

# The Ventura Nursing Legacy Project



## The Nursing Shortage in Ventura County: How the Education and Service Sectors Can Work Together on Solutions

### A Healthcare Crisis

Our communities are suffering from a severe nursing shortage:

- According to the American Hospital Association, there are more than 100,000 nursing vacancies in the United States.
- The Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that by 2016, the U.S. will need more than one million new and replacement nurses.
- California graduates only two thirds of the nurses it needs each year.
- The state's nursing schools turn away more than 40 percent of applicants because they cannot accommodate them.
- Latinos are quickly becoming a majority in California, but they make up only four percent of the state's registered nurses.

In Ventura County, the shortage is more acute:

- The county has received an "F" grade from the California Institute for Nursing and Health Care for its low nurse-to-patient ratio.
- There are only 430 nurses for every 100,000 county residents, half the state average.
- Local colleges graduate only 175 nursing students each year, with more than six hundred students placed on waiting lists.

Some of the most serious contributors to our nursing shortage are challenges within the education and service sectors:

**Inadequately prepared students.** Many local students lack adequate preparation in math and sciences to enable them to complete a nursing degree. Latino and other minority students fare worse in the sciences than their white counterparts, decreasing the chances of developing an ethnically and culturally diverse nursing workforce.

**Insufficient capacity to train the nurses we need.** Nursing schools across the United States reject one third of *qualified* applicants because of a lack of capacity. In Ventura County, that percentage is higher, because the ratio of slots to applicants is considerably lower.

"In 2008 we had 37 slots in the nursing program at Cal State Channel Islands, but I had more than 150 qualified applicants. That scenario is being repeated throughout the entire Cal State system. We have good, motivated candidates, but we have to turn too many of them away."

**Karen Jensen, RN, PhD  
Director, CSUCI Nursing**

**A shortage of nursing faculty.** The shortage of slots in baccalaureate and graduate nursing programs has a direct impact on the number of nurses available to teach, as it is nurses with advanced degrees who go on to academic settings. In addition, schools must compete for top talent with the service sector, which offers considerably higher salaries. Restrictions on the teaching loads of part-time faculty make it difficult to tap nurses who are in the service sector as adjunct faculty members, and many faculty at our local colleges and universities are approaching retirement age. Without increasing the number of faculty members it will be impossible to increase enrollment and increase the supply of new nurses.

**Difficult burdens placed on nursing students.** Students who choose to attend full-time nursing school face a number of challenges. Academic demands are high, and many students are inadequately prepared, especially in math and science. They may also have unrealistic expectations of the demands of the curriculum and

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the time commitments required to succeed, leading to high attrition rates—California loses more than 1,000 nursing students every year because they drop out.

## Finding a Solution

There is no single cause for the nursing shortage. The issues we face are systemic, cultural, financial, even personal. Because the causes are complex, there is no single strategy that will stem the nursing shortage facing Ventura County.

The California legislature and Governor Schwarzenegger have already taken some steps to address the nursing shortage through the California Nurse Education Initiative, a public-private partnership which increased funding to the state's nursing education programs. These grants are credited by many with creating the first signs of a turnaround in California's nursing shortage: graduation rates in nursing programs went up by nearly 68% between 2004 and 2008.

But the state's ongoing budget crisis and the current economic downturn will make it difficult for progress to continue. Direct grants to schools may prove difficult to secure, forcing educators to develop more creative approaches for increasing the capacities of their nursing programs.

## A Strategic Approach

The Ventura Nursing Legacy Project has spent the past two years working with community leaders and local nursing professionals to identify and prioritize strategies that can lead to concrete progress in addressing Ventura County's severe nursing shortage. The challenges fall into three basic categories:

- **Barriers to supply and diversity**, including insufficient capacity in the education system, attrition in the workforce, and a shortage of qualified faculty.
- **A difficult working environment**, including workplace safety issues, the demands of nursing and the stress it can place on family life, and lack of management training and mentorship programs for young nurses.
- **Workforce practice and skill issues**, including limited orientation for new nurses, a lack

of understanding by novice nurses of the demands of their jobs, and lack of support for mid-career transitions.

