

Nursing home now a part of WPCC nurse training

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It's just a hop, skip and a jump from the nursing classrooms of Western Piedmont Community College to the Health Care Center of Morganton, located just across Highway 64 from the college.

So when WPCC nursing department chairman Marlene Rosenkoetter and Health Care Center Director Mrs. Nancy Hipps discovered they both had the same idea of a cooperative program between the two institutions, it was easy to get the ball rolling.

Beginning this fall, WPCC nursing students undergo one-third of their out-of-the-classroom training at the center, a nursing home for the elderly. In addition to gaining a broader knowledge of nursing practices and skills, the students are thus preparing themselves to meet a growing community need in the field of geriatrics.

In the past, WPCC nursing students have had training at Grace and Valdese Hospitals. Freshman nursing students now rotate in three groups among the two hospitals and the Health Care Center in a program termed by Mrs. Hipps "a first for this area."

Mrs. Hipps, who has been with the center for two years, said that the system is widely practiced in other areas, including Cleveland, Ohio, where she previously worked.

Mrs. Pat Crumpler, nursing instructor at the center, believes that the program will provide a previously unavailable learning experience. "The emphasis at this particular point is learning skills as well as broadening the knowledge base," she said. In this setting they can concentrate on the fundamental needs that any individual has as well as focus on the geriatric needs of these.

She said that the students would not only be able to develop relationships with residents, which does not always happen with short-term hospital patients, but also could help the center identify residents needs with which it can assist.

"Once they graduate, we will be better able to meet community needs," Mrs. Rosenkoetter said.

Mrs. Hipps agreed: "The nursing home industry is growing, but in most nursing circles, there has not been the emphasis on geriatrics.

"Whether people realize it or not, nursing homes are growing. There's a bigger need, and people are beginning to realize these needs. People are living longer. Nursing homes are not just a place to go and die. Some

residents get well and leave. This makes us feel good because there are other people that need our care."

Mrs. Rosenkoetter said that the program has been a success so far. "I've been pleased with what we've been able to experience. We've had acceptance, cooperation, and welcome from the staff," she said. "The students feel very comfortable and at ease. This has helped the newness of the situation a lot."

"We were a little unsure of how it might work to have so many extra people around," said Mrs. Hipps, "but it doesn't interfere at all with the regular nursing staff that we have. It's not taking away from them."

The present group of students completed a training period at Valdese General Hospital before coming to the Health Center. After only a short time at the center, they were able to distinguish a marked difference between the hospital experience and the nursing home experience.

"It's nothing like I expected," said Mary Hall. "I expected a rest home to be drab, but here it's very bright, a very homey atmosphere. I got a good feeling out of seeing this."

Student Don Grinar noticed a difference in the residents of the Health Center as compared to hospital patients. "These accept the fact that they are here for awhile," he said. "They're very talkative, very cooperative. Most of them seem to really like it here."

"I don't think we make these residents nearly as nervous as we do the patients in the hospital," laughs Reba Freeman.

The students feel that their nursing home training will be a valuable experience.

"It gives us a wider base of education," Grinar said.

"It dispels a lot of the bad things you hear about nursing homes," Ann Goss said.

All students are impressed with the increased degree to which they can get to know the residents, as contrasted with a hospital, where there is a fast turnover of patients.

"It makes me feel like I'll be able to help better by being able to see them every week," Teresa Shook said.

"Where as in a hospital that doesn't happen too frequently," Mrs. Crumpler added.

"It allows the student the time to build a relationship with a patient," Mrs. Rosenkoetter said.

Student Amelia Dillard said that after four weeks of working in a hospital, she had gotten into a routine that she is glad to get out of.

Brenda McNeill has noticed an added dimension to nursing at

the center, too: "I feel like I'm something they need besides just someone to take their vital signs."

Arriving at the center on her first day of training, Mary Hall said, "I got this super-scared feeling of 'What's beyond this door?' When we left, we had good feelings. This is super."

"When everyone was leaving today, they were thinking of something they wanted to do for their patient," Brenda McNeill said.

Mrs. Crumpler said that the students will also be able to gain a more in-depth knowledge of their patients. "Their training is not only the care of that patient, but getting to know the patient and the nursing history," she said.

Mrs. Hipps feels that the residents of the Health Care Center will enjoy the students too. "It excites me to see younger people interested in my group," she said.



Staff photo by ANDY HERN

Trainees Dillard and Ferree chat with patient.