

Promoting the Use of Simulation Technology in Florida Nurse Education

Project Leaders:

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Background:

The Blue Foundation for a Healthy Florida was established in 2001 as the philanthropic affiliate of Blue Cross Blue Shield of Florida. Its mission is to increase access to quality health-related services for all Floridians, with an emphasis on the uninsured and underserved. The Blue Foundation is committed to community health centers and outreach programs throughout Florida that serve the neediest people. Since its beginning, it has awarded over 150 grants and 20 awards totaling over \$10.5 million. Over 500,000 people have received quality health care in these settings. Blue Cross Blue Shield of Florida has established its Signature Program, Generation RN, to address the nursing workforce shortage in the State of Florida. Since 2004, Generation RN has donated over \$17 million to Florida's nursing schools to increase the nursing workforce. The Blue Foundation will subcontract project leadership to the Florida Center for Nursing.

The Florida Center for Nursing has been the central coordination point for nursing workforce efforts, both in terms of collaboration with stakeholders as well as conducting research into the shortage since its inception in 2002. As the definitive source for information, research, and strategies addressing the dynamic nurse workforce needs in Florida, the FCN staff and board members direct their resources to address nurse workforce issues for the health of Florida. Having participated in the establishment of the National Forum of State Nursing Workforce, staff remain active in working to support national projects, including but not limited to the identification of nurse supply, demand, and education minimum datasets. For more information on the FCN and to view its work and reports please visit www.FLCenterForNursing.org.

Though Florida's registered nurse education programs enrolled 9,600 students in academic year 2007-2008, they turned away 10,188 qualified applicants. FCN data show that as of June 2007 Florida had 10,500 vacant RN positions and employers projected growth in 2008 requiring an additional 6,500 RNs. Though economic challenges have slowed growth, it remains evident that supply is not meeting demand. By 2020 the FCN estimates Florida's shortfall of RNs to be 52,200 full-time equivalent positions. To address the increasing challenge of clinical education capacity, a number of nursing programs are beginning to utilize simulation labs.

Project Summary:

The FCN recognized the need to better coordinate education opportunities and address issues of scarce resources for establishing and maintaining simulation labs. As more and more schools are turning to simulation models for education purposes, this coordination will increase the efficiency and utilization of these systems. A simulation advisory panel will be established during the initial implementation phase to provide expertise and promote collaboration throughout the project. The project will be conducted over a two-year period. Year One will focus on information gathering, data collection, and analysis of results. Year Two efforts will be directed toward identification of a strategic approach to achieve the overall project goal and development of a state and regional model for strategy implementation. Upon completion, this project will have defined strategies to positively impact the capacity of Florida's nursing education system, facilitate movement of current RNs within the health system, and decrease the loss of nurses from Florida's supply.

Project Goals and Objectives:

The overall project goal is to maximize the use of simulation technology in the preparation of new and continuing education of current RNs in Florida thus addressing the nursing shortage by increasing the nurse supply through increased production and retention. A statewide simulation resource inventory will be completed including information from nurse educators and employers. Focus groups will be conducted in identified geographic regions of the state to identify unique characteristics and needs. A white paper will be published including a review of published literature. Following analysis of findings, a plan for achievement of the overall goal will be drafted and a state summit held to share results with key partners for their input. Final recommendations will include a strategy to establish a state and regional model for simulation in nursing education that will facilitate communication and a common infrastructure for technical expertise, establishment of standards, sharing of equipment, sharing of scenarios/modules, and establishing outcome measures for evaluation.

Project Strengths:

A unique aspect of this project is its statewide focus in the geographically and culturally diverse state of Florida – the 4th most populous state in the USA. Additionally, this project will demonstrate the value of collaboration in working to address the nursing shortage. Obtaining information on use and availability of simulation resources in Florida is unprecedented. This project is also unique in that 1) it will transition from underutilization of current technology in simulation use for health professional education to maximizing use of current and preparing for future technology, 2) said use will be evident in all geographic regions of Florida through sharing of resources instead of limited to urban clusters or isolated labs, and 3) proposed strategies will incorporate the concept of resource sharing and improved return on investment of state and local funds.

Project Challenges:

As can be expected, challenges may arise throughout the project. On the front end, as with any survey, a challenge will be to maximize responses and gather valuable information. Once the results are analyzed and recommendations drafted, agreement must be achieved. This may include future sharing of equipment, staff, and fiscal resources among competing industry settings and/or education programs. It will be critical to maintain the focus on the long-term goal of addressing the nursing shortage for the health of all Floridians. The final challenge may be achieving fiscal solvency to implement the new model.