$250,000 grant to fight nursing shortage

By Jimmy Ryals
The Daily Reflector

Help is on the way for eastern North Carolina health organizations suffering under a nursing shortage.

A two-year, $250,000 grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation will fund efforts at Pitt County Memorial Hospital and East Carolina University to ease the regional nursing shortfall, the hospital announced Tuesday. ECU and hospital officials will use the funding to expand education and build networks among nurses in PCMH’s 29-county coverage area, said Elaine Scott, an assistant professor of nursing at ECU.

Scott said three initiatives are at the center of the East Carolina Center for Nursing Leadership’s plan:

- Developing online forums for nurses in rural counties, who are often far from other nurses.
- Creating nursing councils in rural counties. The groups would unite nurses health educators from community colleges and schools, and others to design strategies for encouraging prospective nurses.
- Expanding access to continuing education. Efforts would include scholarships for nurse educators and managers, as well greater online continuing education offerings.

Grant administrators hope to have an impact in six to nine eastern counties, said Scott, who also directs the master’s program in nursing leadership at ECU.

“It’s a very ambitious agenda, but you’ve got to start somewhere,” she said.

By 2020, statewide demand for registered nurses will outpace the supply by 42 percent, according to the N.C. Center for Nursing. PCMH already is feeling the dearth. Nearly 183 nursing positions, 10 percent of the 1,823 bedside nursing positions at the hospital, are vacant, said Beth Anne Atkins, Pitt Memorial spokeswoman.

The grant announced Tuesday is part of Partners Investing in Nursing’s Future, a nationwide project, according to a hospital news release. The Pitt Memorial Hospital Foundation received the grant, which will fund joint ECU-PCMH efforts. The PMH Foundation is one of 11 groups receiving funds through the program.

“The foundation is thrilled to have received this significant grant,” said Ken Turpen, executive director of the PMH Foundation, in a news release. “We look forward to working with the East Carolina University School of Nursing and to exploring opportunities that we hope to share with the other Partners Investing in Nursing’s Future communities throughout the country.”
Wake to name new coach today

Wake Forest called a news conference for today where it is expected the school will introduce the successor to Skip Prosser.

Prosser, the congenial coach who led the Demon Deacons for six seasons, died July 26 of an apparent heart attack at the age of 56, shocking the college basketball world and leaving the university in disbelieving grief.

Three of Prosser's staff members are believed to be among the top candidates to replace him: associate head coaches Dino Gaudio and Jeff Battle, and assistant Pat Kelsey.

Under Prosser the Demon Deacons won the Atlantic Coast Conference regular-season title in 2003 and reached the NCAA tournament in his first four seasons.

From Associated Press reports
Steve Spurrier was a star quarterback in the old days. He went on to become Duke’s last successful football coach before leaving for greater coaching glory.

Now Spurrier is throwing darts again. The opposing team? The admissions office at his own University of South Carolina.

As reported on the sports pages this week, the office had the nerve to deny admission to two prize Spurrier recruits who apparently didn’t have the minimum academic qualifications. “A severe blow,” said an angry Spurrier, or the “Old Ball Coach” as he likes to be called.

Yikes, emergency! In response, a University of South Carolina spokesman announced that athletics admissions would be “refined” more to the famous coach’s liking. An appeased Spurrier reported that the university president now sees things his way.

The episode underscores the bullying, oversized power of college sports in our universities today. Big-money celebrity coaches already make triple or more the salary of the university president. They demand high-tech, ultraluxury facilities to compete in the college sports arms race. And now one of the country’s top football coaches threatens to jump ship if he can’t have his way with admissions.

It’s a new ballgame. What long ago began as a few haphazard Ivy League rowing meets has grown into a billion-dollar mass entertainment business driven by money, ambition and the next television contract. It’s College Sports Incorporated, a subsidiary of Sports Glut USA.

Consider the NCAA. It’s the group supposedly overseeing college sports. In his tirade, Spurrier said his two recruits met minimum NCAA eligibility standards and thus should have been admitted to the university. But those standards are a sham. In an extreme case, you could in effect flunk the SATs — scoring as low as 400, the absolute lowest possible combined score — and still make the team if you had a high-enough GPA in high school.

We all hate standardized tests. Even so, when a high schooler scores so very low, it’s ridiculous to think he’s ready for college.

How would you like sitting through Econ 101 without rudimentary academic skills? No wonder many of the best players nowadays skip out of college as soon as they can for the pros, seldom graduating.

Only the imperative of winning no matter what leads universities to pretend there’s nothing wrong with the admissions “special exceptions” they hand sports recruits.

Skewed priorities carry the day. Scholarship money for deserving ordinary minority and working-class kids remains limited. By contrast, a top football or basketball player gets a full ride and lowered admissions bar.

We send the message that it’s better to practice your jump shot than do your physics homework. It’s a false, distorted message, since the percentage of aspiring high schoolers gaining a Division I scholarship — much less making the professional leagues — has always been tiny.

How have college sports spun out of control? No news flash here. Hell-bent boosters demand victory at any cost. University administrators are reluctant to stand up to the sports machine. Coaches cut academic corners because they know they’ll be fired if they don’t make it to the Gizmo.com Bowl this season.

We sports lovers bear the blame, too. Our bizarre national addiction to wasting untold hours watching games on the boob tube drives the demand for ever-more televised sports in the first place.

There are few signs of reform. Just the opposite. College football is now revving into high gear with replica jersey sales and crassly commercialized 24/7 hype. Players do well just to show up for class now and then between the giant, more than full-time demands of the big-time sports schedule.

Those questioning the hugely supersized role of college sports receive no invitations to the posh skybox. Another celebrity coach, Duke’s Mike Krzyzewski, says complaints about sports’ current role at universities are “very narrow-minded” and “so ridiculously wrong.”

And the University of South Carolina? I suspect the Old Ball Coach will get his recruits next time around.

Orin Starn is a professor of cultural anthropology at Duke University.
Stokes was worried about getting fired

He says he can still have impact on ECU

BY JAYMES POWELL JR.
AND CHIP ALEXANDER
STAFF WRITERS

Former East Carolina basketball coach Ricky Stokes said Tuesday his move to associate athletics director for basketball was driven by a concern that he would be fired because of his team's lack of wins. Asked why he was leaving the ECU men's basketball head coaching position, Stokes said he hadn’t performed well in his two years as coach and was tired of speculating whether athletics director Terry Holland would fire him.

Stokes said his new job would allow him to have an impact on basketball without putting his family through the stress of being fired. He was fired as head coach at Virginia Tech in 2003 after four seasons. "I made the decision because I thought it was best for the program. ... I didn't want to go into every game as a referendum on my job," Stokes said Tuesday. "Every game, they throw out my record, I just didn't want that again. And no question, the untimely passing of [Wake Forest basketball coach] Skip Prosser confirmed family is more important. "I'm 45 now, and if I'm going to make a change, now is the time."

Holland, reached late Monday night by e-mail, said deciding to go from coaching to administration is a big deal to any coach. But the athletics director did not specifically address Stokes' move.

Holland said that leaving coaching is "traumatic for a number of reasons — it took me a full year to leave coaching in 1989-90 to go to Davidson and even then I almost changed my mind twenty times," Holland said in the e-mail. "... It simply took that long to get there and it was traumatic at times for all of us. But the decision seems to have lifted everyone's spirits and everyone is bonding in a way that would not have possible before with the 'weight of the world' on everyone's shoulders."

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