The Ventura Nursing Legacy Project has identified strategies that stakeholders believe can make a significant impact. Implementing them effectively is the next challenge, one that will require educating the community about the nature of the problem, and working collaboratively to ensure the progress we have already made continues.

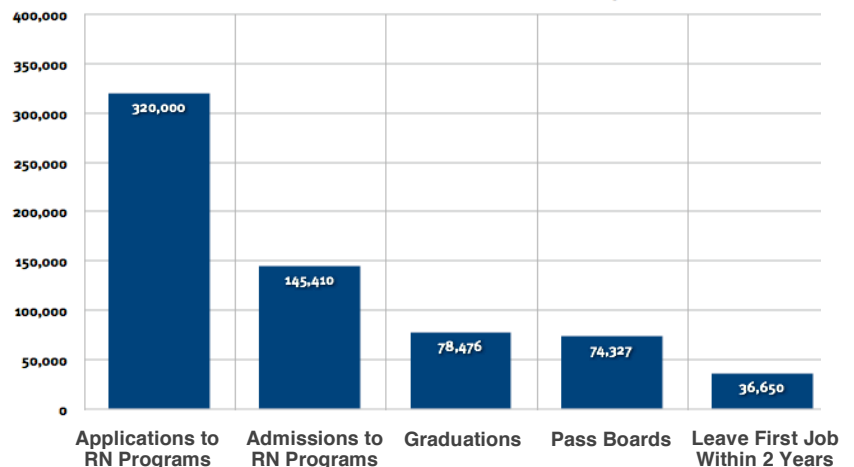
**There is a role for everyone in addressing this crisis. The participation of educators and the service sector in developing strategies to address the nursing shortage is crucial.**

## Next Steps for the Education & Service Sectors

If Ventura County is to address the nursing shortage over the long term, it will need to ensure a pipeline of consistent graduates from the county's nursing programs and improve retention of new nurses in the workforce. Securing that pipeline happens at three fundamental levels:

1. The County's middle and high schools can expand the pool of potential nursing students by improving secondary school math and science programs and reaching out to Latino students who may have an interest in nursing
2. Our colleges and universities must:
  - Secure adequate funding to expand the County's nursing programs
  - Retain existing faculty and recruit new faculty members

**NURSING'S PRESENT: THE STATUS QUO**



Source: Adapted from National League for Nursing and PricewaterhouseCoopers' Health Research Institute Analysis, 2007

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- Provide financial and academic support for nursing students to increase retention and graduate rates
- 3. Our health service institutions must ensure that there is adequate communication and collaboration with nursing programs and that there are orientation and support systems for new nurses that improve workforce retention

## **Secondary School Strategies**

Educators at the middle and high school levels have a significant impact on the educational direction of young people. If more students are exposed to the nursing profession and given an academic foundation that can prepare them for success in nursing school, the County can increase the number of qualified students entering the pipeline. Possible strategies include:

### **Improve the quality of math and science programs in Ventura County's middle and secondary schools.**

Improving the quality of our county's math and science programs is a priority for many employment sectors in our community. Educators should seek out partnerships with the private sector that will target additional resources to math/science education, including:

- Financial and material contributions from local businesses, foundations and public agencies
- Increased funding and continuing education for math/science faculty
- Math/science tutoring programs for groups underrepresented in the sciences
- Partnerships with local community colleges and universities to offer AP chemistry, anatomy and physiology on high school campuses to allow early completion of nursing program prerequisites.

