



Robert Wood Johnson Foundation New Careers in Nursing

A Progress Report

INTRODUCTION

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation New Careers in Nursing (NCIN) provides grants to selected schools of nursing as scholarship support for students who are college graduates with degrees in other fields who wish to transition into nursing through an accelerated bachelor's or master's nursing program. Scholarships are provided to students who are from underrepresented groups in nursing or economically disadvantage backgrounds, by NCIN-selected schools of nursing.

New Careers in Nursing scholarship program is a collaboration between the *American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN)* and the *Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF)*, which has authorized more than \$38.8 million to award in the form of grants. The programs runs through July 2014. The program's director is *Geraldine Polly Bednash, PhD, RN, FAAN*; the deputy director is *Vernell P. DeWitty, PhD, RN, MBA*.

WHAT IS THE PROGRAM ABOUT?

New Careers in Nursing seeks not only to increase diversity among nursing professionals to allow for more culturally competent care, but also to feed the pipeline for bachelor's degree-prepared nurses who are ready to take on the challenges of leadership in the country's evolving health care system.

Students who receive scholarships must be from groups underrepresented in nursing based on gender, race, and ethnicity, or from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. "Limited federal financial aid is available to students pursuing second degrees, and many already carry a lot of debt," notes Sally D. Stroud, EdD, associate dean at the College of Nursing at the Medical University of South Carolina in Charleston, which participates in the program.

Any of the nation's 246 accredited schools with accelerated baccalaureate nursing programs, and 68 schools with accelerated master's nursing programs, can apply for funds through *New Careers in Nursing*. Through grants to selected schools of nursing, each year, NCIN funds scholarships of \$10,000 each. A school may apply for between

five and 30 scholarships per year to be awarded to students. Schools must demonstrate that scholarship funds will be used to expand enrollment and/or increase diversity in their nursing program. A [national advisory committee](#) helps to guide the program and to select the participating institutions.

“If you look at today’s economic environment, the only part of the economy that is growing is health care. Even with the severe recession, we have added nursing jobs, but we need more nurses to fill them,” says the program’s director Bednash who is also executive director of the American Association of Colleges of Nursing. The program is targeting accelerated nursing programs because “they are the fastest way to get the best-educated nurses out there.”

The Challenge

The largest segment of the U.S. health care workforce, the nursing profession includes more than 3 million registered nurses nationwide. However, that number is not enough. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that the nation will face a significant shortage of nurses by 2020 with more than 1.2 million nurses needed to fill new positions and replace nurses retiring from the profession.¹

The Institute of Medicine’s 2010 *The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health*, funded by RWJF, called for raising the share of registered nurses with baccalaureate degrees from 50 percent to 80 percent, and doubling the number of nurses with doctoral degrees. Nurses prepared at baccalaureate and graduate levels have an advantage in the nursing workforce. In addition, there is a growing body of evidence that higher levels of nursing education are correlated with high-quality patient care.

Baccalaureate-prepared nurses also have more opportunities for career advancement, and are four times more likely than other nurses to pursue graduate degrees in nursing, which are required to teach. The American Hospital Association, the American Health Care Association, and the *Journal of the American Medical Association* have pointed out the aging of the nurse management workforce and a growing shortage of nursing school faculty.

The Importance of a Diverse Nursing Workforce

A nursing workforce that can provide culturally competent care is critical to meeting the health care needs of all Americans, according to the National Advisory Council on Nurse Education and Practice.

¹ “Employment Situation Summary: Bureau of Labor Statistics Economic News Release (Table 10), February 1, 2012,” [online](#).

“We need a well-educated, diverse nursing workforce to provide quality care for our changing population,” observes David Krol, MD, MPH, senior program officer at RWJF and director of the Human Capital Program Management Team. *New Careers in Nursing* “is strengthening nursing education and helping fill the pipeline with capable, culturally competent nurses.”

Remarks Gaurdia Banister, PhD, RN, executive director of the Institute for Patient Care at Massachusetts General Hospital in Charlestown, Mass., and a member of the program’s national advisory committee, “When you think about going into an acute-care environment, when you think about language barriers, cultural barriers, religious beliefs—all the things that make up who we are—it is nice to know that individuals on the nursing staff share those life experiences.”

