



News Release

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NMCC Southern Aroostook nursing students half way home

Houlton- Sixteen Southern Aroostook students will be returning to school in the fall to complete their goal of achieving an associate's degree in nursing thanks to a partnership between Northern Maine Community College and Houlton Regional Hospital. The six year cooperative effort between the two organizations has provided students taking courses through the Houlton Higher Education Center the opportunity to accomplish this feat without having to commute to the Presque Isle campus.

The goal behind offering the program via distance education was to help address the shortage of registered nurses in the area. Students in the NMCC nursing program – whether they take classes in Presque Isle or Houlton – have the opportunity to gain a good understanding of which areas within the healthcare setting they feel comfortable and will be able to make a contribution.

“What is great about the nursing program at NMCC is it allows you to better understand the nursing process and get a good understanding of what aspects you would like to work in,” said Houlton resident and NMCC nursing student Kim Fox. “I realized there were certain departments where at first I was a bit hesitant and unsure if I would like the job duties. However, after completing some classroom activities, I learned to enjoy working in these areas very much. It opened my eyes to different areas of the program and will give me more options when I graduate. The clinical experiences taught me the smallest things can make the biggest difference. Talking with patients and making a difference in their lives is such a great feeling and makes all the hard work very rewarding for me.”

Most of the Houlton students are “non-traditional” and have families and/or jobs to balance with College work. The program at NMCC allows for students to complete the coursework in two years providing the opportunity to get into the workforce quickly.

“Completing the program in two years is not an easy task,” said nursing student Julie Tribou, also from Houlton. “Being a non-traditional student with three children, everything was new to me. I have been out of high school for some time now, and I had to learn to manage my time efficiently, and attain good organizational skills. My goal is to work at Houlton Regional Hospital when I am done, and the two year program helps me to achieve that goal faster. I want to be in the workforce as soon as I can, and NMCC provides that opportunity for me. I am highly honored to be in this program. It is very competitive, with a limited number of students being accepted each year. Overall, it's a great accomplishment for me, or anyone else who is able to be a part of the program.”

An NMCC nursing instructor is on hand in the Houlton classroom to support and supplement nursing content and facilitate the local learning experience. In addition to her classroom work, instructor Deborah Folsom, RN, MSN, AHN-BC, also provides the clinical oversight of the students at the Houlton Regional Hospital and other community sites, which support meeting the clinical educational objectives of the program. Folsom has been joined by a second instructor, Deborah Sennett, who was hired last 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.

For Folsom, the success of the students entering their second year and anticipating their graduation date is very gratifying. “The most rewarding experience is watching my students grow in the caring role of being a nurse. Although we are set at a distance in the classroom, we are still part of the larger classroom in Presque Isle as a unified whole. With the addition of the human patient simulator at the Presque Isle campus, the Houlton cohort of students will be able to have access to this technology along with their Presque Isle student colleagues,” said Folsom.

From the hospital’s perspective, the collaborative effort has not only helped 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. It also allows Houlton Regional Hospital the benefit of having educated nurses come into the hospital and make a positive impact. More than 60 percent of the hospital’s nursing staff are graduates of NMCC, and that number is expected to grow annually.

Hospital CEO Tom Moakler sees great benefit in the local program offering. “It’s a win-win situation for the college, students, and hospital. It’s a great experience for the students, and most will become full-time employees,” said Moakler.

“The program gives the hospital staff the benefit of knowing the students before they actually start working at the hospital,” said Doris Kennedy, director of nursing at HRH. “They are local citizens who are likely to remain in the area for a long time. Sixty to 70 percent of our current nursing staff are NMCC graduates. My job is to meet with instructors and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each individual student. We set expectations for each student, and support those expectations with the resources the hospital provides us with.”

NMCC began its foray in delivering healthcare education to southern Aroostook in the early 1980’s. Led by current NMCC nursing and allied health department chairperson Betty Kent-Conant, classes were delivered using a conference phone. The program has come a long way, thanks in large part to the work of the NMCC nursing faculty and information technology staff.

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Northern Maine Community College nursing students taking courses at the Houlton Higher Education Center recently celebrated the completion of their first year in the program. Students include, front from left: A. Gail Paul, Woodstock, NB; Kim Mountain, Houlton; and Olivia McGary, Oakfield. Second row from left: Natalia Mowrey and Julie Tribou, both of Houlton; and Michelle Gardner, Linneus. Third row from left: Denise Marquis, Millinocket; Miranda Wilmot, Kim Fox, and Leisha Murry, all of Houlton; and Teena McCarthy, Woodstock, NB. Back from left: Derek Schriver, Rosedale, NB; Samantha Emery and Brandi Spinney, both of Houlton; Mark Goodale, Littleton; and instructor Deborah Folsom of Smyrna Mills.