

Script – Print – The push to recruit nursing students

It's no secret there is a nursing shortage across the country. About 100,000 registered nurses left the workforce over the past two years due to stress, burnout and retirements. Another 610,000 have stated a plan in leaving by 2027, according to a [study](#) done last year by the National Council of State Boards of Nursing.

To stem the tide, some healthcare organizations are offering sizeable sign-on bonuses to new nurses and retention bonuses to current staff.

But there's another approach that is proving successful – enticing more students to enter the nursing profession.

Dr. Charlene Aaron is the president of the OSF colleges of nursing – Saint Francis Medical Center College of Nursing in Peoria and Saint Anthony College of Nursing in Rockford. In her first year as president, the OSF colleges of nursing experienced a 42% increase in enrollment in the fall 2023 semester. Most of the enrollment has been into the graduate program, with approximately 15% in the undergraduate program.

"We have more and more calls and inquiries about coming to our colleges," she says. "Enrollment is on the way up because people are understanding that a nursing career is a solid career. They will always have a job and are learning more and more about the variety of how they can spend their career in nursing."

Dr. Aaron calls the next wave of experienced nurses retiring a 'silver tsunami.' And not just in hospitals, but medical groups, nursing homes and other healthcare facilities are also hiring additional staff. Of course, she says, the COVID-pandemic contributed to many of the stressors that nurses face daily. But the pandemic spurred others to choose a career in nursing as well - many of whom persevered during a global crisis.

"It just showed the strength, stamina, and savvy that nurses have because they were able to do what nurses do, which is show up for duty on time and provide holistic care to every patient they cared for," she says. "They were there to provide care and support for families and get them through that process as well. And that is impressive."

Dr. Aaron says nursing colleges need to think outside the box when recruiting students. And that includes finding more male students.

According to the American Nurses Association, the percentage of male nurses is about 13%. While that number has risen over the years, Dr. Aaron says it's still an area of untapped potential for any medical facility.

"There are so many different ways that a nurse can practice, and it does not have to be at the bedside – things like informatics which means using data working from a computer," she says. "Insurance companies employ registered nurses and want to hire nurses who are fluent with technology. So that's just one opportunity for men to practice as nurses."

Dr. Aaron plans to introduce a program called nursing pipeline preparatory program (NP3). It's a program that takes nursing schools like OSF into area high schools to introduce the students to a potential nursing career. The high school students can tour the colleges of nursing, shadow faculty members, and get an up-close look at how nursing students learn their craft.

"It's just fascinating," says Dr. Aaron. "The students love it, and it allows them a chance to have hands on activities just like nurses do, so that they can begin to imagine themselves working in a nursing role."

OSF HealthCare now offers a 12-month accelerated nursing program which may also entice future students. The program started at Saint Francis Medical Center in October 2023 and will be available at Saint Anthony College in the fall. At the completion of this program, the student will receive a BSN (Bachelor of Science in Nursing) and will sit for the NCLEX (nursing boards) exam shortly after graduation and become a registered nurse.

Dr. Aaron says the options are endless when it comes to a career in nursing.

"It's so exciting because there are so many different types of nursing that you can do," she says. "If you want to practice in one area, but if you get a little restless you might try something different. You can do that. It's just a wonderful profession. You'll never be bored. Never."

For more information on a career in nursing, visit the [Saint Francis Medical Center College of Nursing](#) or the [Saint Anthony College of Nursing](#).