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Fairbanks Foundation grant to IPIC means 20 new nursing instructors will be prepared to teach

Twenty registered nurses will receive full scholarships to earn their master's degrees in a new accelerated program, allowing them to begin teaching 200 additional nursing students by summer 2009, thanks to a \$425,000 grant from the Richard M. Fairbanks Foundation to the Indianapolis Private Industry Council Inc.

IPIC, the Workforce Investment Board for Marion County, sought the grant to jumpstart a new accelerated Master of Science in Nursing degree program that will be offered for the first time this fall at the Indiana University School of Nursing in Indianapolis. The accelerated program will allow full-time students to earn their degrees in 18 months instead of the traditional 24 to 36 months.

In 2005, IPIC secured a \$1 million federal grant for a multi-faceted project to address several health care challenges in Central Indiana. That led to the partnership with the IU nursing school to develop curriculum and clinical rotations for the accelerated degree.

The scholarship program, which will support the first 20 students who enroll in the program by paying for their tuition, books and stipends, is intended to encourage enrollment and expedite these students' entry into the teaching profession, thus increasing local teaching institutions' capacity by 200 students by summer 2009. In return, the scholarship recipients will commit to teach for three years in a Marion County nursing school.

Nurses and other health care workers have been in short supply across the country since 1998, and the situation is expected to worsen in the next decade. A 2006 IPIC study of the life sciences labor market cited several reasons, including demographics: the number of women going into nursing had fallen sharply, raising the age of the existing workforce. Meanwhile, demand grew as baby boomers aged and needed more health care (and as the nurses themselves aged, dropped out of the workforce and needed more health care). (For a fuller explanation, see the IPIC study at www.ipic.org/lmi.)

“IPIC has taken a series of steps to address the shortage of health care workers in Central Indiana ,” said Joanne Joyce, IPIC’s president and chief executive officer. “We have assisted workers on each rung of the health-care career ladder take a step or two up, in hopes of filling in existing shortages and anticipating future ones.

“Clearly, the Fairbanks Foundation understands that helping nurses who are willing to take another step up the ladder and become teachers ensures that the lower rungs will be filled with promising young students whose entry into the field is vital to us all. For that, we at IPIC are very grateful.”

Over the past several years, IPIC has partnered with several local hospitals to train more than 300 of their entry-level workers in high-demand, certificate-based occupations. This allowed those individuals to step up several rungs on their career, providing the hospitals with skilled workers to fill crucial positions and creating new openings at entry level for new workers to come in from the outside. IPIC also has offered on-site, basic-education courses for entry-level workers.

In addition, IPIC has worked with Ivy Tech Community College to expand its Associate of Science in Nursing degree program to nights and weekends, creating space for 20 more students who wished to become registered nurses. IPIC also enabled Ivy Tech to create a new polysomnography (the study of sleep) certificate, which registered respiratory therapists may earn after three semesters of advanced study.

The work won’t stop there. The federal grant also allowed IPIC to create a cutting-edge, Web-based career-awareness campaign to expose middle school and high school students to the life science industry; it is scheduled to be unveiled in late summer. And while most of the Fairbanks grant – \$350,000 – will support the scholarships, the rest will be used by IPIC and the IU nursing school to convene a task force to analyze and develop creative solutions to all aspects of the nurse-staffing issue, including the subsequent shortage in doctoral-level nurse educators who are qualified to teach nurses pursuing master’s degrees.

“The nursing faculty shortage is the true crisis in the American health care system,” said Marion E. Broome, university dean and distinguished professor at the IU School of Nursing. “Without enough faculty to teach nursing students, schools of nursing will be unable to educate nurses in sufficient numbers to serve our community and the state. This poses a serious threat to the health and safety of Hoosiers.

“This new innovative nursing education program, made possible through the beneficence of the Fairbanks Foundation and our special partnership with IPIC, provides a partial solution to the faculty shortage, especially for schools in the community college system.”

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