



Eastern-in-the-News



EASTERN'S NEW NURSING PROGRAM RISES TO CHALLENGE OF STATE'S RN SHORTAGE

Moorefield, WV — Oct. 15 — Amidst all the sound and fury about the need for — and best approach to — healthcare reform in the United States, everyone seems to agree on at least one of the current system's flaws: the ongoing shortage of registered nurses (RNs).



Eastern's New Nursing Program Rises To Challenge Of State's RN Shortage: Last spring the WV Board of Examiners for Registered Professional Nurses approved a new nurse training program in the Potomac Highlands. "Although it's officially a brand new program, we're not complete rookies in this field," noted Robert 'Buck' Eagle, Dean for Academics and Student Support Services at Eastern WV Community and Technical College.

SHOWN, from left:

Front row: Megan Evick; Kanssa Marshall; Brittany Hawk; Heidi Peregory; Jill Landis (Instructor);
2nd row: Cassie Clark; Ashley Sager; Christy Rockwell; Freda Lough;
3rd row: Claudia Acord; Jessica Wolfe; Rachel Rexrode; Laura Schmidle; Marcie Harrington; Shelby Hall; Eleanor Berg (Program Director);
Back row: Chris Todd; Danielle Miller; Rebecca Turner; Angel Perry; Joel Green; Ben Hanlin.

"Even in the best of times, there aren't enough nurses to go around," Kathleen Sebelius, U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) warned the

American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) last year on its 40th anniversary. "But today, we're in the middle of a workforce crisis."

The West Virginia Nursing Leadership Institute agrees. Its website (<http://wvnli.org/>) points to "a nursing shortage threatening the quality of patient care, and currently being felt in all sectors of West Virginia health care."

Nationwide, nurse retirements and an aging, more medically-needy U.S. population will require more than half-a-million new registered nurses to enter the workforce by 2018, according to Department of Labor forecasts. And in Charleston, Duane Napier, the executive director of the West Virginia Center for Nursing, believes that by 2020 the state can expect RN staffing to fall at least 15-percent below necessary levels.

That kind of nursing shortage can lead to more frequent medical mistakes, more hospital-based infections, and a lower quality of care, Napier told the Martinsburg Journal-News earlier this year. "Beds in hospitals may have to be closed due to lack of staff. More injuries to patients will occur," he said.

In a step towards averting those complications, last spring the WV Board of Examiners for Registered Professional Nurses approved a new nurse training program in the Potomac Highlands.

"Although it's officially a brand new program, we're not complete rookies in this field," noted Robert 'Buck' Eagle, Dean for Academics and Student Support Services at Eastern WV Community and Technical

College. "Ever since 2003, through our real-time, video distance learning technology, we've been privileged to host a local class for a nationally-recognized nursing program."

Eastern's partner, Southern WV Community and Technical College, enrolled nursing students in Moorefield, in 2003, 2005 and 2008.

"Now, based on our close partnership with Southern, we've modeled our own new program on that exact learning plan that has proven so successful in the past for students in this area and around the state," Eagle said.

Last summer, Eastern admitted its first class of nursing students, whose makeup reflects what US Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, at the White House's Community College Summit, October 5 called "the new normal. 21st century students," he said, are "28 year olds, raising three children, trying to work a job, trying to better their lives."

Of Eastern's 20 nursing students, "nine are parents, eight are married, and one is a veteran. And they range in age from 18 to 40," noted Eleanor Berg, MS, RN, Adult and Pediatric Practitioner, who directs the Moorefield training program. Her students hail from five Potomac Highlands counties, and ten of them bring some previous healthcare background to class, including five Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs), two emergency medical technicians (EMTs), and three phlebotomists.

"Applicants with a healthcare background may get a few extra points on their applications," acknowledged Deb Backus, Eastern's Academic Program Director for General Education & Instruction, "but we look for qualified applicants, both men and women, from a broad diversity of backgrounds." Two members of the current nursing class have associate degrees, and three have bachelor's degrees, in such diverse fields as Accounting, English, History and Criminal Justice. And the group's previous

employment history includes the postal service, waitressing, personal care providers, security, insurance and telecommunication among others.

Although Eastern requires that applicants' pre-admission test scores only make them eligible to take college-level math and English, Director Berg "strongly recommends" additional preparation. "Prior to entering the program," she emphasized, "if possible, students should take English 101, English 102, Nutrition, Lifespan Psychology, and Anatomy and Physiology."

Learners can register for those classes at Eastern in either spring or fall semester of next year.

Whatever their backgrounds, starting this fall all of the new students will get a taste of what it means to deliver hands-on nursing care. "Students start clinical rotations for their fundamental training in the first semester," said Berg, who shares the teaching duties in Eastern's program with fulltime instructor Jill Landis, BSN, RN, and with additional adjunct faculty. The clinical training sites include "the local hospital, long-term facilities, and offices," Berg noted. "And to enhance their learning through observation, we also take them to W.V.U. hospitals."

For more information about Eastern's Associate in Applied Science, Nursing program, check the college website at www.eastern.wvnet.edu/v.php?pg=49, or call 304-530-5130; or toll-free 877-982-2322.

Serving the residents of Grant, Hampshire, Hardy, Mineral, Pendleton and Tucker counties, Eastern West Virginia Community and Technical College, fully accredited by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, is a comprehensive and equal opportunity community and technical college bringing the resources and assets of Education That Works to the families, communities and employers of the Potomac Highlands.

