



Massachusetts Board of Higher Education

Nursing Initiative

Background

The demands on the health care system, a major employer in the Commonwealth, are expanding and colleges across the state are being asked to meet the demand for qualified health care professionals. Nurses in particular must be trained in much higher numbers and with greater skills. Since 2005, the Board of Higher Education, through the Nursing Initiative, has been working with employers, higher education leaders and health care advocates to develop statewide and regional programs to address the nursing shortage and enhance the quality of education. Partnerships, such as the ones with the Mass Organization of Nurse Executives and the Mass Hospital Association, are essential for moving forward.

Policy Details

There is no shortage of students interested in going into the nursing field. Currently, at least 800 qualified applicants are on public nursing program waiting lists but institutions cannot meet the demand without more teaching faculty, science and nursing laboratories and more clinical spaces.

The Board of Higher Education Nursing Initiative has already established a web-based system for coordination of clinical placements in the Northeast/Central region of Massachusetts, is implementing this model in the West and Southwest regions, and is exploring a Boston area system. (Clinical placements are rotations for each nursing student in a hospital or other medical facility, where students get a mentored experience in a medical environment.) Over 50 health care facilities and 45 schools of nursing are participating in this system.

The Board is partnering with campuses and nursing practice leaders on the Nurse of the Future Program to develop a new approach to nursing education based on the competencies required of nursing graduates to meet the more complex demands of current practice. Schools are volunteering to review curricula in light of these competencies with support by a grant from Johnson and Johnson, through the Mass Hospital Research and Education Association.

The Board is also expanding opportunities for students and incumbent health care workers through advancing simulation technology. The program has purchased and distributed SimMan manikins for campuses and healthcare facilities. The manikins provide students with a safe environment to learn clinical and decision-making skills. Over the past two years, the BHE distributed nine SimManikins and one SimBaby, with an additional five units projected for competitive distribution in FY08.

BHE Response

While there are shortages in many allied health fields, the BHE is focusing on nursing as a critical priority. In this way, the Board is addressing the nursing shortage and identifying effective strategies and best practices that may be implemented in other allied health fields.

The BHE received \$1 million for the Nursing Initiative in the FY08 budget, representing a 100% increase over FY07 and FY06. (\$500,000 was appropriated for the program in each prior year.) This support is evidence of the success of the program in helping many future students enter the nursing field.

Increasing the Capacity and Quality of the Nursing Education Pipeline

