

UW Health: Wisconsin Medicine addresses workforce shortages with innovative programs

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MADISON, Wis - [Wisconsin Medicine](#) announced a new focus on overcoming national workforce shortages and building the healthcare workforce of the future.

A significant donation from Verona-based Epic will kickstart the effort, allowing for the creation and expansion of programs to inspire, train and support the next generation of healthcare workers with a strong focus on impacting historically marginalized communities.

Among the programs receiving support are a new and innovative nursing recruitment program and the expansion of a community-based healthcare apprenticeship program that are both designed to help address barriers to joining and staying in healthcare professions, according to Dr. Alan Kaplan, CEO, UW Health.

“The demand for healthcare is increasing, but the supply of healthcare workers is not,” Kaplan said. “Even those with good insurance may face the prospect that care is not readily available because there are not enough healthcare workers to provide it. This problem is not new, but thanks to our generous philanthropic community we can seek solutions on a new scale.”

Shortages exist for all clinical and support positions, with an estimated 3 to 4 million-position national shortfall by 2026. To bridge this gap, the healthcare industry needs a new approach, Kaplan said.

“We need to inspire interest in the field, we need to diversify our workforce,

we need to create pathways to a career and we need to provide the tools to support staff throughout their careers in healthcare,” he said.

First, Wisconsin Medicine is supporting a new program to recruit, train and advance a new generation of nurses, thanks to generous investments from partners like Epic and collaborations with local nonprofits and educational institutions.

Philanthropic support will enable the creation of a three-part learning path that supports students through the process of earning a certified nursing assistant credential, followed by an associate degree in nursing and a Bachelor of Science in nursing.

“This program takes an innovative approach to solving the important challenge of healthcare capacity,” said Karina Rohrer-Meck, a nurse and clinical information leader at Epic. “Improving access to nursing careers not only bolsters our healthcare workforce, but also extends career opportunities to people who might not consider the profession an option today.”

All individuals will be employed at UW Health during the training and education program while their educational costs are covered by the program, according to Rudy Jackson, chief nurse executive, UW Health.

“Nursing is a calling, but so often those who are called to our profession face barriers including access to education,” Jackson said. “I am very excited to meet the new generation of nurses who will have more opportunities to learn, connect and care for our community through this innovative program.”

Wisconsin Medicine will also support the expansion of an already successful workforce development program. This program at UW Health has for years created new pathways to employment through youth and adult apprenticeship opportunities thanks to work with local partners.

Still, Wisconsin faces a deficit of more than 8,000 healthcare positions across the state, with 3,500 of them in the Madison area, according to Bridgett Willey, director, Allied Health Education and Career Pathways, UW Health.

“We’ll increase youth apprenticeship opportunities many times over from what we offer today thanks to philanthropic support,” Willey said. “At the same time, we will co-design adult apprenticeship programs in areas like licensed

practical nursing, ophthalmology technicians and assistants, paramedics, respiratory therapy, and dietetics and patient nutrition services.”

Wisconsin Medicine, the philanthropic arm of UW Health and the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health, is reaching beyond traditional support for education and professional development, according to Kaplan.

It is addressing a national healthcare workforce shortage by leveraging innovation, entrepreneurialism, community and equity.

The healthcare workforce crisis is significant, and it is global. But our path forward is clear, Kaplan said.

“In the Madison area alone, we have serious workforce shortages in everything from lab technicians to nurses to phlebotomists,” he said. “But through generous philanthropic support, community partnerships and the innovative thinking Madison is known for, we can rise to this challenge that may define the next decade of healthcare.”