

Our Roots

A brief history of nursing education in Cowley County

By Sharon Shetlar Taylor

Since the early 1900s nursing education has existed and has been paramount in supplying nurses for the local health care system.

The late 1800s brought a proliferation of hospitals and hospital schools of nursing in the United States. The hospitals varied in size, but even the smallest had a school of nursing. A school of nursing was essential to provide low-cost care for patients, as students served as hospital staff. Upon graduation few nurses continued working at the hospital, as they found employment as private duty nurses caring for people in their homes.

In Arkansas City, Mercy Hospital was established in 1908. There was a school of nursing associated with Mercy Hospital, but records are not available. In 1946 Mercy Hospital was purchased by the City of Arkansas City. There has not been a professional nursing program in Arkansas City since that time.

The first public hospital in Winfield began operation in 1899. Miss Lizzie Wells, a graduate of the Illinois Training School for Nurses, Chicago, was introduced as superintendent. The purpose of the Winfield Hospital Training School for Nurses was to supply nurses to private families and physicians and not merely to have students to staff the hospital. In addition,

the trained hospital nurse was perceived as the capable mother or caring neighbor who tended to the sick. The chores of the average housewife, such as scrubbing floors and doing laundry, were expected of the nurse. Although it became apparent that using educated female nurses in such a way was a waste, the practice continued. Students who were promised an education willingly worked for little except room and board.

Both men and women were accepted as students in the Winfield Hospital Training School for Nurses. They were required to be between the ages of 20 and 30 and to have “trustworthy evidence of good moral character, education, and health” status. The students in the two-year curriculum were instructed by the superintendent and resident and visiting physicians. Graduates received \$4 per month along with room, board, and laundry. Upon graduation, each received a diploma and \$100.

Due to financial difficulties, the hospital was given to the Sisters of St. Joseph of Wichita and renamed St. Mary’s Hospital. The training school was discontinued but reopened in 1913 as St. Mary’s Hospital School of Nursing and continued to educate nurses until its closure in 1951. The Sisters of St.

Joseph closed St. Mary’s Hospital in 1960, ending a long tradition of health care motivated by humanitarianism.

Parallel to the Winfield Hospital and St. Mary’s Hospital, Dr. Pilcher established Pilcher’s Surgical Home at 10th and Millington in 1899. Upon his death 1908 the institution was reorganized by Dr. F. R. Smith and renamed Winfield Hospital, and a training school for nurses was added. In 1925, the Winfield Hospital was consolidated with the new William Newton Memorial Hospital, which opened in 1927.

The new hospital was a gift from William Newton who willed a fund to the city of Winfield to construct and equip the building. In 1928 the William Newton Memorial Hospital School of Nursing was organized. This school’s classrooms and the student dormitory were located nearby in Virginia Hall, which was named for Newton’s wife.

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In 1943, a United States citizen, aged 18 to 35, in sound health, of high academic standing and of good moral character, could be considered for admission to the nursing school. There were two options from which students could choose.

Option One was a five-year curriculum in a Bachelor of Arts in Nursing degree from Southwestern College

and a nursing certificate from William Newton Memorial Hospital School of Nursing. Option Two was a three-year curriculum culminating in just the certificate of nursing. There was one “instructress of nursing,” and local physicians lectured at the school. The last class was graduated in 1968.

On August 13, 1975, St. John’s College began offering an associ-

ate degree in nursing, graduating its first class of ADN graduates in 1977. When the college became a baccalaureate degree granting institution in 1980, the faculty began to develop a bachelor of science in nursing curriculum. In 1986 St. John’s College was closed before the BSN program could be fully implemented.

Southwestern College Department of Nursing

by Martha Butler

In March, 1986 in response to community need, the board of trustees at Southwestern College pledged its support of nursing education. Approval for the program was obtained, and students were first admitted into the program fall, 1986. At that time, the program was fully implemented, with students being admitted from other programs into the sophomore, junior, and senior levels.

Southwestern graduated its first class of five nursing students May, 1987, and was granted initial National League for Nursing accreditation October, 1988. Since that time, major changes have occurred in the nursing program’s curriculum and in its physical facilities. Mossman Hall, built in the 1950’s, has housed the program since its inception, however, it underwent major renovation in 2001-2002. The department of nursing now houses up-to-date classroom, laboratory, and office areas, and contains space for student gatherings. Most significantly, faculty have responded to changes in the health care system

and to changes in educational philosophy by implementing and refining innovative methods of faculty-student interaction. In recent years, technology has played a major role in these innovations.

In 1994, the college initiated a degree completion program with the opening of off-campus centers located in Winfield, and in Wichita. These centers, known as “Professional Studies” (PS) campuses, are especially designed to meet the needs of working adults who have completed college course work and who are now seeking to complete a baccalaureate degree. Because the PS format is conducive to registered nurses’ returning to the educational setting, the department of nursing began offering a RN-BSN degree completion program in 1997 at the Wichita east professional studies campus. In 2006, the program transitioned to a completely online format.

Both the traditional on-campus prelicensure program and the RN-BSN program were granted initial accreditation by the Commission on

Collegiate Nursing Education in October, 2003, and that accreditation continues, ensuring the program addresses standards set forth by the American Association of Colleges of Nursing.

Currently, enrollment on the main campus is approximately 650, of which 40 are generic nursing students on the main campus, and approximately 800 students are enrolled at professional studies in Wichita, including 35 part-time RN-BSN completion students. The majority of generic students have a permanent residence within a 50 mile radius of Winfield, and many RN-BSN students live in Kansas. However, because of the online format, RN-BSN students live throughout the United States. The program’s graduates live and work in a wide geographic dispersion...from Arizona to Tennessee, from California to South Dakota to Delaware, and internationally. Many are practicing in Kansas and surrounding states, contributing in positive ways to the health and wellness of their communities.