

# Partners in Nursing

Grant mentoring program brings nurses and others together to support the profession on the Eastern Shore BY STACEY COTTINGHAM, BS, RN

**P**artners in Nursing (PIN) is a 2-year program addressing local nursing workforce issues on the lower Eastern Shore of Maryland, specifically through development of a regional nurse mentoring program.

The PIN program is sponsored by the Community Foundation of the Eastern Shore in collaboration with several local healthcare and education partners. It is further supported by a generous grant from a partnership of the Northwest Health Foundation and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Other partners include Peninsula Regional Medical Center, Atlantic General Hospital, McCready Memorial Hospital, Genesis Salisbury Rehabilitation Center, Salisbury University and Wor-Wic Community College.

## Three Targets

Specifically, the mentoring program seeks to address three issues: 1) Retention of new nurses in a variety of healthcare settings; 2) Creation of a local nursing leadership network; 3) Development of a career path to encourage continuing education within the nursing community and to increase the number of nurse faculty.

This mentoring program provides a unique opportunity to enhance the personal and intellectual development of nursing protégés — first-year nurses and those returning to the profession. Experienced nurses serve as peer mentors, providing personalized support through a one-to-one exchange. Local nursing faculty members provide support to mentors and help to facilitate professional development and continuing education opportunities, including an ongoing series of professional development workshops.

The PIN program is committed to helping local nurses improve their problem-solving and leadership skills and to support nurses in various stages of their career. New nurses receive encourage-



**NURSING SUPPORTERS:** Stacey Cottingham, BS, RN, director of Partners in Nursing, with Mary Hansen, national adviser for Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and Spicer Bell, president of the Community Foundation of the Eastern Shore, supporters of the PIN 2-year program on the lower Eastern Shore of Maryland. *courtesy Stacey Cottingham*

ment from mentors in their pursuit of excellence within local healthcare organizations. Mentors make a personal investment in the future of nursing.

## Getting the Word Out

To launch a successful program, you have to inform all stakeholders. Initially, information about PIN was disseminated by meeting face-to-face with area healthcare, business and civic leaders. Many expressed support for the program because of the focus on retaining valuable new/returning nurses in the local workforce and the additional emphasis of nurturing experienced nurses into the leaders needed to educate nurses.

The past 6 months have been enlightening, evolving from program planning to actual implementation. Innovations and ideas from the faculty advisers, mentors and protégés have inspired custom-made tools proven to help in assisting PIN mentoring pairs. For the mentors who have not yet been matched with a protégé, these

new tools (along with the experience of the previously matched pairs) will help give that extra boost to protégés.

Faculty advisers, mentors and protégés have embraced the weekly mentoring meetings and monthly seminars.

## Guiding Protégés

PIN participants are really embracing the goals of the program, proving it was needed within the nursing community. One mentor recently assisted a protégé who was concerned with the negative attitudes on her unit. Another guided her protégé toward in-house resources to strengthen critical care skills. Balancing family and nightshift schedules was a high priority for yet another mentoring pair.

Comments shared by participants demonstrate the value of the program: "We had a very good discussion about an incident the protégé was upset about," commented one mentor. Another said, "We focused on confidence building and self-esteem issues; the protégé is doing very well."

## First Anniversary

The program is now 1 year old. Feedback will continue to be measured to enhance the program and to ensure it adequately meets the needs of the target population — local nurses and nurse educators.

PIN will be reaching out to the community to develop a network of new, experienced and potential nursing professionals through a variety of events, including new partnerships with the Girl Scouts and the Maryland Nurses Association. ■

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