

Union Health gives \$250K to SMWC for nursing education to help address shortage

By SUE LOUGHLIN
TRIBUNE-STAR

A three-year, \$250,000 gift from Union Health to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College will go toward a new program expected to help ease the nursing shortage.

Union officials presented the first installment of \$100,000 during a news conference Monday.

Funds will go toward a new SMWC online program that allows students who are paramedics to earn their bachelor of science in nursing degree. It will enable students with varied work schedules to take classes while still employed.

"We're excited to be here and expand on our partnership with Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College and to increase the supply of nurses we have available to us at Union Health," said Steve Holman, president and CEO of Union Health.

The pandemic had a major impact on nursing, statewide and nationally, Holman said. It prompted early retirements and fewer people entering the nursing profession, so the supply of nurses has decreased.

Union Health Systems



Sue Loughlin/Tribune-Star

Steve Holman, Union Health president and CEO, talks about the health system's gift to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College for a program that could help ease the nursing shortage locally.

currently has about 100 openings for nurses, which it addresses through traveling nurses, voluntary overtime and other measures, officials say.

The new program will help ease the pressure and increase the supply of nurses, Holman said.

Union Health employs about 900 nurses system-wide, and with turnover and retirements, in needs to hire about 150 nurses per year.

The Woods' new para-

medic to BSN program is for those who have an associate degree in paramedic science or hold a paramedic certification. It's a hybrid program that involves online coursework and some residencies.

The program's first cohort began in January and is at capacity with 24 students. The Union Health Systems grant will enable the college to enroll a second cohort starting in August with an additional 24 students.

"That speaks to the interest and demand out there for these paramedic professionals who want to take the next step in their careers," said Dottie King, college president.

The program allows paramedics "to take all the skills they already have and expand on those" for more lucrative jobs as nurses, who are in high demand, King said.

She thanked Union Health for its donation and ongoing partnership.

The grant will allow the program to add more faculty members and strengthen courses, and the program will have two cohorts per year.

The nursing skills lab in Hulman Hall will be renamed the Union Health Nursing Skills Lab.

SMWC's nursing program began in 2015 and has expanded to include a master of science in nursing, a post-master's family nurse practitioner certificate and the paramedic science to BSN degree.

Sue Loughlin can be reached at 812-231-4235 or at sue.loughlin@tribstar.com. Follow Sue on Twitter @TribStarSue