

Editorial

Education Issues: Education at a Distance

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In the past I have spoken about the shortage of both nurses and faculty for schools of nursing. In fact, federal officials as well as nursing leaders agree that an acute nursing shortage will occur in 2010 when the Baby Boomers begin to retire. Fewer young people are taking up the profession and those in nursing are moving to other professions such as business and law.

Rural areas tend to have community colleges rather than universities. With a decrease in numbers of nurses and qualified faculty nationwide, rural areas are especially hard hit. The purpose of this column today is to discuss ways in which nurses can prepare for a career in nursing education for community colleges in their own area.

A number of colleges and universities have tailored their nursing programs for students at a distance. For example, some upper division nursing programs for associate graduates provide general education as well as nursing courses online for students such that the students do the work at a time convenient to them—late at night, early morning, midday. More recently I have seen total graduate nursing programs provided via the Web. Students graduate from programs where they have never seen the campus. These programs cover all types of courses including but not limited to midwifery, care of the older adult, and care of the child. What a wonderful way for nurses in rural settings to earn bachelors and masters degrees in nursing.

I was at the Doctoral Conference sponsored by the American Association of Colleges of Nursing in late January 2001. Faculties in colleges of nursing are aware that it is difficult for many nurses to be on a university campus to earn a doctoral degree. They are developing

doctoral programs for these potential students. Depending on the type of doctoral program (and finances), nurses can choose a program where they never go to the campus—all courses are via the internet or two way video. Other programs are designed for nurses to go to campus for several weeks in the summer to learn in a group format and return home for coursework the rest of the year via internet. These programs, taught at a distance, are for the part time learner and I view these programs as designed especially with the rural nurse in mind.

Nurses in rural settings can continue their professional nursing education in the same manner as their urban counterparts. Through the use of advanced technology, they can be in classes with their urban counterparts as well as colleagues from any state. Having the appropriate degree for the nursing positions is paramount and distance today should not be a factor. Rural nurses have always gone the extra mile to become educated; the fact that Colleges of Nursing have addressed the need for access should help, especially in preparing rural nurses for faculty positions.

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