The nursing profession is enjoying a recent surge of young people entering the field, yet the numbers don’t equal an end to projected nursing shortages, industry experts say.

While Central Ohio isn’t feeling much pain on the nursing front right now, that is likely to change, said Ann Schiele, Mount Carmel College of Nursing’s president and dean.

“What is happening is that as the population ages, people are more acutely ill and you need more registered nurses to care for those patients,” said Schiele, a registered nurse. “Definitely there will be the need and it will continue and it will escalate.”

A December Health Affairs report found that the supply of registered nurses between the ages of 23 and 26 is growing faster than projected. Between 2002 and 2009, the number of full-time RNs jumped by 62 percent.

Health Affairs is a peer-reviewed journal published monthly by Project Hope, an advocacy group that works to eliminate health threats around the globe.

The aging population and health-care reform mean the nation’s health-care system will require more nurses and other medical professionals to provide geriatric and primary care. In some regions, nurse practitioners and clinical nurse specialists will ease a projected shortage.
Ohio Dominican’s Theresa Holleran, professor and chair of the Division for Mathematics, Computer & Natural Sciences, David Paulk, middle, director for the Physician Assistant Studies Program, and John Thistlethwaite, assistant professor of anatomy and physiology, all were involved in developing a new physician assistant master’s degree program.

NURSE GRADS: Find plenty of work

Ending the nurse and medical practitioner shortage is about much more than numbers. It’s about the education level of nurses, the availability of faculty and clinical sites to train students, the need to care for 30 million newly insured citizens once the Affordable Care Act is fully implemented, and the need to get more medical workers into rural communities.

Recent interest in nursing and other medical professions is thanks in part to the economy and marketing efforts about care shortages, educators say.

Ohio Dominican is launching a physician assistant master’s program because one did not exist in Central Ohio and the demand was there, Paulk said.

Physician assistants often are called physician extenders. They can do much of the work that doctors do, including writing prescriptions. Ohio Dominican will enroll its first class in July and hopes to have 40 students.

John Thistlethwaite, assistant professor of anatomy and physiology at Ohio Dominican, said physician assistants can help ease the primary care shortage and are known for their compassion. He helped create the program with Theresa Holleran, professor and chair of the Division for Mathematics, Computer & Natural Sciences.

Paulk said physician assistants and nurse practitioners to fill those needs.

Physician assistants are licensed to practice medicine under a doctor’s supervision.

CARE EXTENDERS

The number of full-time-equivalent registered nurses ages 23 to 26 has grown since 2002 at a rate not seen since the 1970s.

Source: Health Affairs

TRENDING UP

The Health Affairs study found that if current trends continue, the registered nurse work force would grow 24 percent by 2030. Study authors said this is about the same rate of projected population growth. If the scenario holds true and interest in nursing remains high, then new nurses will more than replace retiring nurses.

That’s the situation right now in Columbus, Mount Carmel’s Schiele said.

“We do not have a shortage for professional registered nurses. Our grads find placements because people are moving and retiring. We are meeting those numbers right now.”

Nationwide Children’s Hospital felt the nursing shortage in 2002, said Linda Stoverock, chief nursing officer. The pressure lifted in 2005, due in part to the hospital’s pediatric specialty. Stoverock said many nurses commute to be at Children’s.

The American Association of Colleges of Nursing said bringing more young people into the profession would develop nursing professionals with longer career horizons.

”It is critical that nursing take steps to ensure that this growth results in more nurses moving to the bachelor’s and higher degree level in order to prepare nurses to serve as faculty, researchers and administrators,”
EMPLOYERS: Want bachelor's degrees

FROM PAGE 20

vanced clinicians,” said Robert Rosseter, a spokesman for the association. “Today’s new nurses must be encouraged to continue their education and embrace lifelong learning.”

ECONOMIC IMPACTS

The poor economy helped to prompt more interest in nursing, but there may be false security. Ohio offers more than 80 accredited nursing programs. The challenge is finding the right pathway that matches a student’s needs, available resources and goals. Sandy Cody, assistant dean for student affairs at the Ohio State College of Nursing, said in an email.

OSU is experiencing a boost in the number of career starters and career changers, Cody said.

The college has rolled out a distance learning option for family nurse practitioner and psychiatric mental health nurse practitioner specialties. Students have the opportunity to take all courses online and complete their clinical work near their own community.

Ohio State’s stance is that distance education programs provide greater access to nursing education for those in areas with shortages of health-care providers.

Nursing is more popular because people know there is a high likelihood of finding a job after graduation, Schiele said. Accelerated degree programs help those with a degree in another field become nurses.

Despite a short-term easing of the shortage, the Tri-Council for Nursing in July 2010 cautioned against slowing down the graduation of RNs given projected demands for nursing services.

In 2009, research from Dr. Peter Buerhaus at Vanderbilt University published in Health Affairs predicted the nursing shortage to be at 260,000 by 2025.

But the American Association of Colleges of Nursing in December said it is tough to determine the size of future shortages without a clear assessment of how many older nurses are leaving the profession compared with younger entrants. The median age of RNs is 46.

Even though Central Ohio’s nursing programs are full, there are bottlenecks.

Tens of thousands of potential nurses are being turned away by colleges, according to a report from the nursing association. In 2010, 67,563 qualified applicants were turned away due to shortages in faculty and clinical sites, the report said.

