

NURSES FOR WISCONSIN: A COLLABORATIVE INITIATIVE TO ENHANCE THE NURSE EDUCATOR WORKFORCE



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Wisconsin, like much of the nation, is currently suffering from a growing nursing shortage. The University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire College of Nursing and Health Sciences, in partnership with the University of Wisconsin–Madison, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, and University of Wisconsin Oshkosh nursing programs, took advantage of a University of Wisconsin System Incentive Grant for economic and workforce development to address this problem. With a \$3.2 million award, the Nurses for Wisconsin goal is to increase the number of baccalaureate registered nurses by expanding the nursing education capacity within the University of Wisconsin System. Nurses for Wisconsin is accelerating the preparation of nursing faculty by supporting nurses to enroll in doctor of nursing practice or nursing doctor of philosophy programs with pre- and postdoctoral fellowship awards ranging from \$21,500 to \$90,000 and the recruitment of faculty with a loan repayment program of up to \$50,000. In exchange for the financial support, fellows and faculty must make a 3-year commitment to teach in a UW System nursing program. Two conferences for program participants are also funded through the award. The first conference was held in October 2014. The second conference is scheduled for summer 2015. With the first year of the 2-year project completed, this article describes Nurses for Wisconsin from inception to implementation and midterm assessment with a focus on lessons learned. A follow-up article addressing final outcomes and next steps is planned. (Index words: Economic development; Workforce development; Predoctoral fellowships; Postdoctoral fellowships; Loan forgiveness; Grant; Nursing education; Nursing shortage; Nursing faculty shortage) J Prof Nurs 32:292–299, 2016. © 2016 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS of Wisconsin's nursing workforce data tells the story of a state on the cusp of a nursing shortage (Wisconsin Center for Nursing [WCN],

2013). This is occurring at a time when interest by qualified students seeking admission to baccalaureate programs in nursing is increasing, whereas the number of nursing faculty available to teach is decreasing. This scenario is positioned within the larger context of a national nursing faculty shortage (American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2014) and the charge from the Institute of Medicine Report, *The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health*, that 80% of the nursing workforce have a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) degree and that the number of nurses with a doctorate double, both by 2020 (Institute of Medicine, 2011). A policy statement from the Tri-Council for Nursing (2010) further states that “A more highly educated nursing profession is no longer a preferred future; it is a necessary future in order to meet the nursing needs of the nation and to deliver effective and safe care” (para. 3).

Interest in obtaining a baccalaureate degree in nursing within the University of Wisconsin (UW) System is strong, but the ability to accept all qualified applications is limited. UW System nursing programs are turning away qualified

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applicants to nursing programs. In the 2012–2013 academic year, 50–80% of qualified undergraduate students who applied to UW–Eau Claire, Madison, Milwaukee, or Oshkosh were denied admission primarily because of a shortage of well-qualified nursing faculty (S.P. Lundeen, K.A. May, R. Smith; L.K. Young, personal communications, October, 2013). This again reflects the national trend in nursing education. The American Association of Colleges of Nursing reported that across the country, nearly 80,000 qualified applicants to baccalaureate and graduate nursing programs were denied admission because of lack of a sufficient number of faculty (American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2014).

The projected need for nurses in Wisconsin is great. *Be Bold 2: Growing Wisconsin's Talent* revealed significant impending shortfalls within the Wisconsin workforce. By 2018, 24% of all jobs in Wisconsin will be in the nursing and health-related professional career cluster. Projections suggested that there will be a 43% increase in demand in this sector with only a 13% increase in available workforce (Competitive Wisconsin, Inc., & ManpowerGroup, 2012). More specifically, the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development (DWD) predicts a shortfall of 20,000 nurses (35%) by 2035 (WCN, 2013).