**Increase student exposure to the nursing profession.** Many middle and high school students, particularly Latino students, do not think of nursing as a profession that is open to them. Strategies to increase awareness include:

- Work with local providers to sponsor nursing-related field trips to local hospitals and clinics and increase in-class presentations on nursing
- Educate career counselors about the nursing field and its prerequisite courses
- Work with nursing programs to develop mentorship and tutoring programs for prospective nursing students

- Work with nonprofits and healthcare service institutions to create internships for high school students in nursing schools and healthcare settings where they gain direct contact with healthcare professionals
- Recruit Latino nursing students to work with local community organizations to mentor high school students with the potential to enter nursing school
- Establish summer programs that provide college credit to high school students, creating a bridge between high school and nursing school

“A shortage of nurses endangers quality of care and places patients at risk for increased illness and death. A long-term shortage could undermine the American healthcare system ...”

**The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation**

## **College/University Strategies**

Ventura County has three accredited nursing programs: Cal State Channel Islands, Ventura College and Moorpark College. Each faces similar challenges and can benefit from similar strategies, such as:

- Work with high schools on transition programs for prospective nursing students
- Increase scholarships and forgivable loans and offer more work study opportunities for nursing students
- Develop nursing curricula that integrate cultural competency skills and proficiency in a second language
- Provide tutoring and mentorship programs for bi-lingual, bi-cultural nursing students
- Create doctoral pathways and funding opportunities for prospective nursing faculty in BSN and MSN programs
- Increase starting salaries for nursing faculty to help recruit and retain an adequate faculty supply
- Create a consortium to share faculty and lift restrictions on the teaching loads of part-time faculty so that adjunct faculty members can be recruited from the private sector

The schools can also work together to share

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existing resources where appropriate, including senior faculty members, student advisors, and facilities.

***Establish Partnerships Between Education & Service Institutions.*** Employers in the healthcare sector have a major stake in increasing the number of nursing school graduates—their future depends on an adequate supply of highly trained, skilled nurses. Educators and health service institutions should work together to develop mutually beneficial programs:

- Expand clinical placements, preceptorships and other hands-on training programs to provide students with hands-on experience before they graduate
- Standardize preceptor training for all clinical training sites in the county
- Encourage 20/20 programs for current employees to work part-time and attend school part-time
- Create loaned employee programs to provide part-time faculty members for local colleges and universities
- Provide stipends to employees who agree to serve as mentors to nursing students, guest speakers in nursing school classes, or providing presentations to high school students
- Work with colleges and universities to create internship programs that will provide students with work-based college credits
- Place students in long-term work study programs with a potential employer that can lead to a job upon graduation, helping ensure students remain in school
- Sustain a regional committee to continue the collaboration between service and academia that has been developed during the Ventura Nursing Legacy Project

## ***Service Sector Institutional Strategies***

Healthcare institutions can implement strategies to help train and retain new nurses to decrease attrition in the workforce. Strategies include:

- Provide extensive orientation programs (such as VERSANT) to new nurses
- Develop language and cultural competency training at worksites
- Allow current employees to work part-time to continue their education
- Work with colleges and university extension programs to develop and

support leadership & management skills programs for nurses

- Provide time for managers to mentor and support their staff
- Promote shared governance structures to give staff nurses a voice in problem solving
- Provide training to build more technology savvy and customer service oriented workforce
- Encourage and incentivize nurses/healthcare workers to donate time to partner with nonprofit clinics to expand exposure to more culturally diverse nursing prospects

### **Success Story: Cal State Channel Islands Nursing Pipeline Program**

This program aims to encourage under-represented minority students to choose a healthcare career. The NPP includes a five week intensive course of study with exposure to health care careers and ethics, and the potential for scholarships through funding partnerships.

These are just a few ideas that experts believe can play an effective role in reversing Ventura County's nursing shortage. The Ventura Nursing Legacy Project is committed to collaborating with local partners to implement these and other strategies. Working together, engaging in sustained dialogue, sometimes across traditional boundaries, will be the foundation of our success. Together we can identify opportunities for effective collaboration.

*The Ventura Nursing Legacy Project is a collaboration of the Ventura County Community Foundation and California State University Channel Islands, funded through the Partners in Investing Nursing's Future program, a joint initiative of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Northwest Health Foundation. Its goal is to identify strategies that will have a material impact on Ventura County's Nursing Shortage.*

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