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BCC program notches perfect pass rate for seventh consecutive year

By Sam Hickman

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SUPPLY — The North Carolina State Board of Nursing exam is notoriously difficult — except, apparently, for Brunswick Community College nursing students.



Beacon file photo

The Practical Nursing program at Brunswick Community College had a 100 percent pass rate on the state board exam for the seventh consecutive year.

For a seventh consecutive year, students in the practical nursing program at BCC have passed the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX-PN) with a 100 percent rate.

Led by program director Tanya Mace and lead nursing instructor Shaylene Ball,

the practical nursing curriculum prepares students to provide nursing care to children and adults.

Twenty students took the test in the middle of May and found out they passed just two days after completion.

Mace, who took over as program director in 2007, said while she expects positive results, it's always great to find out in writing.

"We're so proud of (our students)," she said. "After they graduated on May 9, they came back for three days of intensive review, then most of the students took the test a couple days after."

In the last seven years, 128 BCC practical nursing students have taken the state exam, and 128 have passed.

Mace said most of the credit should go to her hardworking students, but the faculty plays a major role in the program's success.

"A lot of our faculty, we convene about (the test scores)," she said. "We're invested in our students. We encourage the students to call us before the test so they don't get too nervous. If they don't think they did well, we encourage them to call us and we offer them that shoulder to cry on. But we know they do better than they think at first. We're always tight as a group. It gives them a sort of comfort level."

Mace said this group was a particularly tight bunch, calling them "a big family."

"The dynamics change with each group," she said. "They were a good group, a tight bunch. They realize they need each other during this program."

The practical nursing program is a three-semester program. Students are accepted into the program in April and complete general education requirements during summer school. That's when the real fun begins.

"Then it gets intensive, very intensive," Mace said.

During the fall semester, practical nursing students are responsible for completing 25 credits. To put that in perspective, 12 credits are considered full-time, Mace said.

Students take fundamentals of nursing and pharmacology courses beginning July 22. The fundamentals course ends in the middle of October while the pharmacology class lasts until the middle of November. Then, Nursing 102 (one course divided into two classes) begins in the middle of October and lasts until the end of the semester in December.

"For four weeks, the students are taking three classes," Mace said. "It's so much hard work. It's not an easy program."

During the spring semester, students take 12 credit hours worth of classes, including clinicals at the hospital, to complete their coursework.

"It's a credit to our faculty," Mace said of the success of the practical nursing program. "It's all about our philosophy. The people I hire, I want people passionate about nursing and education. I want people who will go that extra mile.

"It's a rigorous program with a strong curriculum. The students know it's difficult and I think in their hearts they want to be challenged.

They meet that challenge. My staff doesn't see this as a job. It's a mission. This career is rewarding and we want our students to find it as rewarding as we do. In that aspect, it's different from any other program."

Mace said the program prepares the students for the NCLEX-PN, but also prepares students for real world experiences in the field. "There's nothing on that test that the students haven't already seen in our program," she added. "Our students tell us that the final exam we have in our class is more difficult than the state exam. We give them as much information as we possibly can, and at times they feel bombarded. But it's a credit to them for taking all that information, learning it and passing the test."

Students participate in assessment, planning, implementing, and evaluating nursing care.

The National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX-PN) is required for practice as a licensed practical nurse. Employment opportunities exist at hospitals, rehabilitation/long term care/home health facilities, clinics, and physicians' offices.

Students stay in touch with their nursing instructors at BCC long after graduation and taking the state board exam, Mace said.

"I have a former student who works out West and she still calls me regularly," she said. "It really is a tight-knit group. We take a lot of pride in that."

To meet a growing demand for nurses, people can apply for a licensed practical nurse (LPN) license in the state by completing coursework and taking an exam or by endorsement. North Carolina is also part of the Nurse Licensure Compact (NLC), which allows nurses from other NLC states to practice nursing in the state without additional licensure. By 2020, the Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts that LPN jobs will increase by 10 percent per year in North Carolina.

The NCLEX-PN exam is used by state boards of nursing around the country for testing proficiency and granting licensure. Many state boards of nursing use the combined NCLEX-PN exam pass rates for each school as one of the primary ways to approve or deny a school's ability to provide practical and vocational nursing education. As can be seen, NCLEX-PN rates is one of the best ways to determine how well a school is preparing its students for a career in practical nursing.

Additionally, BCC's Licensed Practical Nursing program was ranked No. 1 in North Carolina by PracticalNursing.org in March.

The program has built quite the reputation, as students from Jacksonville and Lumberton have enrolled as full-time students, driving to clinicals at 4 a.m. during the spring semester to be a part of BCC's strong program.

"If there's anything we can do to help our students, that's what we do," Mace said. "Students have a lot of hurdles to get through to be a part of this program. We trust that they want to be here. We figure they want to be here. If they want it badly enough, and we think they all do, we're going to see them through to the finish line. That's what we're all about."

Mace said the program's success is also a credit to the work of the Board of Trustees and administration.

The state board exam, Mace said, shows that those who pass are safe practitioners.

"These are going to be the nurses taking care of me, taking care of my family members," she said. "I'm excited to know that the people of Brunswick County are in good hands."

For more information about the practical nursing program at BCC, go to www.brunswickcc.edu or call Mace at 755-7350.

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