

Featured Hospital

St Francis Hospital & Health Center, Blue Island

By: Ann Adlington

Summertime at St. Francis Hospital & Health Center's Emergency Department is an exciting time. The hospital sponsors a six week student nurse program every summer. In mid spring nursing students entering their final year the next fall are eligible to apply for positions as a student nurse. They must have a B average and provide two letters of recommendation in order to be considered for an interview. The students can either apply to work in an area of special interest or rotate through several nursing units. Clinical Coordinators and mentors are chosen in each department to work with the students and assist them in gaining valuable experience. The program structure includes educational experiences addressing issues such as interviewing skills, time management and critical thinking.

The Emergency Department welcomes the students with open arms. New students rotated through the department every week. Sue Schaller, the Clinical Coordinator for this summer made sure the students had the best possible experience. She reminded staff it is important to share our knowledge with these soon to be nurses. Staff was encouraged to share interesting cases and question the students to encourage thinking. At any time you could walk through the department and hear some one asking, "What do you think is wrong with this patient?" or "What treatment would you expect?" The students witnessed some very exciting situations, but they also faced some of the more challenging aspects of practice. On a given day they might learn to deal with a grieving family or care for a critically ill child. We made sure not to neglect discussing how to cope emotionally with these situations. Staff members also benefit from the students. It is refreshing to see the excitement of these future nurses and know they are the future of our nursing profession. I think the student nurses enjoyed us as much as we enjoyed having them.

At the completion of the program, the student nurses interview with unit nurse leaders for the opportunity to remain student nurses for the school year. The Emergency Department chose four student nurse externs this year, with one graduating in December, and the remaining three next May. These students work schedules conducive to school and are mentored by a specific nurse preceptor. The goal for the student nurses is to build an ongoing relationship with their nurse preceptor and the department in order to effectively transition to a new graduate upon completion of nursing school.

In the past many of our student nurses were hired as new graduates after completion of nursing school. We have a structured new graduate orientation program. This program is designed to support the new graduate nurse as they adapt to the role of staff nurse. In the Emergency Department we provide an extensive orientation. The new graduate works closely with an assigned nurse preceptor, as well as, the Clinical Educator. We utilize the ENA's Orientation to Emergency Nursing self directed learning modules and attempt to design clinical patient assignments to reinforce material in the

modules. The new graduate meets weekly with the Clinical Educator to review the modules and discuss recent experiences. This time is also used for exposure to equipment or procedures not yet encountered in orientation. The average orientation for a new graduate is 4-5 months, but it is individualized to need. Our student nurses who move into the role of new graduate seem to make the transition with relative ease.

Our belief is time spent mentoring student nurses and new graduate nurses are an investment in the future. Our experiences and knowledge are valuable assets needing to be shared with new nurses. We are attempting to break the stereotype of “nurses eat their young”. This is an opportunity to develop nurses who will be working side by side and caring for us in the future. This opportunity can't be wasted.

As we move into the new school year it is exciting to think once again we can impact the development of a new nurse.