

Editorial

Educational Issues: Facing Today's Nursing Shortage

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It is exciting to think of how one can participate in the educational processes of rural nurses. The purpose of this column is to address educational issues related to the "new graduate," the advanced practice nurse, and continuing professional education. I ask you, the reader, to e-mail specific issues that you would like addressed related to these topics and I anticipate having guest authors on a periodic basis. I will conclude each column with my name and e-mail for your convenience.

We again are experiencing a nursing shortage, and at the same time, a decrease in numbers of faculty for schools of nursing—all types. This shortage is different from previous ones due to patients being "sicker" and home "quicker." In addition, there are fewer young persons entering colleges today and those that do have many more opportunities for careers other than nursing. Schools of nursing have trouble filling nursing classes, and more importantly, have difficulty finding qualified faculty to teach. This is known as the "graying" of the professorate. The average age of nursing faculty is 49.7 years and there are not many potential persons in the pipeline. Lack of qualified nursing faculty impacts numbers of students that can be admitted to schools of nursing, further decreasing numbers of nurses.

In the rural areas this is extremely critical. The cost of recruiting just one nurse from a small pool of qualified persons is approaching \$30,000, and that is if they stay in the position for at least two years. This cost increases dramatically if they leave prior to two years of employment. It is well documented in the literature that if persons are educated in their home

communities, they are more likely to stay there. Hence, potential nurses, especially from rural areas, ask for nursing classes taught through distance education means. Teaching using interactive television has been done for a number of years. Newer is the development of WEB-based courses that students can take at their own pace and time. For those who are visual, there even is a television chip that can be used with a home computer so that students/faculty can see one another! Use of distance education to prepare nurses in rural areas also addresses the shortage of qualified nursing faculty. One faculty member at a large university can have a class of 20 students, all in rural areas if the course is WEB-based or via television. What a wonderful way to deal with scarce resources.

In conclusion, I ask you to let me know your issues. I will address them in this column with the help of you, our experts. E-mail: szigetie@upstate.edu.