

the Bridge

nursing news

Published for the alumni/ae, students, faculty, staff, and friends of the School of Nursing at Salem State College.

A Message from Our President Dr. Patricia Maguire Meservey



Dear fellow nurses and friends of the School of Nursing,

It is a pleasure to bring you greetings in this issue of *the Bridge*. I do so wearing not only my Salem State presidential hat, but my nursing cap as well. Although my own career has led me from nursing into higher education

administration, I was a practicing nurse for many years and later a nursing instructor. More than many, I believe, I understand the challenges you face in today's rapidly changing health care environment.

As you are well aware, nursing in this country faces enormous challenges: experienced nurses are retiring early or leaving the field; turnover is rampant; patient loads are increasing; nurse support is decreasing; and more foreign nurses are being recruited to fill shortages.

President Barack Obama, as part of his pre-election health care platform, committed his administration to going beyond short-term fixes. As recently as December, he reiterated his belief that a major health-care initiative "has to be intimately woven into our overall economic recovery plan," adding that "It's not something that we can put off because we are in an emergency. This is part of the emergency."

The much discussed health care reform package presented to Governor Mitt Romney and enacted by the Massachusetts legislature in April 2006 has positioned our own state as a leader in the country's efforts to provide health care access to all, presaging—and perhaps influencing—President Obama's own initiatives.

Massachusetts' groundbreaking legislation required all uninsured adults in the state to purchase some kind of insurance policy by July 1, 2007, or face a fine. Their choices include a range of new and inexpensive policies—ranging from about \$250 per month to nearly free—from private insurers subsidized by the state. Although Hawaii

and Maine have programs that offer near-universal access to health insurance and Illinois last year approved a subsidy plan that will widely increase coverage for needy children, Massachusetts is the only state making health insurance a legal requirement. Polls conducted this summer reveal that 97 percent of its citizenry is covered, with only 167,000 individuals—or 2.6 percent—still without.

What does this mean for nursing in the Commonwealth and for graduates of Salem State's nursing program? Quite frankly, I believe it bodes well for both. With health care for all now a mandate in Massachusetts, nurses will be in more demand in this state than ever before and Salem State—currently the only state college nursing program in Massachusetts accredited by both the National League for Nursing and the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education—will continue to take the lead in providing qualified, well-trained and diverse nurses to leading medical centers in our region and beyond.

I would be remiss here if I failed to note that one of the most critical factors facing schools of nursing today is the lack of nursing educators, laboratory facilities and clinical sites to prepare nurses in the numbers that will be required. A report prepared last year by the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) revealed that U.S. nursing schools turned away 42,866 qualified applicants from baccalaureate and graduate nursing programs in 2006 due to an insufficient number of faculty. In fact, nearly three quarters of the nursing schools responding cited faculty shortages as the reason for not accepting all qualified applicants into entry-level nursing programs.

Whatever the numbers, the problem is clear: to meet the expected demand, we must train more nurses in all specialties. Without credentialed nursing faculty at the PhD level to teach them and renew faculty ranks, however, we will not be able to do so.

To turn out the number of health care professionals the region will require in the future and to educate the number of young people wishing to enter the field, we must find

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and hire the faculty to educate them. If not enough nursing educators at the doctoral level exist, we must find ways to remediate that.

Salem State is fully prepared to undertake this endeavor and is working with the state's Department of Higher Education to obtain the authority to offer doctoral degrees in two important disciplines--nursing and education. They will be the first doctoral programs ever offered on the North Shore, and will respond to career areas that are projected to continue suffering from a shortage of talent. Recognition as a university will allow us to do this.

The region demands it, the health care industry supports it, and Salem State is prepared to do its part to deliver it. In closing, let me say that when delivering the keynote address at Salem's Million-Dollar Women Symposium in October, I made a point of emphasizing in my remarks not that I *was* a nurse, but that I *am* a nurse. It is an identity I wear with pride and I know you do as well.

Please know that you have my sincere admiration for all you do on behalf of our profession and my full support of a strong nursing future at Salem State.

Sincerely,

Patricia Maguire Meservey
President