

Breaking the Stereotype: Number of Male Nurses Up at Centralia College

Five Percent of Nursing Students Are Male Nationwide; That Number Is at 23 Percent at Centralia College

Rise of the Male Nurse

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Centralia College is bucking national trends with its nursing program, a career field which is typically dominated by women.

The college has seen an increase in male students in the past two years with 11 of the 48 being male, accounting for almost 23 percent of its program. The national average is 5 percent.

The program has two classes of 24 students each. The second-year program has four men, while the first-year program has seven.

The trend is one that staff has not seen before and the increase has been welcomed, helping to add different types of people to the nursing field.

"I can't remember a class being that high," said assistant professor Chuck Hill, who has been teaching in the nursing program for 11 years.

Nola Ormrod, director of the nursing program, credited the greater number of men to a change in mindset. She said with worker retraining and second career choices, men have begun looking toward the career of nursing more frequently.

The program at Centralia College has typically always had men within its courses, although Ormrod recalled a year when there was only one man in the class, a stark contrast to the numbers seen today.

"I think more men are discovering it as something they are interested in doing," Hill said. "There are a lot of men who just wouldn't have thought of nursing as a career and they are now considering it as an option."

It's unknown if the trend will continue, but Hill said there were multiple benefits to having added numbers of men in the field. He said on certain occasions a patient would prefer to have a male nurse, and he also said the added physical strength comes in handy when lifting heavier patients.

"If you talk to staff at the hospital, most say it's good to have both genders for different reasons," he said.

As the only male staff member in the nursing program, Hill said the field can be enticing because of the competitive wages, benefits and also due to the amount of different settings nurses are able to work in.

Mike Staley, 39, of Olympia, is part of the first-year program. He chose to look into nursing not only because of the good benefits, but because he wanted to challenge himself. After working for a construction company for over 20 years, Staley was ready for a change. He said so far everyone has been very welcoming and he believes more males in the field is an added bonus, helping to diversify the workforce.

Another first year nursing student, Kyle Tracht, 24, of Lacey, is in the program to further his experience in the medical field. He has been a certified nursing assistant for approximately a year and also has background with EMT work.

He believes having more males in the field is a good way to expand nursing, something he said is important in any field.

"I think it's something you see a lot more of now. Just in this program we have a good amount of guys, which I was surprised to come in and see," he said.

Tracht believes it's a trend that will continue.

"I think it's a very attractive field, whether it be a male or a female," he said.

The nursing program at Centralia College is a competitive two-year program and admission is heavily based on grades in prerequisite classes, including anatomy, chemistry and physiology.

Each year, the program accepts 24 students out of a larger field of approximately 100 applicants.

Ormrod said the size of the classrooms helps make the program unique and desirable for applicants.

"We are small enough that students and faculty really get to know one another," she said.

On average, about half of those who graduate from the program stay locally to work in different nursing settings throughout Lewis County. Often, nurses in specialty fields will move elsewhere to larger areas such as Seattle, Portland or Tacoma; but, if no specialty field is sought, there is a high chance the students will remain local.

Ormrod said the support the students experience is critical, stating the program has nurtured and welcomed support from local providers.

"We have really strong support from health care providers in the community," she said.