Addressing the Nation's Nursing Shortage

The University of Central Florida hopes to diversify its nursing staff and students.

November 11, 2022 By Laura Schmidt

The University of Central Florida (UCF) received a two-year, $250,000 grant from Bank of America for its Progresando initiative, which aims to grow the number of Latino health care graduates.

UCF, in partnership with the university's Education Advisory Board, will use the funds to expand services that will benefit over 1,500 students.

Elizabeth Yousef, an adjunct professor at UCF's College of Nursing and a graduate of the university's nursing program understands the importance of representation. Only 5.4% of the 3 million nurses in the United States are Latino, according to data from the National Library of Medicine. Yousef believes the grant will not only help generate a more diverse group of health care workers but also address the nation's nursing shortage.

"The Hispanic community continues to grow by leaps and bounds, and a lot of the population does not speak English," Yousef said in a UCF news release. "There's a comfort when you see someone that looks similar to you, or you understand their ways of being."

Ayanna Lopez, the director of academic advising for the UCF College of Nursing, said COVID-19 only amplified the nursing shortage already underway prior to the pandemic. "We've lost a significant number of nurses to retirement, burnout and other issues already occurring in the profession but, again, magnified by the impact of the pandemic," she said.

UCF also plans to improve its recruitment efforts and hire more diverse faculty who can relate to and inspire Central Florida's growing Latino population, according to Lopez.

"Adding more students is one thing, but we don't want to have classes that the faculty are not able to give that one-to-one type of experience to the student when they are in need," she said.

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