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CRMC Receives Grant for Nurse Residency Program

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HRSA) recently awarded a \$621,000 three-year grant to Cortland Regional Medical Center (CRMC) to help launch an innovative new nurse training and retention initiative. The program, with a total estimated budget of \$800,000, is primarily designed to give new nurses a solid foundation and support system as they transition from student to independent staff nurse at the medical center.

Only 25 of these very competitive grants were awarded nationwide and CRMC is the only rural hospital in Central New York to receive one

“The first year for any new nurse can be a very challenging one,” observed Diane Mawbey, M.S.N.,R.N, who serves as the project director for the nurse residency program.

“Many feel overwhelmed by their new responsibilities and are unprepared for the work expected of them. They had so much to learn in the classroom at nursing school that they often don’t get enough clinical time...actually working at the patient’s bedside.”

High turnover rates among new nurses are a problem at many hospitals in New York State, and CRMC is no exception. For example, 15 new registered nurses (RN) were hired in 2007. When CRMC applied for the HRSA grant, only eight of that group (60%) were still employed at the medical center.

“We have to do everything in our power to make certain our hospital is well staffed and our patients are cared for by well qualified nurses,” said Mawbey. “Providing a healthy, supportive work environment for our new nurses to learn and build confidence is part of that strategy.”

The nurse residency program began in July 2009. 30 graduate nurses, from schools such as Tompkins Cortland Community College, Corning Community College, and the Decker School of Nursing (Binghamton University) applied and were interviewed. 10 were selected to form the first class. Each resident is teamed for the first three months with a specially trained preceptor, who guides the newcomer through nurse orientation and works side-by-side with him or her on the nursing unit. Residents are also provided with training books, attend monthly education in-service sessions, and listen to guest speakers.

According to Mawbey, money from the grant will be used to cover the salaries of the preceptors, equipment, books, and other expenses related to the program. . The HRSA grant of \$620,660.80 will fund 78% of the program's budget. The remaining 22% (\$179,428.40) will be paid by the medical center.

For the next nine months, the residents are each assigned a mentor, an experienced nurse who is available to answer questions and help build upon the skills already learned. Once the residents have completed the 12-month program to enhance their general nursing skills, they then will have the option of moving on for training in more specialized areas, such as surgery and obstetrics. Veteran nurses will also be able to participate in the specialty portion of the residency program. Mawbey noted that this expertise is particularly important as CRMC looks to staff a planned addition to expand surgical and obstetric services.

How is the program going so far? According to Mawbey "the feedback has been very positive. The residents love it. They appreciate that the preceptors can spend the proper amount of time with them providing one-on-one instruction, so they become more comfortable in their role and more effective nurses."

In addition, the residency program will benefit veteran nurses on the units as well. “The program will produce more capable, knowledgeable nurses to work side-by-side with,” said Mawbey.

From all indications, the new nursing residency program is a win-win-win for CRMC and the Cortland community: new nurses get the initial support they need to better succeed in their jobs; the medical center can reduce nurse turnover and stabilize its staff going forward; and CRMC patients will receive better care.

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