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Gateway, hospitals boost nurse program

BY HOWARD MCEWEN | ENQUIRER CONTRIBUTOR

EDGEWOOD - Officials at Gateway Community and Technical College and St. Elizabeth Hospitals are hoping a cooperative program can help put a dent in the shortage of nurses.

Thirty-seven students became the first graduates of Gateway's nursing program in May.

The American Association of Colleges of Nursing reports that 44 states will have a shortage of registered nurses by 2020. The AACN believes this shortage will have a direct bearing on patient care and survival.

The shortage results in a Catch-22 for educators.

"There is clearly a shortage of nurses nationwide and most nursing programs cannot meet the demand because that same shortage also impacts the availability of qualified nursing faculty to teach nursing," said Terry Mayo, Gateway's nursing program coordinator.

Highlighting this circumstance is that all of Gateway's graduates had jobs upon graduation.

One member of that graduating class, Rebecca Fugate, worked as a nurse's aide at St. Elizabeth while enrolled. She chose Gateway because it didn't put her on a waiting list and St. Elizabeth offered a scholarship.

"They tell you at the beginning of the program that this is going to be your life for the next two years. I was very determined to graduate," she said. She said the smaller class sizes helped with the work. "All the teachers knew our names and we spent the entire two years together. They got to know us better," she said.

Fugate said Gateway's Monday-through-Thursday schedule assisted in managing her family and maintain an income.

After spending the week in school, she was then able to work Thursday night through Saturday night. She is already seeing a payoff.

"I've had an impact already with just the few patients I've taken care of so far," she said.

Gateway conducts its nursing classes from its Edgewood campus. It has 10 fulltime and 10 part-time faculty members. There are 160 students enrolled for the fall and another 65 starting in January.

"It is the most economical program in the region," said Mayo. "We do have selective admission, but we do not create a waiting list. We are an open-enrollment institution, and we have several grant-funded programs to help students ready themselves to enter the nursing program."

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