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#### UTA Dean: Nursing's Future Needs Bold Education and Partnerships

It's a good time to be a registered nurse. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that more than 430,000 additional registered nurse jobs will be created in the next decade. The Texas Center for Nursing Workforce Studies estimates that demand for registered nurses in the Lone Star State will rise by 86 percent by 2020.

Americans consistently rank nursing the nation's most trusted profession, Gallup polls show. Tens of thousands of people will graduate with nursing degrees this month. About 56 percent of these new graduates will land jobs within six months, according to the American Association of Colleges of Nursing.

That figure is twice as high as the job placement rate for all other college graduates combined, the association says. But this optimism is tempered by the fact that our nation continues to face an acute nursing shortage. There are not enough seats in the nation's nursing schools, too few faculty members to serve students and a shortage of clinical practice sites. According to the National League for Nursing, 41 percent of undergraduate nursing programs don't have enough practice sites.

The nursing shortage is worsened by other factors, including the aging of the Baby Boomer generation and the graying of a large segment of our 3.1 million registered nurses. Today there are more people over age 65 than at any time in our country's history. The American Nurses Association estimates that 53 percent of registered nurses are over age 50 and that 700,000 of them will retire in the coming decade.

Nursing schools are also confronting an aging issue. The American Association of Colleges of Nurses reports that the average age of a nursing faculty member is 57. Nursing schools already face difficulties attracting qualified teachers. This shortage of teachers means fewer spaces, which is why 22 percent of applicants were turned away in 2014, according to the National League for Nursing. The role of nurses in healthcare delivery has never been more critical. Nurses are vital to the successful implementation of the Affordable Care Act, which is steadily transforming healthcare delivery.

To be sure, many nursing schools are working diligently to tackle the shortage. At The University of Texas at Arlington, for example, we have created access for baccalaureate and master's degree seekers by significantly expanding our online nursing programs while also maintaining our academic standards.

As a result, in the last decade our enrollment has grown exponentially, making us the largest producer of registered nurses

in Texas and one of the nation's five largest nursing programs. About two-thirds of our approximately 20,000 students take classes online. In addition, we have stepped up our student retention efforts by boosting academic, tutoring and personal counseling support for all students. We have invested heavily in faculty and advisers who help students navigate academic and personal challenges.

We have worked hard to ensure that faculty members focus on teaching and learning by hiring a large number of talented academic support staff members who assist in areas such as our simulation laboratories. Our goal is to have faculty members do what they do best: teach. We have found that this focus on teaching and learning helps us attract and retain talented faculty.

But nursing schools can't tackle this crisis alone. We must forge stronger partnerships with national health organizations, healthcare firms, government agencies, school districts and civic groups. Partnerships with public school districts as well as civic organizations engaged in wellness activities such as nutrition education and breast cancer awareness could provide more opportunities for clinical sites for nursing students.

Simulation programs that are meticulously designed and executed can ease clinical placement shortages. But simulation programs are expensive and partnerships with healthcare firms and other organizations could help nursing schools offset the costs.

Until we take bold steps to reframe our various approaches to nursing education, focus faculty on teaching and build partnerships, the steps taken thus far by nursing schools such as UT Arlington will be just that – steps.

*Anne R. Bavier is dean of The University of Texas at Arlington College of Nursing and Health Innovation and president of the National League for Nursing. Contact her at [Olalekan.oguntoyinbo@uta.edu](mailto:Olalekan.oguntoyinbo@uta.edu).*

Source: *D Healthcare Daily*: [http://healthcare.dmagazine.com/2016/05/17/nursings-future-needs-bold-education-and-partnerships/?utm\\_source=hs\\_email&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_content=29642271&\\_hsenc=p2ANqtz-9XceY6alFB0D8GD2iIMeno1HkW-BEuI-Au6KDVPrTqYkkdpY0Zpq\\_ZszYmG7ir3oSDc2Di7rXLiE xjQgwHzNv-kK10Fg&\\_hsmi=29642271](http://healthcare.dmagazine.com/2016/05/17/nursings-future-needs-bold-education-and-partnerships/?utm_source=hs_email&utm_medium=email&utm_content=29642271&_hsenc=p2ANqtz-9XceY6alFB0D8GD2iIMeno1HkW-BEuI-Au6KDVPrTqYkkdpY0Zpq_ZszYmG7ir3oSDc2Di7rXLiE xjQgwHzNv-kK10Fg&_hsmi=29642271)

INTERLINK  
P.O. Box 610246  
DFW Airport, TX 75261-0246  
Email: [candy@interlink-ntx.org](mailto:candy@interlink-ntx.org)  
Website: [www.interlink-ntx.org](http://www.interlink-ntx.org)

