

New Program A Bridge Between Classroom And Bedside

(June 2004) -When Rita Hoffman, R.N., C.C.R.N., became a registered nurse 29 years ago, she almost quit the profession several times in her first year. "I had a terrible time for about the first six months. Then a nurse took me under his wing and I was fine," she said.

Hoffman's feelings are not uncommon for new nurse graduates, according to Education Director Gale Barone, B.S., R.N., at Rome Memorial Hospital. "In fact, a national study indicates that the number of new graduates who leave the profession of nursing within their first year is accelerating," she said. "It can be difficult to make the transition from the classroom to the bedside without experienced mentors to help smooth the way."

"To help our new nurse graduates become better oriented to the real world of nursing, we have expanded our traditional orientation program to provide more support and training for our new nurse graduates and their preceptors," Barone said.

The "RN Bridge Program" provides new nurses with six months of one-on-one support. The new nurse is paired with a preceptor, an experienced nurse who has received training as a mentor, for the first three months. The new nurse is not counted as a full staff member for patient assignments during this initial phase. The formal mentoring relationship continues for another three months as the new nurse receives his or her own patient assignments.

Hoffman is one of the experienced nurses who will be mentoring the hospital's 17 new nurse graduates. She has been a preceptor for more than 10 years. "Having been there, I can appreciate how a new nurse feels. Often, they come in scared to death," she said. "If they have someone in the background giving them encouragement and answering their questions, it makes all the difference."

"I really like to teach and I have a lot of patience," Hoffman said, explaining why she volunteered to be a preceptor. "The new nurses bring with them fresh ideas. We learn from them as they question various policies and procedures."

According to Barone, the Bridge Program has several special features. New nurses will receive additional classroom training in eight areas, including topics identified by them. They will spend half-day rotations in medical imaging, pharmacy, operating room/post anesthesia care unit, emergency department, medical records, lab and cardiopulmonary services to gain a better understanding of how these departments function and contribute to continuity of care. In addition, there will be receptions to help the new nurses become socially acclimated.

"Providing training for our preceptors to enhance their mentoring skills is also a critical component to the program," Barone said. "We felt it was important to support our preceptors who are the backbone of this program." Diversified Training of Utica conducted a four-hour workshop for preceptors in May. The instructor will return for another two-hour program in September to train mentors.

The United States is in the midst of a nursing shortage that is expected to increase as baby boomers age and the need for health care grows. "There are intense efforts to attract more people to the nursing profession," Barone said. "Through the Bridge Program, we can provide a more supportive environment to ensure that entry into the nursing profession is as rewarding as they expected it to be."

The new nurse graduates participating in the Bridge Program include: Carlos Arrow, Rebecca Bourgeois, Sarah Grocholski, Karen Hamlin, Melissa Hight, Jeanne Hinton, Julie Hutchinson, Sandra Latendress, Nicole Marchesani-Hall, Laura Martino, Christina McQuinn, Antonia Nagurney, Carrie O'Brien, Mary Rose Riolo, Danika Simpson, Darlene Skidmore and Vincent Zegarelli.

Their preceptors are Michle Bates, Lauren Owens, Jane Ricci, Rita Hoffman, Sue Zylinsky, Terri Goodwin, Chris DeBois, Laura Sirles, Diane Hurlbut, Lisa Internicola, Linda Wafer, Diana Lamphere, Ken Fehltner, Marsha Ruscito, Brandi Kirk, Nancy Kovich, Jen Cook, Karen Kobito, Lori Edel and Carolyn Allen.