fully support the hiring of full-time faculty members, so it used NYSHealth funding instead to support the hiring of adjunct faculty members. The nursing faculty and project partners will evaluate the program's future success using metrics based on enrollment, completion of degree requirements, licensure, employment, and retention of nurses in local health care.

The Future

The program is self-sustaining through tuition revenues, provided that each new class has at least eight students. However, given the current state of the economy, tuition costs may be a financial barrier that could prevent new students from enrolling. In response, the College is participating in a capital campaign to cultivate scholarship support.

The inability to secure HRSA funding for the initial launch of the program impeded the College from purchasing the curricular and simulation technology that was needed to augment classroom and clinical teaching. The College has since been awarded a \$250,000 grant to fund these components by a private foundation.

The high turnover rate and inconsistent course schedules of adjunct faculty can be a challenge to growing and strengthening the program. Inconsistent schedules also pose another barrier for adult students pursuing the degree, since most students have full-time jobs and families and need a consistent schedule. Consequently, the program director is submitting an application to the faculty council and vice president for academic affairs to approve two three-year-term faculty positions to assist in meeting the demands of the program. As the program continues to grow and evolve, the positions will be converted to tenure-track positions.



BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

ABOUT THE GRANTEE

Hartwick College's baccalaureate nursing program is one of only two nursing education programs in the seven-county Central Leatherstocking region of upstate New York, an area with a population of 700,000. Enrollment in the College's nursing program has grown from 88 students in 2003 to 187 in 2007. The Department of Nursing is accredited by the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education, and over the past five years, the College's graduates have had a pass rate of 87% for the NCLEX-RN licensing examination. The College has longstanding relationships with Bassett Healthcare, the largest health care provider in the region.

GRANTEE CONTACT

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NYSHEALTH CONTACT

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