



ABOUT THE PROJECT

The Pioneer Employer Initiative is based on the idea that employers who do good, do well. It is an effort to discover and promote the next generation of best practices in workforce management, with a particular focus on health care and manufacturing. Pioneer Employers are companies that strategically invest in their own lower-wage workers to benefit their customers and/or shareholders. They go beyond typical ideas about “great places to work,” and demonstrate how organizations can deliberately align the interests of employees and management to create better results for companies and their employees.

PARTICIPATING HOSPITALS

*Advocate Lutheran General Hospital
Park Ridge, Illinois*

*Bassett Medical Center
Cooperstown, New York*

*Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center
Boston, Massachusetts*

*Faxton-St. Luke's Healthcare
Utica, New York*

*Good Samaritan Hospital Medical Center
West Islip, New York*

*Group Health Cooperative
Seattle, Washington*

*Northwestern Memorial Hospital
Chicago, Illinois*

*Providence St. Peter Hospital
Olympia, Washington*

*Thompson Health
Canandaigua, New York*

*UNC Health Care
Chapel Hill, North Carolina*

*Virginia Mason Medical Center
Seattle, Washington*

PIONEER EMPLOYER HOSPITALS: Getting Ahead by Growing Your Own

CASE STUDY:



Located in Olympia, Washington, Providence St. Peter Hospital (PSPH) is a 390-bed (2,400 employees), not-for-profit Magnet hospital providing a full range of primary and tertiary hospital services. The hospital is the largest institution in the Southwest Washington area run by Providence Health and Services, a not-for-profit Catholic health care ministry committed to providing for the needs of the communities it serves. The health system spans five states—Alaska, California, Montana, Oregon, and Washington—with headquarters in Renton, Washington near Seattle. PSPH has developed strong

partnerships with local educational institutions and community organizations—New Market Skills Center, South Puget Sound Community College (SPSCC), and University of Washington, Tacoma—to address both community and organizational workforce needs. The comprehensive nurse training programs available through PSPH exemplify its commitment to the health care workforce and illustrate the benefits of investing in frontline workers. This program enables both incumbent workers and local high school students to access education and ultimately engage in a career in nursing or health care.

OUR PARTNERS



“We believe in education and giving our employees what they need to practice at a level that is the best for our patients and best for our staff. We retain them if they are happy, if they are striving, and if they are learning and growing. It provides our community with a hospital where we can take care of you with the best nurses and the best hospital possible.”

LINDA MONTGOMERY,
FORMER DIRECTOR OF NURSING
EDUCATION, PRACTICE
AND RESEARCH

How It Began

Like many hospitals and health systems across the country, PSPH began to experience a shortage of nurses in the 2000's. With a wave of retirements and difficulty attracting younger nurses, PSPH was having a tough time filling vacant positions. The hospital averaged 89 RN vacancies in 2007, costing an estimated \$1.76 million. Further, many interested employees were having trouble getting into area nursing schools because of the growing demand for nursing education.

During this same period of time, many hospitals, specifically those with Magnet designations, began to experience pressure to increase the percentage of their nursing staff with Bachelors of Nursing degrees

(rather than Associate Degrees). In response, PSPH began collaborating with local educational institutions to provide opportunities for their workers to have greater access to nursing degree programs.

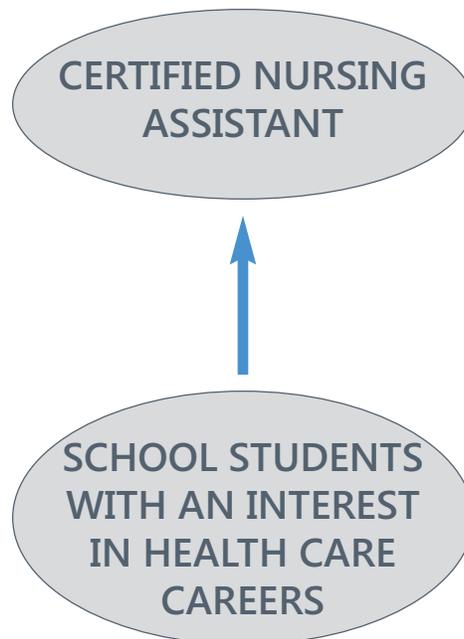
In the early 2000's, PSPH also began to expand access to health care occupational training to members of the community, specifically students at the local high school. They partnered with a community organization to go into the high school and start providing clinical nursing assistant training for students. Through this initiative, they hoped to encourage young people to pursue careers in health care and considered the cost of the program an investment in the future health care workforce.

