

EDUCATION ENABLED

Delaware Valley Healthcare Employers Provide
the Path to Professional Growth for Nurses



Today, no matter what the profession, a high premium is placed upon the concept of career-long education. But in the medical profession — where new developments in techniques, technology and care standards arrive at a rapid clip — continuing education is particularly crucial.

Indeed, continuing education (CE) for nurses has been deemed so important that legislators have mandated the activity. However, even before requirements for license renewal were signed into law — most recently in New Jersey and Pennsylvania — the nursing profession was already on board. As such, healthcare systems and facilities have initiated methods and attached themselves to venues that steer nurses toward CE contact hours.

Everyone Wins

CE benefits all parties involved: the nurses, their employers and, most significantly, the patients served. For nurses, CE provides a pathway to invest in themselves and their careers. In turn, healthcare facilities and systems see it as a way to invest in their human resources. Ultimately, and most importantly, it benefits the patients, through improved care and safety.

“A well-educated nursing workforce is more competent and confident in delivering care, and this contributes to better patient outcomes, as well as nurse satisfaction,” says Carol Boettler, MS, RN, BC, manager of Patient Services Education at the Christiana Health Care System (CCHS) in Delaware.

Moreover, by assisting with CE, organizations such as CCHS demonstrate appreciation of their nursing staffs. In turn, this helps healthcare facilities and systems retain their nursing rosters — a significant consideration, in light of the current nursing shortage.

“The shortage dictates that organiza-

tions recognize nurses for their countless contributions to efficiency and effectiveness,” says Boettler. “It can be costly and difficult to replace a nurse. One tangible way of demonstrating appreciation is increasing access to education.”

Classroom Down the Hall

A proven and primary way that employers provide assistance to their staffers is by offering courses within their own facilities. For instance, nurses can get CE credits through their hospitals, as long as the credits have been approved by the American Nursing Credentialing Center [ANCC], says Helene Burns, director of nursing for Delaware County Memorial Hospital (DCMH) in Drexel Hill, Pa., which is part of the Crozer-Keystone Health System.

The ANCC, the credentialing arm of the American Nurses Association, certifies healthcare providers and accredits educational providers, approvers and programs.

Burns says nurses employed in larger healthcare organizations, such as Crozer-Keystone, even can get reimbursed for costs when they must go outside the system to attend regional conferences. However, that benefit isn't always necessary. “Conceivably, nurses working within a healthcare system may never have to step outside to get enough contact hours on a yearly basis,” she reveals.

For instance, the Crozer-Keystone system includes four hospitals — DCMH, Crozer-Chester Medical Center, Springfield Hospital and Taylor Hospital — that provide courses all approved by the ANCC. Bette Mariani, MSN, RN, staff development nurse educator at DCMH, says, “All nurses working within the system can attend any conference held at any of the four hospitals and get continuing education credits.”

Willing to help in any way possible, Crozer-Keystone also provides its nurses

with contact information related to outside conferences. “One of the benefits we provide is a conference day, where our nurses can attend a local conference,” says Mariani. “We'll try and steer them toward conferences that have contact hours attached. We'll also pay for the conference and give them a paid day to attend.”

Online CE

Crozer-Keystone also offers nurses an Intranet page that provides links to free online contact-hour courses. “Nurses can also go to other online sources, but they would have to pay those fees on their own,” Mariani explains.

But as Burns points out, the online venues aren't all that expensive, and they are accessible. “Web sites have blossomed in recent years, making CE a great deal easier,” she says.

Sites to check out include www.ana.org, the site of the American Nurses Association's NursingWorld; and www.medscape.com/nurses, which enables nurses to obtain CE credits at no cost through Medscape Nursing.

Christiana Care enables its nurses to obtain credit hours through CE courses by partnering with other organizations. Says Boettler, “Nurses can log in at work or at home through the Christiana Care Web site and do one of hundreds of CE programs. There's no charge to nurses within our entire corporation.”

