

Bridging Distances in Healthcare

Outcomes to Date – May 2004

While most of the students are still in training programs, we are already seeing positive outcomes from the system development aspect of the project. Below are just a few highlights:

- Fourteen new rural nursing sites, in twelve communities, have been established in rural Minnesota
- One partnering school has put all of their nursing theory classes online, and many other schools are in various stages of development toward that goal.
- One totally new nursing education program has been established through a Tribal & Community College.
- Another community collaboration has initiated the start-up of a private college campus in their community, specializing in healthcare careers
- Six of the nursing sites include partnership arrangements between two or more colleges.
- At least two nursing programs have adapted their curriculum to meet the needs of rural nursing sites.
- One school is offering a revised curriculum that will offer a dual exit option (Licensed Practical Nurse/Registered Nurse), making it easier for a student to enter a nursing track.
- All partnering schools have adapted their clinical experiences to meet the needs of the rural communities, healthcare facilities, and rural nursing sites.

Key strategies that contribute to the success of the Bridging Distances project include:

- An employer-driven model
- Commitment and sponsorship from local healthcare facilities
- Development of rural clinical sites
- Strengthening of a distance learning model for nursing education
- Involvement of local advisory groups
- Project support to help nurses to get degrees in Nursing Education, to help alleviate the nursing faculty shortage, and support the distance learning sites

The initiative has already demonstrated tremendous impact on job-seekers, employers, and economic development. Obviously, the job-seekers who were accepted as nursing students are experiencing the most immediate impact, as they are in an educational program that will help them get jobs in a high demand occupation, with wages far above what they previously earned. But the initiative also impacts the job-seekers who were not accepted into the project, through the increased capacity of nursing education in rural Minnesota.

The ‘home-grown’ model ensures that employers are supporting future nurses who have chosen to live in their community, and will likely not leave for a metropolitan area that generally offers higher wages. The healthcare facilities involved in the project are not only seeing the increase of nurses available to fill their job openings, but, through the development of the local clinicals, they have also seen a new energy and enthusiasm in their workforce. As one of the hospital partners said, “Having the students in the hospital makes all of us think about what we want them to learn and how we want them to perform.”