How It Works

Since 2000, PSPH has offered three pioneering workforce development programs. The first program involves a partnership with New Market Skills Center (a consortium of 25 high schools that provide career and technical training to high school students) to help students pursue a nursing assistant certification. Students complete a year-long course of study and 50 hours of clinical practice at PSPH. The students spend two days a week at the hospital shadowing medical

professionals, rotating through more than 20 different departments at PSPH. The students are then eligible to take the Washington State Certified Nursing Assistant Exam. While some of the students who take the course are primarily interested in careers as nursing assistants, most plan to attend college, and many want to be physicians. The program provides the students with training in basic patient care skills that apply to many medical occupations.

NURSING ASSISTANT CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

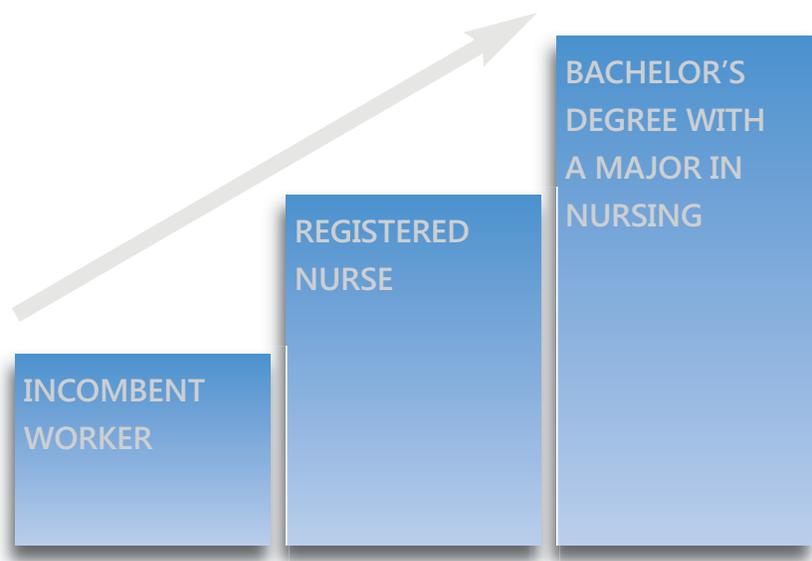


The second program involves a partnership with Capital Medical Center, another acute care hospital in the local community, and SPSCC. Capital Medical Center and PSPH pay SPSCC to expand the slots available in their associate degree in nursing program (ADN) in exchange for guaranteeing slots for hospital employees who qualify for admission. Hospital employees who meet the standards for ADN admission are considered for one of the slots set aside for the two hospitals and do not have to compete for acceptance in the general applicant pool. The PSPH ADN program has sponsored 46 employees since 2006, 65 percent of whom completed the program. Of those who received

their ADN, 83 percent are still employed at the hospital.

The third program involves a partnership with University of Washington, Tacoma and involves supporting interested ADN nurses to obtain a bachelor of science in nursing (BSN). All but ten elective credits are taught onsite at the hospital. Employees attend class once a week or once every other week for three years (depending on the program), allowing them to work full-time or nearly full-time while completing their degree. The tuition assistance policies available at the hospital help to fund workers as they move through the BSN program.

INCUMBENT WORKER NURSING CAREER LADDER





worker spotlight

Soledad Fratis had been a nursing assistant at PSPH for several years when her manager encouraged her to go back to school and pursue a nursing degree. She was initially discouraged because nursing programs are very competitive and she was not aware of PSPH's supportive career advancement programs. When Soledad learned that she was able to apply for a slot in the SPSCC nursing program through PSPH, she decided to go for it. She was admitted on her first try, and 80 percent of her educational costs (including textbooks and other course expenses) were covered by PSPH. Soledad recently completed the ADN program and has been working as an RN on the orthopedic floor for the last four months. Soledad appreciated that PSPH was willing to hire her immediately as a new nurse, noting that many places require some nursing experience before they will hire you as an RN. Currently, Soledad is in her first semester of an online BSN program. She expressed great appreciation for the investment that PSPH has made in her education, and she plans to continue advancing her career within the organization.

Critical Success Factors

Providence St. Peter Hospital's success at grooming high school students and low-wage incumbent workers for careers in nursing and other health occupations results from thoughtful planning and strategic implementation of the program. Below, the critical success factors for their training programs are listed.

Culture of Learning

Employees at all levels of the organization simply believe in the value of education to the organization. Many managers and administrators have risen through the ranks so they have first-hand experience with what it means to "grow your own." For example, two managers interviewed for this report had completed the LPN to ADN training program, continued on to the RN to BSN programs, and then gone on to obtain master's degrees in public health administration. Because of their personal experiences, these managers were eager to help their employees take advantage of the career opportunities at PSPH.

Supervisor Involvement

Project staff enlisted the involvement of supervisors in many aspects of the training programs at PSPH. For example, managers are often asked to allow themselves or their workers

to be shadowed by participants of the nursing assistant training program. For workers who are enrolled in the nurse training programs, supervisors have provided flexible scheduling (e.g., making sure that work schedules did not interfere with attending class and allowing workers to take days off to study for exams when needed) and try to allow workers to reduce their hours as needed to accommodate the demands of classes.

