Recruiting the Next Generation of Nurses

The American Nurses Association estimates that 2-point-2 million new nurses are needed to replace those retiring in 2022 alone. Add to that the recent pandemic-related staffing issues and one thing is certain: nurses are needed.

Dr. Sue Brown is the dean of undergraduate studies at Saint Francis Medical Center College of Nursing in Peoria, Illinois. She and her colleagues are working to educate the next generation of health care workers, something she says is imperative – now more than ever.

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Dr. Sue Brown, Dean of Undergraduate Studies, Saint Francis College of Nursing

"Nursing is under pressure right now with COVID and the pandemic, but also because we have baby boomers retiring. So we have nurses retiring in record numbers, aided by the pandemic, obviously, and we have a decrease in enrollment in higher education across the board." (:20)

The numbers, however, seem to be taking a turn in the right direction. According to data released by the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN)**,** student enrollment in baccalaureate, master's, and doctoral nursing programs increased in 2020, despite concerns that the pandemic might diminish interest in nursing careers.

Those findings were also reflected at the Saint Francis Medical Center College of Nursing. Austin Blair is the director of admissions at the college. He says this fall the undergraduate BSN program had one of its largest class in nearly 20 years. And while increasing enrollment is certainly encouraging, Blair says finding passionate students is just as important when recruiting prospective nurses.

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Austin Blair, Director of Admissions, Saint Francis College of Nursing

"I think the right answer is finding the right students. Because the right people, when you bring them all together, they'll stay. Especially if you treat them well and you give them the right path." (:10)

Ryan Bates is one of those students. Bates will graduate from the College of Nursing in May. His next stop will be the neurological intensive care unit at OSF HealthCare Saint Francis Medical Center in Peoria, but he says his options for the future are endless.

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Ryan Bates, Saint Francis College of Nursing Student

"I chose nursing just because it's a really big field and I can do many different things with just the bachelor's degree. I can do bedside nursing. I can go on to get a new degree, or another degree. I can go into research. I can go into the clinical setting. I can do a lot of things and travel with experience. I can get my certifications become a flight nurse. There are lots of different avenues that I can take with nursing, and that's one of the reasons I chose it." (:28)

But before students get to Bates' level they have a lot to learn. Dr. Brown says she expects her students to have the skills necessary to make a difference on day one after they graduate. This comes with hours upon hours of work, both in the classroom and in clinical settings.

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Dr. Sue Brown, Dean of Undergraduate Studies, Saint Francis College of Nursing

"When you graduate, you're expected to hit the floor running, you're supposed to know what to do right off the bat. And that's hard. It's really hard. And so I think the education you receive prior to transitioning into your professional role is critical. You want a program that provides you with the very best education possible and with the clinical experience that's going to give you those hands-on experiences. You develop those psychomotor skills. You have the ability to prioritize, delegate, use your clinical judgment to the best of your ability, to develop that clinical judgment skill, so that when you do graduate you feel like you're providing the best care you possibly can." (:43)

While the COVID-19 pandemic presented an incredible challenge to the nursing profession, it also put a spotlight on the health care heroes who were imperative in the fight against COVID. The nurses who held the front line have inspired an entire new generation of health care workers, and Dr. Brown hopes the momentum continues, as the pandemic winds down.

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Dr. Sue Brown, Dean of Undergraduate Studies, Saint Francis College of Nursing
"Nursing has not always had the spotlight, and I hope that as a profession we use it wisely, and we use it to advance the profession in a positive direction, and that we attract more people who have that desire to help people." (:14)

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Austin Blair, Director of Admissions, Saint Francis College of Nursing
"I think deep down all of our students have that desire. They've got that passion, and that's going to be what really propels them through to that point of really impacting lives daily." (:10)

And for students like Bates, the end of school is the beginning of a world of possibilities.

*****SOT*****
Ryan Bates, Saint Francis College of Nursing Student
"I have lots of big plans. Nothing's set in certain, but I know that as a nurse, it's going to benefit me and my education is never gonna be able to go away or be taken from me and I'll be able to do just as much as I ever would dream of." (:12)

The Saint Francis Medical Center College of Nursing is hosting its Spring Open House on Saturday, April 9, on campus at 511 Greenleaf Street in Peoria, IL. From 8:30 AM to 12:00 PM, prospective students will get the opportunity to learn about programs offered and see the facilities first hand.

Open house participants will get a chance to explore campus, including dorm rooms and the simulation lab. There will also be opportunities to learn more about:

- BSN, RN-BSN, MSN and DNP programs
- Financial aid/assistance programming
- Early high school admission information
- Virtual graduate programming

Graduate students also have the option of participating in the open house virtually. To register, visit www.sfmccon.edu.