

UW Health: Confronts national nursing shortage through innovation, retention strategies and career opportunities

Posted on Thursday, Oct 21, 2021

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MADISON, Wis. – The national statistics paint a clear picture: there is a very serious nursing shortage in this country.

With more than 500,000 registered nurses anticipated to retire by 2022, the [American Nursing Association](#) projects the need for 1.1 million new RNs to replace those who are retiring and fill the growing need for nurses across the country.

Our remarkable nurses and clinical teams provide amazing care for our patients, but these staff shortages present what is likely to be a long-term challenge, according to Rudy Jackson, senior vice president, chief nurse executive, UW Health.

UW Health has weathered this national nursing shortage better than most systems.

- UW Health has hired approximately 300 nurses in the last two years.
- The current nurse turnover rate at UW Health is around 10%, which ranks well below the national average of 17%.
- Staff to patient ratios at UW Health are among the best in the nation.

Despite those positive statistics, UW Health still has significant staffing needs. As of Oct. 2021, UW Health has more than 3,400 nurses on staff and around 300 nursing openings.

“The pandemic has certainly added stress and high patient volumes to health

systems,” said Jackson. “But we are working hard to address the staffing needs in several ways.”

UW Health offers a generous compensation and benefits package, and the health system’s continuing education program has provided approximately \$600,000 in tuition reimbursements for employees in nursing positions in the past year (Sept. 2020-Sept. 2021).

UW Health also has two Nurse Residency Programs (ambulatory and inpatient) to bring new nurses into the system, help train them alongside an experienced nurse and acclimate them to their careers. The Ambulatory Residency Program began in 2021 and the inpatient program began in 2004.

Since 2004, the first-year retention rate at UW Health for nurses has been 97%. The national average for hospitals with a nurse residency program is 91%. For hospitals that do not have nurse residency programs, the retention rate is 71%.

One individual who participated in the UW Health Nurse Residency Program is Andrew Brown. He started at UW Health working in culinary services and immediately knew he wanted to get involved in patient care. He soon became a health unit coordinator, then a nursing assistant and eventually went back to school for nursing and recently graduated from the UW Health Nurse Residency Program to become a nurse.

Brown credits where he is today to the incredible support and encouragement he received along the way.

“I am very proud to be a nurse at UW Health and the residency program helped set me up for success,” said Brown. “We need nurses now more than ever and I want to provide the best patient care as possible each and every day.”

UW Health faces challenges in finding more nurses and other healthcare staff, and those challenges are likely to remain after the pandemic ends, but innovative programs like our nurse residency will serve as an important resource as we work to continue to lead in recruitment and retention.

Recorded interviews with Jackson and Brown are available.