

BY LEE LEWIS HUSK

New Master's-level Nurse Anesthesia Program

Aims to Alleviate Shortage

Next to every unconscious patient in an operating room is the watchful eye of a skilled nurse anesthetist or anesthesiologist. Anesthesiology physicians are known to the public, but nurse anesthetists have largely escaped public detection, despite being present in nearly every critical care setting and on the battlefields of every major war since the Civil War.

Nurse anesthetists are the nation's oldest nursing specialty and were the first professional group to provide anesthesia services in the United States, according to the American Association of Nurse Anesthetists. Nurse anesthetists provide 65 percent of the 26 million anesthetics given to patients each year in the U.S., the AANA Web site states. Oregon has about 180 certified registered nurse anesthetists (CRNAs), with 40 percent practicing in rural areas. CRNAs provide 80 percent of anesthesia services to rural Oregonians, according to the Oregon Association of Nurse Anesthetists. They often receive their education alongside anesthesiology resident physicians in university-affiliated institutions.

But the nation is experiencing a shortage of nurse anesthetists, due to the overall nursing shortage, the aging of today's practitioners, a decline in anesthesiology residency positions and increased demand in office-based surgery. To address this shortage, the OHSU School of Nursing is starting a program to educate nurses to become nurse anesthetists.

Interestingly, it will be Oregon's second such program. Providence St. Vincent Hospital in Portland started the nation's first nurse anesthesia program in 1909, which lasted through 1956. In addition to training nurses in the art and science of anesthesia, its founder Agnes McGee taught third-year medical students at the University of Oregon (now Oregon Health & Science University School of Medicine). Today the Western U.S. is served by just a handful of nurse anesthesia programs.

OHSU will admit its first class of 10 students in September 2006. These students will join the school's existing graduate-level programs and will finish with a master's of science degree in nursing. Graduates must pass the national certification exam administered by the Council on Certification of Nurse Anesthetists to qualify for Oregon licensure as a CRNA. The program is 27 months of intense, full-time education and is open to nurses with a baccalaureate degree in nursing who have a minimum of one year critical care experience. The average nurse anesthesia student is in his/her early 30s, says Interim Program Director Rick Brown, MSN, FNP, CRNA. "We're very pleased with the applicant pool for our first year," he says.

Brown reports that the program received an initial three-year accreditation – the maximum permitted for a new program – from the Council on Accreditation of Nurse Anesthesia Educational Programs.

The first 12 months of the program include classroom study and laboratory experience in skill development. The school will rely on the OHSU Simulation and Clinical Learning Center to provide a safe place to begin skill development in that first year. Students will spend the next 15 months rotating through clinical sites in hospitals and community settings



in the Pacific Northwest. Among them are the OHSU Hospital and Kaiser Sunnyside Hospital in Portland; the University of Washington Medical Center in Seattle; and Three Rivers Community Hospital in Grants Pass.

"Two of the most exciting parts of the program include really top-notch clinical sites and also the opportunity for us as a faculty to focus on small group, one-on-one educational opportunities," Brown states. "We'll be able to do more mentoring between faculty and student." The school will have three experienced CRNAs to serve as faculty mentors to the students.

The program's costs will largely be paid through tuition. Brown acknowledges that tuition costs can be steep (upwards of \$35,000 a year) but points out that CRNAs have the potential to be high income earners right out of school. He says the annual salary range for new graduates is \$110,000 to \$150,000.

Brown estimates that 90 percent of new graduates will practice in an academic or community hospital setting, with the remainder going to ambulatory care settings. In addition to providing anesthesia during surgery, CRNAs also work in specialty areas, such as pain management, pediatrics, and obstetrics. About 55 percent of CRNAs are female, 45 percent male.

When the first graduates spill from OHSU's gates in early 2009, Brown and other nursing leaders hope that some will find their way to Oregon's rural hospitals where the need is greatest. "OHSU's mission is to provide education and to serve the health care needs of Oregonians. Our program aims to fill critical needs in the region," he concludes.

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— Rick Brown, MSN, FNP, CRNA, Interim Program Director

Oregon Consortium for Nursing Education

OHSU School of Nursing, Community Colleges Start First-Of-Its Kind Program

To increase the number of nurses with bachelor's degrees educated in Oregon as a way to address the shortage of highly qualified nurses OHSU School of Nursing and eight community colleges have partnered to form the Oregon Consortium for Nursing Education (OCNE).

"It's a new and better way of learning, which will result in excellent patient care. There is an urgent need to train more nurses with bachelor's degree because of the increasing sophistication of health care needs of our patients," said Kathleen Potempa, DNSc, RN, FAAN, OHSU vice president and dean of the OHSU School of Nursing.

"The OCNE plan overcomes many of the barriers to increasing the work force, such as having enough faculty around the state to educate more nurses and more classrooms to handle more students, and more clinical sites for their hands-on training," said Sheila Kodadek, PhD, RN, director of the state-wide undergraduate nursing program at OHSU, adding that not everyone can move to Portland to attend OHSU

for four years.

The OCNE is a national model for making Bachelor of Science education more accessible, increasing the quality of the education, educating students more efficiently and preparing them for the future population's needs. Students already are applying to be part of this innovative education.

"Nursing students take prerequisites at any community college or university. They then can apply for admission to one of the consortium programs to begin nursing courses in their second year of full-time study," said Chris Tanner, PhD, RN, AB Youmans Spaulding Distinguished professor of nursing, OHSU, and consultant to the OCNE steering committee.

"The curriculum is innovative, incorporating best practices in nursing education. It raises the bar in terms of expectations for graduates: they will be educated as leaders in health care, skilled in using the best available scientific evidence in their practice, and as compassionate, knowledgeable and skillful providers of care," Potempa said.