



PRESS RELEASE

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida Gift Aids Universities in Addressing Nursing Education Critical Issues

January 10, 2006

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida today announced the donation of \$600,000 each to the University of North Florida and the University of Florida in an effort to address critical issues in nursing education. The State of Florida will match each gift at \$420,000. UNF and UF were also awarded a \$1.2 million SUCCEED grant from the state to increase the number of nurses who enter Florida's workforce.

The nursing shortage in Florida, currently estimated at 34,000 and projected to hit 61,000 by the year 2020, has a negative impact on the quality and availability of health care. In 2004, Northeast Florida hospitals reported that 8.1 percent of nursing positions remained vacant, the same as the statewide average for registered nurse vacancies, according to the Florida Hospital Association. Hospital studies show that patient care declines and health care costs increase when there is a nurse shortage. The Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida gift, combined with matching dollars from the state legislature, is a significant step that will expand the education system, generating more nurses to meet the increasing demand.

"We deeply appreciate the profound generosity of Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida," said UNF President John A. Delaney. "This meaningful gift enables the School of Nursing to sustain the SUCCEED grant and will help to increase student enrollment in our nursing program."

UNF will use the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida gift to hire a professor to work with a data base, which is the first of its kind in Jacksonville, allowing the School of Nursing to more adeptly schedule clinical rotations for all schools and health care organizations in the Jacksonville area, plus staff a patient simulation lab at Shands Jacksonville for clinical education of UNF and UF nursing students as well as Shands staff. This will allow UNF to increase enrollment of baccalaureate nursing students, upgrade technology and optimize the placement of students at clinical sites. Ultimately, all nursing programs in the North Florida area will benefit from the ability to proficiently schedule clinical rotations for their students.

"The University of Florida is grateful for the generosity of Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida and their dedication to improving nursing education," said Bernard Machen, UF president. "UF has been a leader in advocating better education for nurses, and this gift to UF will enable us to address the critical need for new nursing faculty. We are happy to be able to collaborate with the University of North Florida and Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida to increase the number of well-educated nurses and ultimately improve health care for all Floridians."

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida's gift to UF will help expand and enhance the North Florida PhD Consortium, which links UF's PhD in Nursing Science Program to students at sites located at UNF, Florida A&M University, Florida State University and the University of West Florida through a cooperative degree approach. This innovative approach provides access to doctoral-level nursing education in an efficient and cost-effective way through the use of sophisticated distance technology. Funds will also help maintain and improve distance delivery technology, add a Web-based component, fund scholarships for selected students as well as travel costs for students and faculty.

"We recognize how important collaboration is to achieve meaningful progress in easing the nursing shortage," said Robert I. Lufrano, M.D., chairman and chief executive officer, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida. "Through our Generation RN program, we are able to support nurse education as well as address a critical workforce and health care need in Florida."

Generation RN is a public/private partnership initiated by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida to build an expanded, stable and culturally diverse nurse workforce in Florida. Combined with state matching dollars and other private support, BCBSF-endowed scholarships fund the education of more than 200 nursing students each year. Endowed professorships, graduate student scholarships and support for innovative programs help ensure sustained nurse growth.

With support from the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida gift, the SUCCEED project will increase enrollments in UNF and UF nursing programs. Sixty-eight additional students will be admitted to both accelerated baccalaureate program options and to the new clinical nurse leader tracks. The accelerated bachelor's of nursing is a fast-track educational program for students with non-nursing bachelor's degrees, while the clinical nurse leader is a master's degree program, preparing professional nurses to design, coordinate and evaluate clinical care for patients.

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