

Health careers offer a chance to help others

BY WENDY ILENE FRIEDMAN

Time and again public opinion polls show that "nurses are the most trusted profession in the U.S.," said Kathleen Matta, director of nursing education at the Santa Fe Community College.

Yet, by the year 2020, experts estimate there will be a shortage of 800,000 nurses, according to Discovernursing.com. If considering a career in the field, the time is now. Matta says starting salaries range from \$45,000-\$50,000 a year.

"In general, that's the ballpark figure," she said. A career in nursing also offers schedule flexibility and the opportunity to see new places as a travel nurse.

"You can provide for your family and choose different shifts to accommodate your life," Matta said.

The two-year associate's degree offered at Santa Fe Community College is all an interested person needs to get started. Typical students, Matta said, are people looking for a second career, and often single parents. The average age of students is 32-34.

"Very few of our students are right out of high school," she said.

The nursing program is a full-time, four-semester program that students can begin each spring or fall and usually takes two years to complete. In 2008, the college began a "fast track" program that starts every May. Students must have a bachelor's degree to be eligible for the 15-month program and there is a maximum of eight students. The first set of "fast-track" graduates completed studies



LUIS SÁNCHEZ SATURNO

Helena Carling of Santa Fe, a graduate nurse at Christus St. Vincent Regional Medical Center, is among 550 nurses on staff at any given time.

this past August.

"Each one of the students (in the fast track program) passed the state boards and got a job," Matta said. "It's very exciting."

Another source of excitement at the community college is the new Health and Science Building the school plans to open in May 2010.

All the nursing classes, along with certain sciences, biology and the Emergency Medical Science Institute, will be held in the building. The new, eco-friendly structure will contain three human patient simulation rooms. Using life-like mannequins that have a heart rate, breath and moan, students will experience taking a trauma patient from the emergency room through critical care.

But nursing is just one option for people interested in careers in the

healthcare industry.

Alternative medicines — such as massage treatment, acupuncture, aromatherapy and other methods of healing — also are areas to consider.

Although use of these practices and beliefs have existed for thousands of years, their popularity has grown tremendously in the past few decades for both healing and prevention.

"There is a lot more interaction between Eastern and Western medicine now," said Richard Shcolnik, campus director at the Southwest Acupuncture College. "Many of our students are licensed massage therapists, nurses and even MDs."

The college offers a comprehensive education in Oriental medicine that includes acupuncture, the study of Chinese medicinal herbs, Tui Na body



NATALIE GUILLÉN

Jill Gerber works on a patient at High Desert Health Care and Massage.

work, nutrition and Tai Chi.

Reno Myerson, a massage practitioner who runs his own practice and works as a master therapist at Ten Thousand Waves, finds that alternative therapies involve the same underlying principles as any other medical profession, which is "an aspiration to genuinely help people".

And the amount of evidence that supports non-traditional forms of healing, like massage and acupuncture, is growing — both through rigorous research and anecdotal evidence.

Audre Gutierrez is one example. After suffering back pain so severe she was advised to undergo surgery, the former vice president of human resources and administration for a major drug development company decided to try massage therapy.

She found Barry Kapp, a massage therapist and medicinal aromatherapist who used essential oils to assist in her treatment,

which she said, "literally triggered an awakening of life-changing proportions." Gutierrez experienced such positive results that she left her corporate job and opened an aromatherapy business called Wisdom of the Earth essential oils.

She now educates others about the benefits of aromatherapy and counts several massage therapists who use essential oils in their practice as clients.

Many hospitals incorporate massage treatments, Reiki healing, meditation, yoga, acupuncture and other non-Western therapies as part of patient treatment. Doctors are also increasingly using holistic therapies in their private practices. In short, in addition to the thousands of jobs in various healthcare jobs now available, the various avenues a licensed nurse or therapist can take continue to grow.

Or, as Myerson put it: "Career opportunities are as big as you want them to be."

Details

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