Comprehensive Coverage

One of the strengths of PSPH's nurse training programs is the comprehensive career ladder it provides for workers interested in a career in nursing. Workers with minimal training are given substantial support to first train for an ADN degree and then a BSN degree in the form of tuition assistance, on-site courses, and flexible scheduling. For those who are interested in pursuing education even beyond a BSN degree, PSPH continues to offer tuition assistance for obtaining a master's degree. Key informants estimated that 25-50 percent of workers in frontline positions, such as patient transportation and unit clerks, go on to receive advanced education either through the formal programs or by accessing tuition assistance.

“From a workforce planning perspective, there are definitely cost savings related to recruitment and retention of employees. Developing and retaining our staff is excellent stewardship of our resources from every perspective!”

DENISE MARRONI,
CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER

Progressive Human Resource Policies

The availability of tuition assistance (in addition to the funds set aside specifically for those at the LPN to RN and RN to BSN stages) to all employees—not just professional staff—reduces the financial barriers for workers needing to cover prerequisites or the first year of the nursing program. PSPH also allows students to maintain benefits at .5FTE, which not only helps student workers navigate work, family, and education more successfully, it also sidesteps the common challenge to working part time—lack of benefits.

Cohort Model

Employees participated in the RN program as a cohort. Many key informants felt that this model was beneficial to workers. Participants were taking classes with co-workers who could relate to the challenges of working and going to school. They provided emotional and social support for each other as well as help with homework and other school-related issues.

Caring Faculty

Several key informants talked about the high quality of instructors teaching in the nursing assistant and RN programs. They described instructors as effective, supportive, and willing to address life skills in addition to substantive coursework. For example, Judy Burchett, the instructor for the nursing assistant program, used active, problem-based and experiential learning to help students master the curriculum. She also integrated professionalism into the lessons, guiding students on how to be punctual, maintain a positive attitude, proper dress, and grooming. Key informants noted that students who ended up working at Providence demonstrated these valuable skills on the job.

Return on Investment

The CNA, ADN, and BS in nursing programs have resulted in several benefits for Providence St. Peter

Hospital. Below are the most salient benefits identified.

“It takes a while to polish [high school students] up a bit and teach them trust, respect, and communication skills, but I see so much potential in these students.”

JUDY BURCHETT,
NEW MARKET SKILL CENTER INSTRUCTOR

HOSPITAL’S RETURN ON INVESTMENT

<i>Retention</i>	PSPH is able to retain employees through implementation of their career ladders. Many of the managers and workers interviewed as part of this case study had been employed at PSPH for 20 years. The long tenure of these employees helps to retain firm-specific knowledge within the organization and reduces the cost of recruiting and training new workers.
<i>Lower Vacancy Rates</i>	PSPH no longer has nursing shortages. While this is also a result of current economic conditions, the nurse training programs have helped to alleviate vacancies in nursing positions that had been a challenge for PSPH to fill.
<i>High Worker Satisfaction</i>	Managers and frontline workers report high levels of job satisfaction. They appreciate the career support that PSPH has provided and express satisfaction with their employer’s policies and practices.
<i>Increased Productivity</i>	Because participants are hospital employees while they complete the RN program, workers have more familiarity with hospital policies, procedures, and culture when they enter an RN position. This organizational knowledge can reduce the time it takes workers to become familiar with their jobs, cutting down on orientation and other on-boarding costs.
<i>Strengthened Integration of Education and Practice</i>	Key informants noted that graduates of the BSN program are more engaged employees. They are publishing articles and applying evidence-based research to their practice. In effect, these employees are exemplifying the positive impact of bachelor’s prepared nurses in the clinical setting.
<i>Improved Recruitment</i>	PSPH is phasing certified nursing assistants back into its care model over the next few years. Graduates of the nursing assistant program have expressed interest in working for the hospital (they typically enter long-term care work upon graduation). By fostering the partnership with the New Market Skills Center, PSPH has created a reserve of eager and well-trained potential employees.

Next Steps

Due to the economy and the ADN program's success, there is no longer a shortage of RNs. In fact, recent and future graduates of the ADN program will have a hard time entering nursing positions given the low vacancy rates for RNs at the hospital. As such, PSPH has decided to discontinue its partnership with SPSCC on the ADN program. Should the nursing shortage resume in the future, leadership may revisit this strategy once again, implementing important lessons learned such as rigorous selection and worker supports to achieve greater success.

The nursing assistant program is on-going and is likely to serve as an important resource to PSPH as it seeks to fill the CNA slots that will be created with changes in the delivery model. Further, the tuition assistance policies and the BSN program will continue to provide support to the many incumbent workers at PSPH interested in advancing their careers in health care.