

NJHA Recruitment Center Turns Job Stress Into Strategies

BY KERRY McKEAN KELLY

After years of grappling with the nation's ongoing shortage of nurses and other healthcare professionals, you may think you've heard it all, from every perspective, from every angle.

And then you meet Barbara Tofani.

The way Tofani sees it, the healthcare system is a living, breathing thing. And like all creatures, it is susceptible to the stresses of life. If the stress becomes too great, the system succumbs and becomes ill.

That's what's happening now in healthcare, says Tofani. A variety of stresses such as financial pressures and quality questions are making the system vulnerable to a number of ailments — not the least of which is a serious shortage of healthcare workers.

Tofani brings that and other fresh perspectives to her new role as director of NJHA's Nursing and Allied Health Recruitment Center. Launched last month, the center's sole purpose is to promote nursing and other healthcare jobs statewide. Strategies to be used include one-on-one outreach with schools and youth organizations, marketing and advertising efforts targeting young people and mid-career adults and a Web site providing key information on educational programs and financial aid.

Tofani brings an impressive list of credentials to the Recruitment Center. An RN for two decades, Tofani most recently served as coordinator of clinical oncology services at Saint Peter's

University Hospital. She has master's of science degree in nursing and is an oncology clinical nurse specialist.

Tofani said it was her experience in managing oncology services that sparked her commitment to nurse recruitment and retention matters. She found it increasingly difficult to find the right nurses to work in oncology care. Staff shortages and budget limitations had made it hard for nurses to develop such specialties, she said. Plus, the lack of staff across the hospital was making it more difficult for everyone to do their jobs, she says.

Tofani describes nurses as an "oppressed group."

"Nurses were succumbing to all the bad press," says Tofani. "As a profession, we were out of rhythm."

Some of the fault lies with nurses themselves, says

Tofani. Like other oppressed groups, there has been infighting among the different professional silos in nursing, and nurses were beginning to "self-destruct."

Says Tofani, "I was frustrated with nurses defeating other nurses."

To address that concern, one of the Recruitment Center's goals is to promote a collegial, supportive work environment for all members of the hospital team.

Demand Outstrips Supply

The numbers behind the new Recruitment

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For
NJHA's new
Nursing and
Allied Health
Recruitment
Center, honest
talk about
what ails the
system is the
first step in
reversing per-
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shortages.

Recruitment... continued from page 1

Center are sobering. Data shows a serious shortage not just of nurses but also of other key healthcare professionals including pharmacists and radiological and laboratory technologists. A survey released by the American Hospital Association in June showed a nationwide vacancy rate of 21 percent for pharmacists, 18 percent for radiological techs, 12 percent for lab techs and 11 percent for registered nurses. A 10 percent vacancy rate is generally considered to be a severe shortage.

“We’re trying to create a work environment that is a positive one.”

— Mary Ellen Clyne, Clara Maass Medical Center

In New Jersey, the RN vacancy rate stands at about 15 percent.

New Jersey Colleagues in Caring, a Rutgers-based initiative studying nurse supply-and-demand issues, projects a shortage of 14,000 RNs in New Jersey by 2006, for a vacancy rate of 18 percent. Nationwide, the shortage is expected to reach 1.1 million nurses by 2020, according to AHA.

There are many factors that may be keeping people away from jobs in healthcare — the work environment, including long hours; the shift toward greater technology in healthcare and an ever-widening array of job options in other sectors. All of those reasons feed into the work being done by NJHA and its Recruitment Center. According to Geraldine Moon, RN, NJHA’s senior vice president of Hospital Operations, the Recruitment Center is just one part of a multi-pronged strategy. NJHA’s Quality Patient Care Advisory Committee (QPCAC) is taking a hard look at the practice environment and transitional education, while the Recruitment Center focuses on image and marketing.

“We have to align our thinking with the (employee’s) goals — to make sure there is career upward mobility, financial upward mobility and job security,” says Moon. “Employers really have to be committed to the employee.”

Tofani says the consideration to employees must reach down to an even more basic level. Citing a theory called Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, she maintains that individuals must have their basic needs for safety and security met before they can function well and contribute to others’ needs. For nurses and other health professionals, that means that the need for adequate pay, dependable hours, the right tools to do the job and a stable and friendly work environment must be met before they can deliver optimal service to patients.

