

Crain's

Exclusive: H+H expands nursing partnership with CUNY

By: Shuan Sim

NYC Health + Hospitals and the City University of New York have expanded a partnership that will help train nursing students as well as provide professional development for the public health system's workforce, they told Crain's in an exclusive. Such programs can be key to retaining nursing talent, especially given staffing challenges amid the pandemic, stakeholders said.

The partnership provides expanded clinical placements for CUNY students across Health + Hospitals for internships and recruitment pathways. Nurses currently working in the public health system will be able to receive training from CUNY faculty on new clinical approaches and equitable health care delivery. Nursing staff also will be able to continue their education up to doctoral programs at CUNY schools.

In addition, CUNY will help H+H set up a nursing research committee—to provide statistical and analytical support—as well as convene health equity forums with stakeholders for best practices in nursing, education, leadership and health policy.

This formal partnership builds on work done between the two institutions in the past two and a half years, said Natalia Cineas, senior vice president and chief nurse executive at H+H.

The pandemic created a landscape where staffing challenges lay not in attracting nurses but retaining them, Cineas said.

"This is especially so given the opportunities for nurses to travel and do other things in nursing," she said. Covid made leaving a hospital more attractive, be it lucrative rates offered for travel nurses or early retirement from burnout, said Patricia Simino Boyce, CUNY university dean for health and human services, which runs the nursing program across 14 schools.

The state Health Department put out a report in August 2020 that anticipated a shortage of over 39,000 registered nurses in New York by 2030.

The partnership represented a way for the health system to buffer the pipeline by incentivizing nurses to go back to school and learn something new as well as expanding graduate placements, Cineas said.

Elizabeth Corwin, vice dean of strategic and innovative research at Columbia University School of Nursing, agreed that such advancement programs represent powerful tools to entice nurses to stay. Columbia Nursing likewise has a career advancement/continuing education program with New York-Presbyterian.

"Attrition can happen after the first few years, where nurses can get burned out or bored or not feel they're advancing," Corwin said. "It's important that hospitals help nurses feel they're not stymied in their advancement."

CUNY saw record admissions in 2020, and its graduation rate is on par with that of other classes, Boyce said. CUNY graduates about 1,800 nurses each year.

"Covid has inspired many to enter the profession, as clinicians, and nurses were seen as stepping up during one of our largest health care crises in history," Corwin said. "What we need to address here are strategies to keep nurses fulfilled and acknowledged."