

News Release

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BlueCross' \$1.5 Million Nursing Scholarships to Ease Nursing Faculty Shortage

Columbia, S.C. – The BlueCross BlueShield of South Carolina Foundation will grant \$1.5 million to establish graduate-level nursing scholarships through the South Carolina Nurses Foundation, Inc. Distributed over three years, the grant will enable financial support for at least 30 nurses who will then become faculty in nursing education programs across the state.

South Carolina is experiencing a serious nursing shortage due to the retirement of a large number of nurses and the inability of state nursing education programs to expand enrollments sufficiently to meet demand. Colleges and universities currently must limit enrollments based on faculty-to-student ratios required by the South Carolina Board of Nursing (8-10 students per faculty member). Faculty are required to hold higher degrees – a minimum of a master's degree in associate degree programs and a doctoral degree in baccalaureate and graduate programs.

“The rate of new graduate degrees for the preparation of nurses for faculty roles has not kept up with faculty retirements,” said Foundation Executive Director Harvey Galloway. “We hope our new scholarship will entice some who otherwise wouldn't be able to afford higher education to pursue a graduate degree and go on to teach others. It's imperative to the health of people in our state to have a sufficient number of working nurses.”

The grant will be administered by the South Carolina Nurses Foundation (SCNF), a nonprofit established in 1974 to advance the nursing profession through scholarships, awards and programs of excellence.

“This grant will make a significant impact in meeting prospective faculty requirements in our state,” said Renatta S. Loquist, SCNF past president who solicited the grant. “We are grateful to the BlueCross BlueShield of South Carolina Foundation for their vision and commitment to the health of the citizens of our great state. We hope to sustain the project beyond this grant amount by adding other partners who will invest in creating a thriving nursing education system.”

By immediately addressing the faculty shortage, the future 30 higher education graduates can begin to fill existing vacant faculty positions and provide additional slots for student enrollment. For every one new faculty member hired, a nursing program can accommodate up to eight additional students in a clinical course.

“It is compelling that we have stimulated interest in nursing as a career, and nursing programs in the state are turning away qualified applicants,” said Dr. Gail Stuart, dean and professor in the Medical University of South Carolina College of Nursing. “The problem now is attracting and retaining sufficient numbers of nurse faculty to sustain and grow nursing school enrollment. This program will be a tremendous stimulus to ensure a strong cohort of nurse educators.”

“We are grateful for this commitment by the BlueCross BlueShield of South Carolina Foundation,” said Rosanne Pruitt, Ph.D., RN and Clemson University director of the School of Nursing and associate dean, College of Health Education and Human Development. “This is a much needed resource to prepare nurses for the faculty role. Preparation of the future nursing workforce has important health implications for all South Carolinians.”

Dr. Peggy Hewlett, dean of the USC College of Nursing, said, “Securing substantial scholarships for our graduate nursing students at both the master's and doctoral levels is one of our greatest challenges. This generous gift from the BlueCross BlueShield of South Carolina Foundation will provide an opportunity for nursing scholars to attend school full-time and in so doing, graduate more quickly into the teaching ranks.”

South Carolina has 24 undergraduate RN programs, three master's programs and two doctoral programs in nursing. Clemson University's new interdisciplinary Ph.D. in healthcare genetics also has an option for nurses to prepare for the academic role. In 2007, there were 44 faculty vacancies, with an additional 72 faculty expected to retire within five years.

The scholarships will be made available to in-state or out-of-state students accepted to or already enrolled in nursing graduate programs at the University of South Carolina, Clemson University and the Medical University of South Carolina, with each university receiving equal amount scholarship funds. Scholarship recipients will be required to sign a contract that commits them to teach in a South Carolina state-approved nursing program for at least three years. Scholarship applicants may apply through their universities.

Headquartered in Columbia, the BlueCross BlueShield of South Carolina Foundation (www.bcbscfoundation.org) is a philanthropic affiliate of BlueCross BlueShield of South Carolina. It was created to identify and help solve South Carolinians' health problems, with special emphasis on access, affordability and quality of health care. The BlueCross BlueShield of South Carolina Foundation and BlueCross BlueShield of South Carolina are independent licensees of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association.