

PASADENA STAR-NEWS

# OPINION

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## Make room for nurses

**I**T'S not because there aren't enough applicants.

Health-care professionals and educators have known for more than a decade that an already acute nursing shortage will grow much worse, and in many cases they seemed powerless to do anything about it.

The U.S. Department of Labor estimates that in the 10-year period between 2006 and 2016, there will be nearly 600,000 new nursing jobs across the United States. To meet that demand, schools of nursing must ramp up training of registered nurses, but there are reasons why that isn't happening as fast as it should, and it isn't because young men and women aren't willing to be trained. There are far more applicants than there are slots. As recently as 2003, Cal State Long Beach's R.N. program had 800 applicants for 36 slots. That went up to 90 Bachelor's of Science in Nursing (B.S.N.) slots per semester recently with 350 applicants for each slot. So few nurses are being trained because there are not enough nursing instructors, training facilities and willing hospitals to train the tens of thousands of new nurses that an aging population needs.

Cal State Fullerton has also been advertising for nursing instructors. Some universities are offering incentives to enroll nurses into master's programs, so they can instruct future candidates.

Another way to increase the number of nurses training spots is for hospitals to lend aid. Memorial Hospital in Long Beach, for example, provides clinical rotations for 675 nursing students a week from Cal State Long Beach and nearby community colleges.

Nursing comes in three stripes:

L.V.N.s, who are trained at community colleges and must pass a state exam. LVNs find work in doctors' offices and long-term care facilities. In hospital or other settings L.V.N.s work under the supervision of a registered nurse, but those positions in acute hospitals are being phased out. Registered nurses must earn a certificate at community colleges and pass a state licensing board exam.

### OUR VIEW

B.S.N.s academic degrees makes them candidates for the master's in nursing degree.

Trying to convince R.N.s to go into teaching is a tough sell, since it's more lucrative to practice nursing than to teach it. That has to change for, among other reasons, the United States is importing nurses from other countries whose English skills are subpar, often robbing those countries of nurses they need.

Aside from an attractive salary, the Labor Department lists nursing as one of the most respected professions in the United States. Anyone who has been hospitalized can appreciate how a competent and efficient nurse made their stay more tolerable. But the path to a nursing certificate or degree is rigorous.

Tuition at community colleges for four semesters is about \$3,800. Community College graduates who pass their state board exams can expect their earnings to match those who attend four-year colleges. At schools such as Cal State Long Beach or Cal State Fullerton, tuition for the six-semester B.S.N. training program is about \$17,000.

The cost, the requirement that students don't have to speak English proficiently when they enter and leave the program, the lack of nursing instructors and the lack of training facilities mean that while programs between colleges and hospitals are making a dent in the shortage, there's much more to be done. Not everyone is cut out for nursing, but certainly everyone who has the aptitude for the profession should have a chance.

In editorial board meetings we've asked college officials why more nurses aren't being trained, and have never received the kind of answers that gives us hope that the critical shortage will finally be addressed. Taxpayers need to ask that question, too, whenever they're asked to vote on bond issues that don't address facilities for training more nurses. And they deserve the only answer that will help solve the shortage.