

Draft

Draft

**NORWALK COMMUNITY COLLEGE
CENTER FOR NURSING AND HEALTH SCIENCES**

The most modern hospital room with the best monitoring equipment is useless if it is dark and empty because there are not enough nurses to staff the Coronary Care Unit.

The most powerful MRI can't help doctors quickly diagnose a serious injury if there is no technologist available to perform the test.

The newest drugs to stop strokes as they happen are powerless if a shortage of paramedics means the patient has to wait and wait for an ambulance.

Health care is, at its core, all about people. People who are ill or injured, people who need help regaining or maintaining their health, people in pain, in need of compassion and support. For the help they need, they turn to people – not to buildings, or equipment, or medications – but to people, educated professionals who can preserve health and save lives.

Today, those of us who live and work in Fairfield County are discovering that the health care we depend on may be at risk because of a significant and growing shortage of health care professionals. We are blessed to live and work in an area where there are excellent facilities, the most up-to-date technology and equipment, a genuine wealth of health care resources – and yet the most important resource of all – educated health care professionals – is in short supply.

Norwalk Community College, in a unique collaboration with Greenwich Hospital, Norwalk Hospital and Stamford Health System, is stepping forward to meet this challenge and we have the opportunity to protect our health care by supporting this effort.

The need is urgent, imminent and will have an impact on all of us and our families

Many of us have read and heard media coverage of the national nursing shortage. But are we aware that this shortage is particularly acute in Fairfield County, and that the shortage is not limited to nurses, but includes other health professions?

Current estimates are that this year, in the State of Connecticut, one in every four nursing positions is vacant – and that within another decade, that shortage will rise to 40 percent. Currently Connecticut ranks last in the United States in the number of nursing graduates. By 2020, as our children are having their own children, there will be a shortage of 20,000 nurses in the state. Fairfield County is not immune to these shortages. Our hospitals have precious few options: closing patient care units, asking nurses to work longer or extra shifts, increasing costs by “importing” nurses from across the U.S.

Similar shortages of trained professionals exist in other fields – Medical Assistant, Respiratory Care, Radiology, Pharmacy, and Paramedicine are just a few examples. As the new technology for diagnosis becomes more sophisticated, and treatments, such as minimally invasive surgery, grow, the need for highly educated health care professionals increases.

This situation is particularly frustrating because there are people who want to fill these positions. The shortages don't mean people are uninterested in health care careers. Just the opposite. There are thousands of qualified men and women of all ages who are being turned away from education and training programs because there are not enough faculty and not enough facilities to teach them.

This situation must be addressed. This need must be met, to preserve quality, accessible health care for all of us in Fairfield County.

Fortunately, in Fairfield County, there is an answer and a solution. Norwalk Community College, partnering with Norwalk Hospital, Greenwich Hospital and Stamford Health System, is taking aggressive action to meet our need for health care professionals

Norwalk Community College has for more than four decades met the needs of Fairfield County for trained professionals in many fields. For more than 30 years, NCC has educated and trained thousands of nurses and healthcare professionals, including medical assistants, respiratory therapists, paramedics, clinical laboratory technicians, certified nursing assistants, patient care technicians and dental technicians. And ninety percent our graduates stay in this area, to provide healthcare for us and our families. Every one of our 2004 nursing graduates is working in southwestern Fairfield County today.

NCC leaders have worked tirelessly to find ways to educate more nurses and professionals to meet the needs of Fairfield County families. The college created a partnership with Stamford Health Center, Greenwich Hospital and Norwalk Hospital with the goal of educating more health care professionals to work in Fairfield County. The three partner hospitals committed funds to hire additional faculty so that more students could be accepted to and graduated from the health and science programs. The college renovated existing facilities to the extent possible, so that nurses and other health care students are educated with the latest technology.

Now, as the need grows, NCC is taking the next, essential step, and turning to the community for support.

The New Norwalk Community College Center for Nursing and Health Sciences will meet the needs of the people of Fairfield County

The Center is both a place, and a program including an expanded curriculum, additional faculty, renovations to current buildings, and enhanced clinical education at the partner hospitals. The expanded curriculum will include the latest in teaching practices and laboratory equipment in the sciences and health care related fields.

The heart of the new Center will be building with access to the most up-to-date teaching, laboratory and medical imaging technology so that our growing number of health care students will be educated to meet the current and future healthcare needs of the people of Fairfield County.

The net result of all of this will be that NCC will be able to educate 50% more students in the sciences every year expanding all of the college's healthcare professional training programs and adding a much needed program to educate radiology technicians.

NCC is well on its way to bringing this vision to life. The State of Connecticut is doing its share, committing \$20 million for bricks and mortar – the building that will house the Center.

But a building is just a shell. To make the Center a functioning reality, there must be furnishings, equipment, education technology, and endowment funds to support much needed faculty positions. All of this will cost \$15 million, and now it is time for those of us who live and work in Fairfield County to step forward, to help raise the funding as quickly as possible. The College can have the Center built, equipped and staffed in just a little over two years – if we are willing and ready to do our part.

It's up to all of us – Fairfield County residents and business leaders and families and citizens. Let us make the commitment, so that now and in the future, when we are in need, when our health and lives are at stake, there will be trained, well-educated nurses and healthcare professionals there to care for us.

The modern hospital rooms will be ready with dedicated, well-educated nurses who will provide expert, compassionate care for us.

The MRI and other new technology will be available round the clock, staffed by well educated health care professionals so that our injuries can be quickly diagnosed.

And when our lives are at risk and time is of the essence, there will be paramedics on the scene, and a full complement of nurses and health professionals awaiting us in the emergency department.

We have the power to affect our community, to impact our own health and the very lives of our families, our neighbors, our co-workers, our friends. Let us join together today to support the new Center for Nursing and Health Science Education in Fairfield County.