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Residency Program Aims to Reduce Nurse Turnover at City Hospitals

New nursing grads to get increased on-the-job training and mentorship to help ease burnout risks

By Melanie Grayce West, Updated Dec. 17, 2018 4:54 p.m. ET



Kings County Hospital Center in Brooklyn. The city's Department of Small Business Services is providing more than \$300,000 to support the residency program; 500 new nurses will get the training in the first year. PHOTO: BYRON SMITH FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

In an effort to stem the turnover rate for new nurses working in some of the city's busiest hospitals, the New York City Department of Small Business Services is rolling out a nurse residency program that provides increased on-the-job training and mentorship.

The new program, announced Monday, is a first for the city's 11 public hospitals. The program will be open to newly graduated nurses—with either a four- or two-year degree—who are entering the field. In all, two dozen hospitals will be a part of the residency program.

The Department of Small Business Services is providing more than \$300,000 to support the program; 500 new nurses will get the training in the first year. The residency includes a curriculum already in use at other private hospitals in New York City. The expectation is that individual hospitals will value the new program enough to make it a regular workplace offering, said Gregg Bishop, commissioner of the New York City Department of Small Business Services, which funds similar training programs.

“A lot of nurses burn out quickly in the first year or so,” said Mr. Bishop. “Some survive and some don’t. A residency allows hospitals to ease in talent. It’s a softer landing.”

On the whole, freshly graduated nurses are easily recruited—with some spoken for even before graduation, according to Lilliam Barrios-Paoli, a senior adviser to the president of New York City’s Hunter College, which has its own school of nursing.

Yet, said Dr. Barrios-Paoli, new nurses face long shifts, low pay and high stress once in the job, and often decide to switch to home nursing or other health-care roles. “They prefer to be in a less strenuous setting,” she said.

In 2017, the NYC Health + Hospitals system hired 420 new nurses and about 1,100 overall, according to a spokesman. Roughly 16% of the new nurses left after their first year. The base salary for an entry-level staff nurse is \$76,399, with the salary augmented for experience or specialty, he said.

Mary Anne Marra, chief nursing officer at NYC Health + Hospitals, said the hospital system doesn’t typically have trouble finding new nurses, but she added that the nurses frequently leave for other positions after less than two years and primarily do so for career advancement.

Residency programs can offer new nurses best-practices training and help with decision-making, leadership, communication and ethics skills, said Ms. Marra. “There are a lot of challenges to a new nurse to really feel confident as they grow professionally.”