

The Nursing Shortage

Local School Trains Sugar Land Nurses



Currently, the demand for nurses in Texas exceeds 22,000

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From cuts and bruises to life-threatening illnesses, Diana Barton sees it all while working as the school nurse at Pecan Grove Elementary School in Richmond.

“In general, what I love about nursing is that the field is so versatile. I like taking care of the students and making sure they are healthy,” says Barton, who graduated in May with her Bachelor of Science in Nursing after taking classes at the University of Houston System at Sugar Land.

An Increased Demand

Barton’s love for her field has an added bonus in that nursing jobs are plentiful because of the shortage of nurses in Texas and across the nation.

“We just can’t keep up with the demand for graduates with the Baby Boomers aging and more nurses retiring. In addition, there’s a shortage of qualified nursing faculty who can teach the next generation of nurses,” says Kathryn Tart, founding dean of the University of Houston-Victoria School of Nursing, which provides degree programs at UHS at Sugar Land, UHS at Cinco Ranch and in Victoria.

Get a Degree in Sugar Land

UHV is working to do its part to solve the problem. The university surveyed area healthcare agencies and nurses to determine the

need for a nursing program and then started one in the fall of 2006. At that time, UHV only offered a Registered Nurse to Bachelor of Science in Nursing program in Sugar Land and Victoria. The program was so successful that the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board approved a proposal in December 2007 to create a UHV School of Nursing, which allowed the university to begin offering other nursing programs.

The School of Nursing added a Master of Science in Nursing program a little more than a year ago, along with a RN to MSN Bridge program. Both programs allow students to select nurse education or nurse administration concentrations.

The School of Nursing’s newest program is the Second Degree BSN, which started in the fall of 2008 on the Sugar Land campus. It allows someone with a bachelor’s degree to earn a second degree in nursing in as little as a year. The next group of Second Degree BSN students will be admitted in January to an expanded program in both Sugar Land and Katy.

Steven Weber, chief nursing officer/chief operating officer at Memorial Hermann Sugar Land, says about half of the 150 nurses working at the hospital have BSNs. The nurses are encouraged to further their education because national research has repeatedly shown that patient care improves when nurses have advanced degrees. “To have the Sugar Land campus one exit down from us is very convenient for our nurses,” he says.



The school offers a nursing program for those who already have one bachelor's degree



Shiby, Michelle, Debbie, Raquil, and Carol are working toward their master's degree



Hospital vacancy rates are around 11%



The Demand for Nurses

Here are some facts about the state nursing shortage.

- ✦ The demand for full-time registered nurses in Texas in 2008 exceeded supply by 22,000.
- ✦ Unless there are major increases in funding for nurse education, this gap is expected to widen to 70,000 by 2020.
- ✦ Hospital vacancy rates for registered nurses are around 11%, up from 8.6% in 2004. Nursing homes and state schools face similar or higher rates.
- ✦ In 2007, Texas nursing schools graduated 7,000 new registered nurses, a 55% increase over the 4,500 produced in 2001. This number still is below what is needed to close the gap in supply vs. demand.
- ✦ Texas nursing schools have turned away thousands of qualified applicants, some 8,000 in 2008 alone, primarily because of the shortage of qualified faculty willing to teach at prevailing salaries.

Source: Texas Nursing Workforce Shortage Coalition

With the expanding medical community in Sugar Land, the demand for nurses is on the rise



For more information about degrees offered by the UHV School of Nursing, visit uhv.edu/nursing.

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Growing Healthcare

Janet Leatherwood, vice president and chief nursing officer at the Methodist Sugar Land Hospital, says she is excited about the programs the School of Nursing is offering. Her hospital employs about 500 RNs, and nurses in specialty areas are always needed. "All of our hospitals are growing in this community, and this, in turn, generates additional openings for nurses," says Leatherwood, who also is vice chair of the UHV President's Regional Advisory Board.

"We just can't keep up with the demand for graduates with the Baby Boomers aging and more nurses retiring." -Kathryn Tart

UHV Second Degree BSN student Lauren Watson has spent time as part of her degree plan working at Methodist Sugar Land Hospital under the supervision of a UHV faculty member and different nurses at the hospital. "I knew I wanted to do something in the healthcare industry to help people, and then I heard about this program," says Watson, who will graduate in August. "It's definitely an added perk that the healthcare industry needs nurses."

Gaining Community Support

Linda Dune, an assistant professor and coordinator of UHV's Second Degree BSN program, says she hears from students that they like the flexibility of having the nursing programs in their community offered at times that are convenient for them. For example, classes for the RN to BSN program are scheduled one day a week to allow nurses to continue to work while they obtain their degrees. "The hospitals around here very much want their nurses to further their education," she says.

Vivian Nowazek, a UHV assistant professor, says that community support in Fort Bend County for the School of Nursing is phenomenal. "They will bend over backward for us," she says. "The hospital administrators give their nurses time off to come here and get their degrees, and the community supports us by serving on our advisory boards and attending our open houses. They know that the future of our country's healthcare depends on increasing the number of nurses." **SLM**

PAULA COBLER is the communications manager at the University of Houston-Victoria, which offers classes face-to-face in Sugar Land, Katy and Victoria, and online.



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