



To Address the Nursing Shortage in Local Hospitals, Ocean County College Designs a Web-Assisted Curriculum

Nursing education for health care employees

SUMMARY

From 2003 to 2006, [Ocean County College](#) in Toms River, N.J., developed the One Day Per Week Nursing Program, a Web-assisted curriculum leading to an associate's degree in nursing. The program is targeted to individuals who are already working in health care.

By delivering all classroom, laboratory and clinical learning experiences in a single day of the week, and providing the core of the curriculum through the Web, the two-year program allows these students to pursue the training necessary to take the licensing exam for registered nurses (RNs) while continuing to work. It was renamed the On Site On Line Nursing Program in 2010.

Context

In 2003, the Nursing and Allied Health Program at Ocean County College surveyed hospital nurse recruiters in Ocean County and nearby Monmouth County to assess their workforce needs. All of the surveyed hospitals expected severe shortages of RNs in the next few years.

Nationwide, a nursing shortage is projected to grow to 260,000 RNs by 2025, according to a study published in *Health Affairs* (July/August 2009). The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) has invested more than \$150 million in nursing initiatives since 1972; a significant proportion of that sum has focused on developing solutions to the nursing shortage. More information on RWJF's investment in nurses is available [online](#).

This project was funded through RWJF's *New Jersey Health Initiatives*, which addresses health and health care needs in the Foundation's home state.

Key Results

Project staff reported the following results to RWJF:

- With the help of an instructional designer, Ocean County College faculty members created the One Day Per Week Nursing Program by:
 - Recasting the curriculum's didactic courses into material that can be delivered online.
 - Organizing face-to-face learning experiences that can be delivered one day per week. During that day, students participate in:
 - Clinical activities
 - A nursing laboratory
 - A colloquium that allows them to interact with a nursing instructor to review and reinforce online material

Students attend the colloquium and laboratory at Southern Ocean County Hospital and receive their clinical experience in hospitals throughout Ocean, Atlantic and Monmouth counties.

- From 2007 to 2009, Ocean County College added an average of 52 licensed RNs to the market each year through the one-day-a-week program. That reflected an increase of roughly 30 percent over the number graduating and becoming licensed in the traditional program alone. Other key data points include the following:
 - Enrollment in the nontraditional program began in January 2005 with 20 students. Of these, half were nursing assistants, whereas many of the others were medical assistants or emergency medical technicians. Some 25 percent were from minority populations (in a county in which minorities comprise only 7 percent of the population).
 - From spring 2006 to fall 2009, 191 students entered the program, compared to 388 students in the traditional, classroom-based nursing program.
 - Attrition rates were very high, with almost two-thirds of enrollees leaving in some years. By contrast, attrition among students in the traditional program averaged about 50 percent.
 - All students who graduated passed the RN licensing exam. Initially, a higher percentage of students in the One Day Per Week program (100 percent) than in the traditional nursing program (90 percent) passed the exam. Now, almost all Ocean County College nursing graduates pass the exam.
- Project staff helped all major hospitals in Ocean County and large portions of Monmouth County market the One Day Per Week program to their health care employees, chiefly through posters, brochures and newspaper articles. Hospitals agreed to retain the students as employees, adjusting their work schedules as needed to accommodate their studies.

Project staff emphasized recruiting students from minority communities that have been historically underrepresented in the nursing profession.

- Project staff published an [article](#) about the program in *Teaching and Learning in Nursing*. (See the [Bibliography](#) for details.) They also made approximately 20 presentations to local, state and national professional organizations, including the New Jersey Council for Community Colleges Best Practices Symposium and the American Public Health Association, and created a [web page](#) with general information.

In 2006, the program received two honors for helping alleviate the nursing shortage: a joint resolution from the New Jersey State Assembly and Senate and a President's Award from the New Jersey Public Health Association.

Lessons Learned

1. Online courses are cost-effective. "The program has had a significant impact on the local nursing shortage at a minimal cost," said Colleen Manzetti, the project director and assistant dean at Ocean County College. "If we had attempted to train this many additional students without the program, it would have required the construction of additional classroom space incurring construction cost."
2. The online approach works best for "highly motivated, self-directed students" with health care backgrounds. Although the program was originally designed for health care workers, project staff expanded recruitment to people from other fields but found they were less likely to complete it.

"If you looked only at our 100 percent pass rate [on the RN licensing exam], we seemed to be doing exceptionally well. But you get a different story when you consider that the attrition rate reached as high as 64 percent one year," said project director Manzetti. To reduce attrition rates, the program changed admission requirements in 2010 to refocus exclusively on health care workers.

Funding

Under its *New Jersey Health Initiatives* program, RWJF provided \$452,406 for this project. A Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Entitlement Grant, awarded through the state of New Jersey, provided an additional \$50,000 to \$80,000 per year.

Afterward

In addition to limiting admissions to those already working in health care, Ocean County College renamed the initiative the On Site On Line Nursing Program in 2010. "We did not want to mislead prospective students into thinking this was an easy program requiring

only one day of work a week," said Manzetti. Since the grant closed, the college has created similar online courses for most of its nursing prerequisite courses.

Project staff also has consulted with other schools creating their own online nurse training programs, including:

- Mercer County Community College (West Windsor, N.J.)
- Brookdale Community College (Lincroft, N.J.)
- The Community College of Baltimore County (Baltimore, Md.)

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(Current as of date of the report; as provided by the grantee organization; not verified by RWJF; items not available from RWJF.)

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