For an example of the theory in action, look to Clara Maass Medical Center, an affiliate of the Saint Barnabas Health Care System. Systemwide, the

goal is to become the “employer of choice” by listening to employees’ needs, says Mary Ellen Clyne, Clara Maass’s vice president of patient care services and a member of NJHA’s QPCAC. Clara Maass and its partners in the system have accomplished that through a variety of methods such as surveying staff about schedule preferences; offering extended hours at its on-site child care center, including a current pilot test of weekend hours; and an education program for managers called EPIC - “Exceptional People-Inspired Curriculum” - that emphasizes good employee relations.

The effort boils down to a single key question: “What is the relationship we’re building with our employees?” says Clyne. “We’re trying to create a work environment that is a positive one.”

‘No Apathy in Healthcare’

While the forecast disparity between professional supply and patient demand

Perspective

GARY S. CARTER, FACHE – President

When it comes to addressing the staff shortages plaguing healthcare, I like to think of NJHA’s approach as a holistic one. Yes, we’re taking the direct route, as evidenced by the recent opening of our Nursing and Allied Health Recruitment Center, but we’re also attacking the underlying issues that undermine hospitals’ ability to attract and retain good workers.

Key among these are the financial challenges facing hospitals. As a whole, New Jersey hospitals lost money three of the last four years; last year, they barely broke even. That’s a reality that can frustrate hospitals’ ability to pay staff what they deserve. We’re attacking that problem by pressing the case — loudly and consistently — that our hospitals need better reimbursement from Medicare, Medicaid and charity care.

Managed care further complicates the financial picture. It puts hospitals in a financial squeeze, and it bogs

down staff with added paperwork and follow-up. NJHA

has waged a longstanding battle with HMOs over their irresponsible ways, and we’ll continue to pursue it through legislative relief and valuable resources that help members better manage their payers.

Excessive government regulation is another burden that weighs down caregivers. When studies show that an ER nurse spends equal amounts of time on paperwork and patient care, that’s a misplaced priority that NJHA and the American Hospital Association are working to correct.

Barbara Tofani, the new director of our Recruitment Center, likes to call these problems the “stressors” that contribute to staffing shortages. In that case, NJHA is leading the charge, on behalf of its members, to provide some much-needed stress relief.



appears grim, many nurse leaders see cause for optimism.

"Nurses' and other healthcare workers' voices are being heard," Tofani says. "An example of that is this job - my only job is to respond to the need and make it better."

Tofani knows the healthcare workers on the frontlines in hospitals are under stress as the industry grapples with the shortage. Her message to them?

"Be patient. Soon you're going to start to get something tangible and real from these efforts."

"As long as there is not apathy there is opportunity."

— NJHA's Barbara Tofani

For example, Tofani notes that stipends and tuition help for continuing education are in the pipeline, and those efforts will eventually pay off with more student nurses and ultimately more staff.

In the meantime, Tofani is pursuing phase one of the Recruitment Center's strategy — hospital visits around the state to hear from administrators, nurse executives and professional staff. She views the professional staff as "consultants" who will help shape the Recruitment Center's efforts.

"What's good and right about your profession? What is driving you away? What would attract your peers? Those are the kinds of things we need to listen to," says Tofani.

If the conversations so far are any indication, Tofani says there will be no shortage of ideas from nurses and other allied health professionals.

"One thing I'm convinced of after starting my rounds to hospitals: There is no apathy in healthcare," says Tofani. "And as long as there is not apathy there is opportunity."

The Nursing and Allied Health Recruitment Center has created a Power Point presentation to help NJHA members tell the story behind the nursing shortage. For a copy of Nursing in New Jersey: A Career, A Calling, A Crisis, e-mail btofani@njha.com.

Provider Coalition Targets Nursing Bills in Trenton

By KERRY McKEAN KELLY

The search for much-needed healthcare professionals doesn't always lead to high schools and nursing programs. Some of the key strategies are unfolding under the State House dome in Trenton.

This month, as the state Legislature rushes toward recess, NJHA is pushing a package of four priority bills aimed at easing the shortage of nurses in New Jersey. Joining NJHA in the effort is a coalition of trade organizations representing multiple facets of the healthcare community, including the State Nurses Association, the Health Care Association of New Jersey, the Organization of Nurse Executives of New Jersey and the Home Health Assembly.

