



PRESS RELEASE

New York State Area Health Education Center (AHEC) System Releases Nursing Strategic Plan

May 10, 2005, New York, NY. The New York State Area Health Education Center (NYS AHEC) System, Statewide Office, celebrates Nurses Week by releasing its Nursing Strategic Plan that addresses the statewide nursing shortage. The Strategic Plan, posted on the AHEC website at www.ahec.buffalo.edu, will serve as a vital navigational tool to help local AHECs focus on the need to 1) recruit diverse minority, rural and disadvantaged students, 2) attract and retain nurses in rural and underserved areas and 3) develop collaborative liaisons with community and statewide organizations.

The NYS AHEC System is a community-based health care workforce development initiative that is committed to cultivating a workforce that more closely matches the state's diversity, and improving access to quality health care for all New Yorkers, particularly for the 4 million New Yorkers who reside in underserved areas. There are nine local AHECs strategically located to cover the entire state.

In 2004, the NYS AHEC System Centers convened ten focus groups to identify the concerns of nurses statewide and develop goals. A draft report and recommendations were submitted to NYS AHEC System Statewide Advisory Board, representing all major health care disciplines, academic institutions and other health care organizations, for input. The Nursing Strategic Plan reinforces the key strengths of the AHEC organization -- recruitment, retention and education and training.

Dr. Carol Brewer, Director of Nursing for the NYS AHEC System, Statewide Office, hailed the release of the Strategic Plan to coincide with Nurses Week. Reflecting on the scope of the shortage, Dr. Brewer stated that "nurses are the largest component of the health care workforce nationally with an estimated 2.7 million Registered Nurses, about 700,000 employed Licensed

Practical Nurses and twice that number of nurses' aides. In the current environment of nursing shortages, the NYS AHEC System is uniquely positioned to make a difference. The Strategic Plan will enable each AHEC to address nursing workforce needs in their own particular region." Dr. Brewer continued, "an AHEC strength has always been its focus on preparing young people for careers in health care. Now local AHECs can focus on initiatives that present a positive image of nursing and encourage young people, as well as displaced and mid-career workers, to pursue nursing as a career."

A number of projects are already underway or planned that will be enhanced by the new Strategic Plan. In 2004, AHECs placed 1,616 nursing students with clinical preceptors or in underserved training sites and 2,264 nurses attended AHEC-sponsored continuing education (CE) programs. Multiple programs across the state encouraged children to enter the health professions, and partnerships with nursing schools and health organizations worked to strengthen the nursing programs and opportunities. AHEC initiatives across the state include:

- Bronx-Westchester and Brooklyn-Queens-Long Island AHECs provide tutoring and remediation to at-risk undergraduate nursing students and assist others to pass the licensing exam;
- Western New York Rural AHEC has already helped 339 individuals pursue a nursing degree or take a "nurse refresher" in anticipation of reentering the work force by providing tuition, uniform, books and fee support;
- Central New York AHEC offers hospital-based nurse CE programs, a Mini-Nursing program at a local college, and, in collaboration with a community college, is launching a new nursing program. Nurse refresher courses are planned; and
- Catskill Hudson AHEC, through its nurse workforce development group, will sponsor a nursing workforce summit to develop nursing workforce and refresher courses and prioritize CE programs.

Future initiatives will reflect the Nursing Strategic Plan goals and priorities. AHECs statewide will focus on supporting nursing school faculty development initiatives, distance learning, continuing education and employer 'best practices.' Dr. Brewer concluded, "meaningful intervention is critically needed to address the nursing shortage and enhance the working environment and image of nursing in New York State. The Nursing Strategic Plan is an important first step."

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