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Change in nurse refresher courses

A change in an Oklahoma nurse refresher course could help supply more nurses at a time when they are critically needed.

The statewide nurse refresher course is part of a partnership between the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center Fran and Earl Ziegler College of Nursing and the Oklahoma Department of Career and Technology Education. Nine Oklahoma CareerTech technology centers offer the course for nurses who do not have an active license but want to return to practice.

Oklahoma's critical nursing shortage worsened in 2020 as the COVID-19 pandemic increased the demand for nurses. Registered nurses and licensed practical nurses who do not have active licenses to practice in Oklahoma must complete the refresher course before they return to the field -- or in some cases begin a nursing career. The course is designed for those who have left the field and for those who never took their board exams.

Previously students had to complete 80 hours and complete the skills lab and the clinical rotation separately. Now, the two parts have been combined, and students must complete only 40 hours if they achieve baseline competency. Students who are not successful within the first 40 hours may need to complete in-person clinical rotations. Students can also save time in the online course by showing what they know; those who don't pass chapter tests will have to review the content, but those who pass can move on, said Lara Morris, Oklahoma CareerTech health careers education state program manager.

"We are specifically doing this in response to the COVID surge and the need for more nurses to be used at the bedside and for replacing nurses who have moved to hospitals from clinics and other nursing positions," Morris said.

The virtual clinical portion of the course will save students money, Morris said, because they will not have to pay for travel to clinicals, uniforms, background checks and vaccine requirements.

"The hope is to streamline the process while saving the student time and money," Morris said.

Technology centers offering the course are Autry Tech, Canadian Valley Tech, Green Country Tech, Kiamichi Tech, Meridian Tech, Metro Tech, Moore Norman Tech, Southern Tech and Tulsa Tech.

More information about the nurse refresher course can be found on the Oklahoma CareerTech website.

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