HOW DOES THE PROGRAM WORK?

Students in accelerated programs earn a bachelor of science in nursing in 12 to 18 months, or a master of science in nursing in 24 to 36 months. “Some very interesting people enter accelerated nursing programs: car salesmen, businessmen, educators, physical therapists,” notes Deputy Director DeWitty. “They come to nursing with previous work experience, previous life experience, and are very clear about why they are coming to nursing at this point in their lives.

“One sports physical therapist told me, ‘There are only so many ankles you can look at and feel fulfilled. Nursing allows me to touch people at a basic level and feel rewarded.’ People want more meaning in their work, and nursing is respected and well reimbursed.”

However, “an accelerated program is intense, because students take 17 to 18 hours of classes each week, and their schedule is jam-packed. When you add clinical hours and prep time, they are stressed to the max,” says Stroud of the Medical University of South Carolina.

To help students fulfill these demands, schools receiving scholarship funds match recipients with peer or faculty mentors. “When I was in nursing school, I never had a faculty member who was an African American. I never saw anyone who looked or sounded like me who could be a mentor and serve as a role model,” Banister observes.

Schools also use the Pre-entry Immersion Program (PIP), developed by program staff, to coach students on what to expect from an accelerated curriculum, and how to handle the challenges. Instructions for schools of nursing regarding use of the PIP toolkit and mentoring students are available on the program’s [website](#).

Leadership Training and Community Service

Beyond classroom and clinical work, students who are awarded scholarships develop leadership skills through courses on leadership and participating in student organizations and professional conferences.

“I really enjoyed the speakers who came to talk to us about leadership,” says Jason Casey, MSN, who recently graduated from the University of Tennessee Health Sciences Center and now works in the Trauma Intensive Care Unit at the Regional Medical Center in Memphis. “That kind of information gave all the scholars an edge in understanding what it’s like to work as a nurse, and what’s required to run a unit or a hospital. Those kinds of insights will help me throughout my career.”

New Careers in Nursing also recommends community service as a way for scholars to cultivate the kind of commitment and compassion it takes to flourish in their new profession. For instance, scholars in the accelerated program at Fairleigh Dickinson University in Teaneck, N.J., participate in one community service activity per month.

Danielle Reader, a Fairleigh Dickinson scholar, notes that service “is a lot of work, but it helps you break away from studying... We’re excited about community service, and we’re all looking for different things to do.”

A toolkit on how participating schools can help students develop leadership skills is available on the program’s [website](#).

Evaluation

The American Association of Colleges of Nursing are collaborating with researchers at the [Educational Testing Service](#) in Princeton, N.J., to evaluate the program. The researchers have been surveying participating students before, during, and after they complete their degree programs; and interviewing leaders, faculty, and students at participating schools. The evaluation is expected to be complete in September 2014.

WHAT HAS THE PROGRAM ACCOMPLISHED SO FAR?

The program has awarded grants through five annual rounds of funding, and schools can receive funding in multiple years. Each school also receives a technical assistance grant, up to \$5,200, to help cover the implementation of the PIP program, as well as NCIN’s mentoring and leadership components. Technical assistance grants are awarded after program requirements are fulfilled. Leaders from funded schools attend an annual summit to learn about best practices and share their experiences.

Staff at the American Association of Colleges of Nursing and the evaluators report these results from the program so far:

- **Some 119 nursing schools in more than 41 states and the District of Columbia have awarded 2,717 scholarships to students in accelerated nursing programs, as of academic year 2012–13.**

- 58 percent of all students are underrepresented racial or ethnic minorities.
- 39 percent of all students are male.

Men are considered to be underrepresented in nursing and many schools have focused on increasing their enrollment of males as well as other diverse students.

“The most striking change in the student population has been the recruiting of men into the nursing programs,” according to a January 2012 evaluation report.

“Transformation of the racial and ethnic profile of nursing students also is starting to occur.”

Jed Hansen, a former corporate manager who is now nearly halfway through his accelerated nursing program, has never regretted his decision to change careers.