Dozens of measures addressing the nursing shortage have been introduced in the Legislature, but these four bills were selected as an industry-wide rallying point because they offer quick relief as well as long term benefits for a relatively minor investment in funding, says Mary Marchetta, NJHA's director of legislation and policy.

"This package of four bills will cost \$7.2 million in total but will have a direct, immediate and measurable effect on the industry," says Marchetta. "The value of these initiatives will far surpass this initial investment by attracting and retaining qualified nurses in our state."

The priority bills are:

■ S-2208/A-3302, sponsored by Sens. John Matheussen (R-Turnersville) and Shirley Turner (D-Trenton) and Assembly members Sam Thompson (R-Matawan) and Joan Quigley (D-Jersey City), which would enter New Jersey into a multistate licensure compact allowing qualified nurses from other states to work in New Jersey. This measure was recently approved by the Senate and is awaiting an Assembly

vote to concur on Senate Amendments.

The following bills are working through legislative committees.

■ S-2205/A-3346, sponsored by Sens. Joe Vitale (D-Woodbridge) and Jack Sinagra (R-East Brunswick) and Assembly members Francis Blee (R-Absecon) and Alex DeCroce (R-Parsippany), which would appropriate \$1.2 million to create a statewide Collaborating Center for Nursing.

"This package ... will have a direct, immediate and measurable effect on the industry."

— NJHA's Mary Marchetta

■ S-2206/A-3347, sponsored by Sen. John Matheussen (R-Washington Township) and Assembly members Steven Corodemus (R-Atlantic Highlands) and DeCroce, which would appropriate \$5 million to establish a specialty nurse education and training pilot program.

■ S-2443, sponsored by Sens. Robert Littell (R-Franklin) and Vitale, which would appropriate \$1 million for a nurse retention stipend program to encourage New Jersey nurses to continue working in the state.

With the State's bleak financial picture, the fate of these three bills remains uncertain. But, given the strength of the provider coalition, NJHA is optimistic about the bills' prospects in the next legislative session.

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

Interview

Dr. Johanna Kobran

By KERRY Mc KEAN KELLY

One innovative strategy targeting staff shortages is a partnership between hospitals, educators and elected officials spearheaded by Brookdale Community College. Dr. Johanna Kobran, the college's executive vice president of educational, student and outreach services, describes the program, known as the "Healthcare Summit of Monmouth and Ocean Counties."

Q How did this partnership first develop?

It came from a couple of sources. We had a large associate degree nurse program here at Brookdale and across this last year, we were looking at two things — one, that we did not have a waiting list to get into the nursing program as we have had for years, and secondly, this growing nursing shortage, not only in our counties but also across the state and across the nation. We were getting lots of information — all of the executive staff at Brookdale serve on a hospital board. I serve on CentraState, the president serves on Meridian, the other executive vice president serves at Bayshore and the vice president for planning, assess-



ment and research was serving on Monmouth Medical Center's board. So we were hearing it as board members, we were hearing it as administrators at Brookdale and certainly we were hearing it from media accounts.

So we called a meeting — we called it a summit meeting — of our directors of hospitals as well as agencies — visiting nurses, the blood bank — in both Monmouth and Ocean counties and the college administrators from both Ocean County College and Brookdale. That first meeting was held in June.

Q I would think what makes this effort especially strong is that coalition approach.

Absolutely. It's across the board — what can we do educationally, what do the hospitals need, what do the agencies need, what can the legislators and freeholders deliver. (Healthcare) is a big employer in our county, and it obviously goes right to the health of our families. And so it hits almost every button there is to hit.

Q Have you seen any results in terms of student interest?

Well, I'm not sure it's a result of this, although we have received some publicity — we did get a surge this summer and we added an additional class in the nursing program. Another 20 students were admitted this fall and we hired an additional faculty person. And we had a surge in radiological technology as well. ... So we have a big program in rad tech and nursing; we also have a program in respiratory therapy, but there's still not a lot of interest in med lab tech.

I know it's frustrating for the hospitals. They feel the immediate need for people in there. It's one of those issues that is not going to go away, and we'll have another executive summit meeting in early February.

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