In-house Access

CCHS also provides in-house programs that offer CE credit hours, according to Boettler. “Since 1992, we've met the ANCC Commission on Accreditation criteria to provide nursing continuing education,” she reports.

Abington Memorial Hospital in Pennsylvania also provides on-site CE with accredited contact hours. In addition, nurs-

es can attend the daily medical ground rounds. "We've attached nursing CEUs to all medical ground rounds," says Barbara Wadsworth, Abington's vice president of patient services and chairperson of the Department of Nursing.

Abington also employs computer-based training education modules, in partnership with HealthStream, a provider of Internet-based learning and CE solutions. "Nurses can complete these modules at work or at home, and get free CEUs toward their license."

Some organizations, such as NewCourtland Elder Care, a Philadelphia-based non-profit network of six nursing homes, provide on-site educational environments where nurses can obtain CE credits. NewCourtland provides a state-of-the-art Education Center, geared toward staff training and development. The 41,000-square-foot facility includes classrooms, seminar spaces, labs and an auditorium. Along with geriatric assessment, medication management, workshops on dementia management and leadership training, the Center provides CEUs for nurses and nursing home administrators. Kathleen Brogan, NewCourtland's chief nursing officer, says, "Our RNs need a high level of knowledge and competency, because their work involves a lot of autonomy and independent critical thinking."

Reimbursements

As Helene Burns from DCMH indicated earlier, regional healthcare organizations also help their employees through cost reimbursements. But what a hospital will do often depends on its policy, she adds. "Some will provide paid days off to attend outside conferences. Others will pay some of the conference cost. At Crozer-Keystone, if a nurse wants to attend an outside conference, we pay for the

day," she says.

Most organizations offer some kind of arrangement, paying either for the work day, the conference or both, Burns says. But what specifically an organization will do often depends on the expense. "Reimbursement can turn out to be costly for a larger organization with many employees who want to attend outside conferences. The average conference registration fee is around \$150 a day. So, reimbursement coupled with a paid day off could become costly."

CCHS sometimes reimburses employees for travel and conference tuition, says Boettler. It also will pay for certification exams for the many specialties within nursing.

Abington Hospital provides allotted annual reimbursements for full-time nurses, says Wadsworth. "Typically we offer \$200 a year and one full payday, so nurses can attend a conference of their choice," she says.

Mariani sums up her thoughts on employer-sponsored CE: "Education will help nurses do their jobs in the most effective fashion. When we provide the means, it not only helps nurses grow as professionals, it enables optimal patient care. And that's the most important element. While it's important for nurses to advance their careers and achieve a high degree of professional satisfaction, the patient is No. 1." ■

Dan Harvey is a freelance writer based in Wilmington, Del., and a frequent contributor to healthcare-related publications. He can be reached at dharvey@harveyfreelance.com

Note: For a partial list of upcoming educational events in the Delaware Valley, see Mark Your Calendar, pg. 11.

All-Encompassing Careers.



No matter what direction you choose, we'll guide you there.

Curious about assisted living? Thinking about home care? Looking for an outstanding hospital close to home? No matter what you're searching for in your healthcare career, Holy Redeemer Health System offers options to fit your interest, expertise and ambition.

We invite you to explore a variety of work environments while advancing your career at:

- Holy Redeemer Hospital & Medical Center
- Holy Redeemer Home Care (New Jersey & Pennsylvania)
- St. Joseph's Manor (Long Term Care/Assisted Living)
- The Lafayette-Redeemer (Long Term Care/Assisted Living)

Choose us. And your career direction will choose you.

Opportunities include:

RNs/LPNs

- ACUTE CARE
- HOSPICE CARE
- ASSISTED LIVING
- HOME CARE
- LONG TERM CARE

Our commitment to offering employees options extends into our benefits packages as well. Whether you're a hard worker always looking to improve your skills and knowledge via tuition reimbursement or a parent in need of an onsite day-care, a future-minded individual looking for an employer-paid pension plan or a health-conscious person looking for an onsite gym, we have the benefits to make our time here more valuable. EOE.

Find the position that's right for you and apply online at

www.holyredeemer.com