The 2014 Wisconsin Registered Nurse Survey, which highlights the characteristics of 83,918 Registered Nurses (RNs) in the state, indicates that over 35% of the nursing workforce intends to leave direct patient care in the next 9 years (WCN, 2014a). The recent economic downturn and continuing job satisfaction that nurses experience has postponed retirements for many older nurses (Auerbach, Buerhaus, & Staiger, 2014; Buerhaus, Auerbach, & Staiger, 2009) and delayed the Wisconsin nursing workforce crisis.

However, one third of the nation's nursing workforce (nearly 1 million nurses) are predicted to retire over the next two decades (Health Resources and Services Administration, Bureau of Health Workforce, & National Center for Health Workforce Analysis, 2014). According to a recent study conducted by The National Forum of State Nursing Workforce Centers, 53% of the nurses working are age 50 and older (Budden, Zhong, Moulton, & Cimiotti, 2013). Wisconsin is experiencing this same trend. Between 2012 and 2014, the number of nurses age 55 and older in the workforce increased from 27.6% (16,367) to 33.5% (24,491). During that same period, the number of nurses who identified themselves as retired increased from 5.5% to 6.3% (WCN, 2014a).

In response to the anticipated retirements, increasing the enrollment and graduation of a large number of new nurses who are capable and committed to Wisconsin is critical (WCN, 2014a). Researchers Juraschek, Zhang, Ranganathan, and Lin (2012) predict nursing shortages in all 50 states occurring between 2009 and 2030. Their report models and forecasts the future supply and demand, taking into consideration population, age, and staffing ratios. Using a letter grading scale of A–F, the authors gave Wisconsin a grade of “D” in its supply of RNs by 2030.

The projected demand for nurses over the next two decades, as modeled by the DWD Office of Economic

Table 1. Adapted from “The Wisconsin Nursing Workforce: Status and Recommendations,” p. 18. Copyright 2013 by the Wisconsin Center for Nursing. Source: Walsh, T., Udalova, V. & Winters, D. (2011). Wisconsin Registered Nurse Supply and Demand Forecasting: Results Report 2010–2035. Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development, Office of Economic Advisors. Wisconsin DWD Office of Economic Advisors, November 2011 (p. 5)

Estimated number of nursing graduates needed annually to meet projected demand	
2010 (actual)	2,700
2015	4,500
2020	7,500
2025	11,300
2030	14,100
2035	15,500

Advisers (Table 1), cannot be met given the faculty demographics. Currently, the average age of Wisconsin nursing faculty is 58 years, and 58% of faculty plan to leave the workforce in less than 9 years (WCN, 2014b). These data highlight a compelling need to increase faculty numbers beyond current levels within the next 10 years. In addition, only 0.6% (513) of the nursing workforce in Wisconsin is prepared at the doctoral level (WCN, 2014a). The key factors driving the need for more doctorally prepared nurses include increased demand for nurse educators to prepare future nurses at the baccalaureate and graduate level, increased demand for nurse practitioners to provide primary care to the newly insured in our expanding health care system, and increased demand for nurse researchers to generate new knowledge and advance the profession (American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2015).

The Nurses for Wisconsin Grant Proposal

The 2013–2015 Wisconsin Legislatures' Biennial Budget required the UW System Board of Regents to invest \$22.5 million to increase economic growth and build a stronger Wisconsin workforce. In late September 2013, the UW System Office of Economic Opportunity announced the Economic Development Incentive Grant program and invited all UW institutions to submit applications (University of Wisconsin System & Office of Economic Development, 2013). Proposals were required to advance efforts in one or more of the following areas: economic development, development of educated and skilled workforce, and improving affordability of postsecondary education. Applications were due in October 2013.

Coincidentally, faculty, instructional staff, and administrators from the six UW System nursing programs were in attendance at a conference on September 2013 entitled “Identifying, Recruiting and Retaining Nurse Educators in Wisconsin.” This event was hosted by the UW–Eau Claire, College of Nursing and Health Sciences (CONHS). At the end of this conference, the CONHS dean was informed of the request for proposal (RFP) that was circulated to all UW System campuses for these economic incentive dollars. She immediately engaged the deans of the three other UW System programs offering doctoral nursing degrees in

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