“If you talk to faculty, there is still a problem in getting places for some of their clinicals,” Nationwide’s Stoverock said.

“We are trying to create new opportunities. We are in the exploration phase.”

ODU’s undergraduate pre-nursing program has a partnership with Mount Carmel’s nursing college where students can complete clinicals and further degrees, Schiele said. There are 940 students enrolled in the nursing college.

For its current class of 140 freshman, Mount Carmel received 600 applications, up 94 from the year before. Faculty shortages exist in certain subject areas.

“There is a national nurse faculty vacancy rate of 7.7 percent, according to a September survey from the nursing association that found 1,088 faculty vacancies.

“We all have more applicants than we know what to do with,” Schiele said. “But you only take the number for which you have qualified faculty.”

HIGHER EDUCATION

The faculty shortage not only slows the production of nurses, it makes supplying highly educated nurses more difficult.

NURSES WANTED

A Health Affairs study found that nursing is considered an attractive career choice. Some of the study’s highlights and job data from other sources:

- 165,000 full-time equivalent RNs ages 23 to 26 were in the workforce in 2009, up from 102,000 in 2002.
- Not since that decade has the growth rate for people entering nursing been at such a high level.
- 2-YEAR associate degrees and accelerated nursing degrees aimed at those in other fields have spurred interest.
- $240M federal support for nursing work-force development in 2010, up from $80 million in 2001.
- 90,000 shortage by 2020 of physicians, according to the Association of American Colleges. A projected physician shortage will increase the demands on RNs.
- 121,000 new job ads for RNs posted in May, up 46 percent from the same month in 2011, according to Wanted Analytics.
- 428,000 jobs added in the health-care industry during the 18-month recession that ended in June 2009, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.
- 283,000 jobs added to the industry in 2010, according to the bureau.

A national push is underway to increase bachelor’s degree-prepared nurses and to double the number of nurses with doctoral degrees.

At Nationwide Children’s, 63 percent of nurses have a bachelor’s degree or higher, Stoverock said. The increased educational level will be important as nurses provide more acute care and do more interdisciplinary work with other professionals such as social workers and occupational and physical therapists, Stoverock said.

“We can’t just stop at the associate degree, she said.

Mount Carmel’s Schiele said more employers want bachelor’s degree-prepared nurses. As health-care reform takes hold, nurse practitioners and clinical nurse specialists can improve the health care of the uninsured, Schiele said. These nursing professionals can work independently and write prescriptions in a collaborative role with physicians.

They work in a similar way to physician assistants, and both “are very necessary links in the health-care system,” said Rebecca Rowoth, pre-nursing program coordinator at Ohio Dominican.

To prepare for growth in acute care needs, Mount Carmel will launch an acute care nurse practitioners program with a trauma focus.

“Some see nursing as a profession with job security,” Schiele said. “But I do caution applicants that if they do not have a passion for caring for others, then nursing is not going to be the right field.”

ANDREA TORTORA is a freelance writer.
Bernadette Melnyk is working to make Ohio State’s students, faculty and staff “wellness warriors” who will embrace healthy lifestyles. A new program with Johnson & Johnson will aid the effort this spring.

**A CONVERSATION WITH ...**

**Bernadette Melnyk**  
Dean, College of Nursing | Ohio State University

In addition to her role as dean at the college, Bernadette Melnyk is associate vice president for health promotion and university chief wellness officer. In that first such position at a U.S. university, Prior to OSU, Melnyk was dean and distinguished foundation professor in nursing at Arizona State University’s College of Nursing & Health Innovation. Melnyk earned a Bachelor of Science in nursing from West Virginia University, a Master of Science in nursing with a specialization in nursing care in children as a pediatric nurse practitioner from the University of Pittsburgh, and a doctorate in clinical research from the University of Rochester. Melnyk, a native of Uniontown, Pa.

What is evidence-based practice and how does it improve health care and patient outcomes?

Approximately 250,000 individuals die every year from medical errors, many of which could have been prevented by evidence-based practice, a problem-solving approach that integrates the best evidence from well-designed studies with a clinician’s expertise and a patient’s preferences and values. Studies have shown that when patients receive evidence-based care, their outcomes are at least 28 percent better than care that is steeped in tradition. I have always been passionate about this, but became even more adamant about it after almost losing my youngest daughter Kaylin in Australia eight years ago. Kaylin had a ruptured appendix and ended up with multiple complications due to non-evidence-based care and the fact that the providers did not listen to my expertise as a pediatric nurse practitioner.

How do you see clinical research playing a major role in chronic disease prevention?

Behaviors — smoking, overeating, lack of physical activity, alcohol and drug use — are the No. 1 killer of Americans. Overweight and obesity soon will surpass tobacco as the top cause of preventable death and disease in the U.S. Furthermore, many people have three to four chronic diseases. With the rise in chronic illnesses, mental health disorders and obesity associated with escalating health care premiums, there never has been a more urgent need to create and test innovative interventions to these major public health problems through research. However, it is not enough to generate and publish the research that we conduct; we need to then rapidly translate the best evidence from research into real-world settings to improve health care. Unfortunately, it often takes a decade or two to translate findings from research into clinical practice; that time gap can be reduced through evidence-based practice.

At Ohio State’s Medical Center, the College of Nursing and other Health Sciences Colleges, we are committed to tackling these pervasive problems.

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