Opportunities for Improved Health Services Delivery
Healthcare Commission Ideas for Governor Freudenthal
June 29, 2005

Creative Solutions to the Nursing Faculty Shortage

1) What is the problem?

a) Wyoming Community Colleges require faculty members to have a Master's Degree and the University of Wyoming (UW) requires a MSN or PhD for tenure track. The Community Colleges can hire faculty with a lesser degree with the agreement they achieve the appropriate degree within five years. This is not an option at the University of Wyoming.

b) The majority of nurses in the state hold an Associates Degree. Nurses need several years to earn a degree that qualifies them to teach. The increased workload of earning master's or doctorate while working full-time is a barrier to choosing a faculty position.

2) Describe your ideas.

a) The University of Wyoming and community college nursing programs should modify their internal policies and procedures to allow reduced workload for nurses obtaining advanced degrees to pursue faculty positions. If they are agreeable to the policy revisions, then funding should be made available through legislation.

b) Allow new nursing faculty in Wyoming programs that are working toward an advanced degree to have a half time teaching load (and be paid for that work) and half time load of classes, by providing scholarships of $24,000 per year for tuition and living expenses. The scholarship would be "paid back" by teaching in a Wyoming nursing program. To be eligible for these funds, a person must maintain a half-time credit load (varies by institution) and maintain satisfactory performance levels.[1] (Under this provision, these faculty members would not be eligible for the $20,000 increase listed under salary recommendations).

c) Allow nursing faculty with a bachelor's degree to work for two years before requiring they begin pursuit of a master's degree. This allows faculty to become established in the faculty role before pursuing the next degree. The current requirement is to obtain the degree in five years. This would increase the timeline to seven years, and allow faculty a lighter load in the early years.

d) Create a pilot program that allows 25% of the nursing faculty at any one community college to hold the bachelor's degree instead of the master's degree, if they meet the following requirements:

- **i.** Evidence of being a clinical expert in their field – national certification
- **ii.** Completion of 6 credits of teaching/learning theory at the graduate level
- **iii.** Completion of 3 credits in advanced nursing – research, theory, roles
- **iv.** Participation in 5 continuing education units per year related to nursing education
- **v.** Receiving significant orientation, mentoring, and evaluation by the Program Director

3) Who are your partners?

a) Community colleges and UW would need to manage faculty salaries, adjust workloads, and course loads.

b) The Wyoming State Board of Nursing would need to approve the new criteria.

4) Supporting evidence and data.

a) Heavy workload is cited as a barrier to faculty positions.[2]

5) Funding/staffing needs.

a) Scholarships for up to 5 newly recruited faculty/students for each of 8 institutions' programs (40 individuals) would be roughly $960,000 annually.

6) Who is better off and how can you measure the impact?

a) By reducing the barrier to becoming a faculty member (related to workload), faculty positions can be filled more easily, and faculty can be retained, which will stabilize and increase enrollment in schools of nursing.

b) Improvement would be measured by numbers of students admitted to nursing programs, recruitment and retention rates of faculty.

7) Could this proposal be included under the Children and Families Initiative?

a) By improving the supply of nurses, the proposal increases access and should improve care throughout the state.

8) Potential drawbacks and political considerations.

a) There may be opposition from college presidents and non-nursing faculty, as it is not now standard for community colleges to reduce workload for faculty pursuing a degree.

b) The Wyoming State Board of Nursing or other nursing organizations may perceive this program as a reduction in qualifications for faculty. The national standard for program accreditation requires all faculty have a master's or doctorate degree. However, Wyoming schools are typically unable to meet this requirement.

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[1] These students may also be eligible for other tuition assistance programs.
[2] Colorado Nursing Faculty Supply and Demand Study, 2004.