“Nursing is one of the few careers that offer the opportunity to affect the lives of others through so many different professional avenues,” says Hansen. “I am now refocusing my goals to...impact the field of nursing as a whole, not just the patient base I will serve. Because of the scholarship, I feel that I will be in a position to continue my education after receiving my BSN and become a true leader in health care.”

- **Some 1,557 students had graduated from the accelerated programs as of August 2012, including 1,255 with a bachelor of science in nursing degree and 302 with a master of science in nursing degree.** According to the evaluators:

- 94 percent of students who receive the scholarships graduate or remain in the program.
- 96 percent of those who have graduated have passed the National Council Licensure Examination, which is required to become a registered nurse.
- 52 percent of graduates with a bachelor’s degree in nursing say they plan to pursue a master’s degree in nursing, and 43 percent plan to pursue a doctorate.

Chris Fogarty, a former manager at a small fabrication company in Ohio, is on track to graduate in 2013 from the accelerated nursing program at Kent State University, just three years after he lost his job and took a temporary night job caring for an elderly man. “As I helped this older gentleman struggle into bed, held his hand as he cried for his deceased wife, and assisted him with basic needs like getting into and out of the tub, I knew that my calling was in health care,” Fogarty wrote in a recent essay.

Fogarty, his wife, and four children, including a newborn, moved into the second floor of the house of his parents-in-law. He enrolled in the accelerated nursing

program at Kent State, and then applied for a New Careers in Nursing scholarship. Pursuing nursing “has given me a deeper appreciation for the need for compassionate care,” he says.

Essays by scholarship recipients are available on the *New Careers in Nursing* website, and interviews with program graduates are available on the RWJF website.

- **Participating schools have expanded their efforts to recruit nontraditional nursing students.** For example, the School of Nursing at the University of Delaware has recruited students who qualify for the scholarships at historically black or higher-minority universities in a three-state area, says Kathleen Schell, PhD, the nursing school’s director. “We had never reached out to those groups before. The program has opened our eyes with respect to recruitment.”

WHAT CHALLENGES IS THE PROGRAM FACING?

Staff at the American Association of Colleges of Nursing reported these key challenges:

- **Requests for scholarship funds from schools with accelerated nursing programs exceed the amount available.** “We receive well-written proposals from schools for funding that far exceeds the amount we can distribute,” says National Program Director Bednash. “Determining which institutions will receive the funds is difficult and painful.”
- **Demand for scholarships among students at participating nursing schools far exceeds supply.** For example, as the accelerated master’s in nursing program at DePaul University in Chicago has grown 63 percent in three years, “so has the pool of qualified students for these scholarships,” says Assistant Professor Young-Me Lee, PhD, RN. “This year we had 40 students submit applications for only 10 scholarships.”
- **Students often face challenges in keeping up with the fast-paced programs.** “One of the things we hear from students is, ‘This program is like drinking from a fire hose,’” acknowledges Bednash.

“A lot of our students have been proficient in other careers, so they get frustrated,” Schell observes. “They want to know everything, and have moments when they think, ‘I can’t do this. I will never be competent.’ We remind them that they will get there.” Schell and other leaders at participating schools point to PIP and the mentoring efforts as providing valuable support for scholars’ academic success.

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD?

RWJF may continue to fund the program beyond 2014, and may also focus on nurses who enroll in doctoral programs. “Our next goal is to support the high percentage of

students with a bachelor’s in nursing who want to attend graduate school right away,” says Bednash. “We do not want them to get lost.”

The program also intends to track former scholars during their careers, and find ways to connect them. Some former students are already trying to form a national network to enable scholars to communicate throughout their working lives.

“Scholars who have graduated see themselves as different, and feel a need to contribute to the community,” says Deputy Director DeWitty. “Some have told me, ‘We know RWJF has an initiative on childhood obesity, and we want to participate.’ That’s one of the best examples of a return on our investment: a cadre of nursing students who want to embrace such challenges.”

“We are making wonderful opportunities for bright and creative nurses,” agrees Phyllis W. Sharps, PhD, RN, chair of the Department of Community Public Health Nursing at Johns Hopkins School of Nursing in Baltimore, and a member of the program’s national advisory committee. “It’s truly making a difference.”

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APPENDIX

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