



News Release



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October 17, 2008

NR08096

NMCC and HRH partner to expand nursing education in Southern Aroostook

Aroostook County - A six-year partnership between Northern Maine Community College and Houlton Regional Hospital to deliver associate degree nursing education in Southern Aroostook County has taken a significant step forward, as high demand for the offering in the region has led officials to double the size of the program this fall.

A total of sixteen students, up from eight a year ago, are enrolled in the local nursing program, which features lecture courses originating on the NMCC campus that are broadcast live to the Houlton Higher Education Center using videoconferencing technology coupled with hands on learning opportunities provided by Houlton Regional Hospital.

“The hospital was pleased with the impact the program was having and wanted it to grow. They had the clinical capability for expansion and we had access to qualified faculty to help us deliver the program locally,” said NMCC President Timothy Crowley. “Houlton Regional Hospital and NMCC have worked well together for many years. I am proud of the programs and services we provide in southern Aroostook. The partnership with the hospital is an excellent example of what can happen when we work together.”

From the hospital’s perspective, the collaborative effort has not only helped to mitigate the impact of a statewide and nationwide nursing shortage for the facility, but has been a welcome addition to the educational offerings available to the residents in the region.

“This partnership has been extremely beneficial to not only the healthcare community in our part of the County, but has truly opened up a world of opportunity to individuals who might not have otherwise had the access or opportunity to pursue careers in healthcare,” said HRH CEO Tom Moakler. “We are fortunate that NMCC has been such a leader and innovator in the delivery of distance education. We have seen the direct benefit of this work here at the hospital. More than 50 percent of our nursing staff are graduates of NMCC and that number is growing each year.”

Although classroom instruction for students in Houlton originates on the Presque Isle campus, the future nurses are guided locally by nursing faculty hired by the College. For the past few years, that effort has been led by Deborah Folsom, but with the expansion of the program, a second instructor, Deborah Sennett, was hired this fall.

Sennett, who has worked for the past decade in various leadership roles in nursing at HRH, is herself a graduate of NMCC. Together the team assists students with expanded lecture and hands-on classroom exercises, as well as coordinates clinical opportunities at the hospital and other local healthcare facilities.

“The unique partnership between NMCC and Houlton Regional Hospital has provided the opportunity for 16 students enrolled in the associate degree nursing program to receive the same high quality education here in Houlton that the students receive on the main campus in Presque Isle. The initiative to provide this program via distance education has helped to address the shortage of registered nurses in our area. We are very fortunate to have this nursing education offered in our community,” said Folsom.

Demand for the program in the region continues to grow. According to Betty Kent-Conant, NMCC nursing and allied health department chairperson, two students attending the nursing program on the Presque Isle campus, who live in southern Aroostook area, are hoping to transfer to the Houlton program should space become available.

Kent-Conant, who began her nursing education career with NMCC in 1979, was herself a pioneer in delivering distance education to students in southern Aroostook. In the early 1980’s she initiated NMCC’s (then Northern Maine Vocational Technical Institute) first foray in delivering healthcare education to the region.

“I was responsible for coordinating the delivery of our practical nursing instruction into Houlton. At that time, we delivered classes using a conference phone. We have come a long way since then thanks to the excellent work of the NMCC nursing faculty and information technology staff, as well as our healthcare partners in southern Aroostook,” said Kent-Conant.

According to both College and hospital officials, the local delivery of NMCC’s nursing program is especially important given the current economic conditions and high fuel costs. In addition to the family and work challenges faced by the high number of non-traditional students enrolled at the Houlton site, many taking courses this semester have indicated to the instructional staff that traveling back and forth from Presque Isle would present a financial hardship that would have prevented them from continuing in the program.

In addition to offering nursing education to southern Aroostook, NMCC also delivers courses at a distance to students in Washington County. In the fall of 2009 the College will, for the first time, deliver its nursing program to a group of eight students taking courses in the St. John Valley.

Aside from its education/training partnership with Houlton Regional Hospital in the southern Aroostook region, NMCC is currently working collaboratively on substantial workforce development initiatives with Louisiana Pacific in New Limerick and the Smith and Wesson plant in Houlton.

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Northern Maine Community College nursing students A. Gail Paul (left) and Teena McCarthy practice taking blood pressure during a recent class session at the Houlton Higher Education Center.



Northern Maine Community College nursing instructors Deborah Folsom and Deborah Sennett work with the NMCC nursing students taking classes at the Houlton Higher Education Center.