

Oregon Healthcare System Stronger Due to WIIN Program

By **Judith Andersen**

Director

Workforce Improvement with Immigrant Nurses (WIIN) Program



What is the WIIN Program?

The Workforce Improvement with Immigrant Nurses (WIIN) Program prepares experienced foreign-educated nurses for licensure and practice in the United States. It is approved by the Oregon State Board of Nursing (OSBN) as a re-entry program, and is just over one calendar year in length.

Eligibility is based on OSBN and WIIN Program standards and workplace requirements, and includes:

- U.S. resident status

- English language competency
- Credentials evaluation
- Criminal background check
- Health screening and immunizations
- Personal interview

History

In 2001, Worksystems, Inc. of Portland, Oregon, convened a task force to explore possibilities for retraining experienced nurses from Mexico who were now living permanently in Oregon in order to help them attain U.S. registered nurse licensure. This action would increase the diversity in the nursing workforce as well as bring the nurses themselves back to the professional field for which they had already been educated.

Often, foreign-educated nurses take jobs outside of nursing because of the difficulty in transitioning to the nursing profession in the US. Some have been told that they should just start over and apply to a regular nursing program.

The task force included representatives from the Mexican Consulate of Oregon, the Oregon Nurses' Association, OSBN, Oregon Health

& Science University, Providence and Legacy Health Systems, Kaiser Permanente, Willamette Falls Hospital, as well as an immigration attorney and the author of this article. A search led to the discovery of several similar programs and a summit in Chicago involving those programs to share concerns, strategies and curricula. At this meeting the International Bilingual Nurses Alliance (IBNA) was born. IBNA now holds annual meetings to discuss best practices and common issues, and interface with licensing and credentialing bodies that serve its students.

Shortly after this inaugural meeting in Chicago, the Portland task force submitted a grant to Northwest Health Foundation (NWHF), who funded the first four years of the WIIN Program at Clackamas Community College and who continues to support projects within the program. An initial general information session held to determine potential interest in RN re-entry attracted more than 200 participants, including nurses from a wide range of countries and an equally wide range of English speaking abilities. Screening by WIIN staff and Task Force representative identified a body of candidates for the pilot program.

Program

The program's intent is to provide a review of previously-learned information and to put it into the context of U.S. nursing practice. The emphasis is on problem-solving; evidence-based practice; developing critical thinking, prioritization, and decision-making skills; and using appropriate professional communication. Students work in groups using a case study format to develop team working skills. They are given frequent opportunities to practice their verbal and presentation skills and to receive coaching on pronunciation and vocabulary building. Students review nursing skills in the practice lab and work through simulated patient care scenarios prior to actual clinical experiences.

In 2009 WIIN expanded its curriculum with three general education courses to qualify it as a certificated program. Certification allows

participants to qualify for financial aid, an essential step since few nurses could afford the program without help. The addition of writing, psychology, and "Math for Meds" classes has also enhanced the communication skills of the graduates and ensured safe administration of drugs.

Lessons Learned

Despite credential evaluation screening to assure comparable education to U.S. nursing programs, significant practice differences challenge the foreign-educated nurse. Some nurses with fairly recent practice in their home countries have passed the licensing exam and obtained employment in U.S. facilities only to find themselves unprepared for the realities they encounter in the workplace. Practicing interdisciplinary communication during simulations as well as in the classroom has helped the nurses gain confidence

and skills in using these new approaches. During the WIIN Program many hours of case management are utilized to help students navigate institutional policies and systems of operating.

Judith Andersen is the director of the Workforce Improvement with Immigrant Nurses (WIIN) Program and principal developer of its curriculum. She has held nursing faculty positions since 1973, and was formerly director of the Clackamas Community College Nursing Department. Judith has served on various boards of directors, including the International Bilingual Nurses Alliance (IBNA); Legacy Health System; Northwest Parish Nurses; the Institute for Cultural Initiatives; and the Low Income Families Emergency Center. She was instrumental in organizing cultural exchanges for health professionals and nursing students to Mexico and Central America since 1989.

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