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ABAC, Tift Regional Partner to Improve Healthcare and Education

TIFTON—Tift Regional Health System (TRHS) and Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College have partnered to create a Dedicated Education Unit (DEU) at Tift Regional Medical
Center in Tifton to provide senior nursing students an opportunity to acquire real-world, hands-on training with an experienced nurse.

“DEUs are nursing units that identify expert nurses and train them to become preceptors to nursing students,” said Carol M. Smith, RN, TRHS Vice President of Patient Care and Chief Nursing Officer. “DEUs work to improve clinical education by bringing expert nurses on the unit into closer contact with students so the nurses can share the knowledge they have acquired during their years of practice.”

Deborah Drummonds, RN, ABAC Assistant Professor of Nursing, said the DEU program will help create a more enriching clinical experience for the nursing student.

“The advantage to the nursing students is they benefit from the best of the clinical and academic worlds,” said Drummonds.

Drummonds added that the DEU program creates an environment of one-to-one learning between the student and experienced nurse which, in turn, will enhance the skills of the student and the nurse involved. In the long term, DEUs have been shown to help reduce the shortage of nurses, to improve the quality of patient care by focusing on expert clinical care, and to increase the retention of RNs within sponsoring healthcare organizations. DEUs nationwide have been shown to positively impact patient outcomes due to the positive clinical experience and increased opportunity for the student to function in the “real world” of patient care.

Debbie Brown, Clinical Educator and Student Liaison at Tift Regional Medical Center (TRMC), will coordinate the program. She holds bachelor’s degrees in nursing and adult education.

“The concept of this program is unique,” Brown said. “The selected students will be at the elbow of the expert nurse for the duration of the shift and will receive insight into the
nuances of being in a realistic clinical setting. Students will have the opportunity to function inside the culture of nursing, and with this opportunity, a whole new set of communication skills will emerge. Communication between the interdisciplinary departments is essential for patient care. This experience will help build healthcare vocabulary and needed communication techniques.”

This partnership between TRHS and ABAC also benefits the experienced nurses taking part in the program with the nurses-in-training.

Brown consulted with Joyce Z. Thielen, RN, Ph.D, Associate Dean of the School of Nursing at Elms College in Chicopee, Mass., prior to setting up the DEU program.

“The success seen by Elms College and affiliated hospitals helped us to realize that this program could be of great benefit to our facilities,” Brown said. “Dr. Thielen’s input was beneficial in helping develop the program.”

Six students were chosen by ABAC’s faculty and the TRHS staff to participate in the first DEU program slated to begin this month. Students within the program will work day and night shifts with their assigned preceptors. Medical West Unit, a nursing unit at TRMC, will house the program which focuses on the medical surgery aspect of patient care. Only senior nursing students are permitted to apply for the program.

“This experience will allow students to be better prepared for the world of nursing,” said Brown. “We want this to be the best experience for everyone involved and hope to grow from here.”

This year marks 50 years of nursing at ABAC. Drummonds said that TRHS is the ABAC nursing program’s most important clinical partner.

“The relationship spans the entire 50 years of the nursing program’s existence,” she said.
Coincidentally, TRHS is celebrating the 75th anniversary of providing quality care and compassion. The original 35-bed Tift County Hospital, located in Tifton at the corner of 12th Street and Tift Avenue, was formally dedicated on Feb. 7, 1941. The building is now the Pickett Building, home of the Tift County Health Department. Today, there is Tift Regional Health System, consisting of Tift Regional Medical Center and the TRMC West Campus in Tifton, Cook Medical Center in Adel and Tift Regional Physician Group with clinics located throughout South Central Georgia.

For more information on the TRHS/ABAC DEU program, interested persons can contact Drummonds at (229) 391-5020.

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