



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

News Release

Office of Public Affairs
Media Relations

Washington, DC 20420
(202) 461-7600
www.va.gov

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Dec. 18, 1998

Washington, D.C. -- The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the nation's largest employer of registered nurses, today announced a national initiative to support its nursing work force, including earmarking \$50 million for education assistance for those seeking baccalaureate or higher nursing degrees. VA believes the scope of this initiative makes it the first of its kind in the nation.

Dr. Kenneth W. Kizer, VA Under Secretary for Health, said the major elements of the initiative are as follows:

- Adoption of new performance standards for more than 36,000 VA registered nurses; these performance standards establish new education and practice requirements for advancement;
- Establishes the baccalaureate degree as the level of educational preparation that VA's professional nursing work force must have by 2005, and puts this requirement in place for new hires immediately;
- Earmarks \$50 million over the next five years to assist its nursing personnel to attain the baccalaureate (or higher) degree, as well as to meet other specific occupational training needs; and,
- Provides the nursing work force innovative academic opportunities and educational programs in partnership with professional nursing organizations.

The first step in achieving the final element of the initiative was taken today with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) and the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN). Under the terms of this MOU, the AACN will work with VHA to find innovative ways of bringing nursing education opportunities to the VA work place.

VA's aim is to ensure that its nurses are educationally prepared to provide the highest quality health care to veterans across the full range of current clinical practice roles and settings, as well as the many new roles for nurses that are evolving.

The standards and implementation plans have been developed in collaboration with a variety of professional nursing organizations and institutions, including labor unions, the American Nurses Association, the Nurses Organization of the VA, and the American Association of Colleges of Nursing. Provision is made for continuation of nurses in their current grades and for entry level hiring of all nurses.

Dr. Kizer said, "VA is partnering with these groups, and expects to partner with others as we move forward, to assure that VA nurses have convenient access to the educational programs they want and need to avail themselves of new practice opportunities and to continue to deliver the highest quality care to our nation's veterans."

The education assistance element of VA's initiative will largely be implemented locally by VA's 22 integrated service networks -- the field management units for VA health services -- under national guidelines that will assist local education initiatives in meeting best-practice principles. It is estimated that more than

5,000 VA nurses are likely to return to school.

VA's nursing performance and education requirements are contained in "nurse qualification standards" that were last revised in 1982. The former five-grade nurse classification system has been revised by a VA task force that collaborated with professional nursing organizations, unions, and VA management, using the American Nurses' Association "Standards of Clinical Nursing Practice."

The education assistance incentives and revised qualification standards reflect VA's need for nurses with additional education beyond entry-level credentials.

VA provides care to approximately 3.5 million veterans annually through nearly 36 million outpatient visits and 800,000 inpatient admissions at more than 1,100 sites of care across the nation. While the new program of education support is available only to VA registered nurses, others interested in learning of employment opportunities with VA may call the VA Placement Service at 1-800-949-0002 for information.