

Resources and Staffing



3SW Orthopaedic/Orthopaedic Trauma unit nurses visit their new unit on 10CFAC.
Left to right: **Mackenzie Karpinski, BSN, RN**; **Amy Andersen, BSN, RN**; **Patty Nissen, BSN, RN**;
Stephanie McClusky, RN; **Tara Kelly, BSN, RN**; **Pam Hudlett, RN**; **Michelle Opgenorth, BSN, RN, CMSRN**

Planning for Significant Inpatient Growth

Imagine taking an already bustling academic medical center and opening an additional 96 inpatient beds. With inpatient capacity at the limit, there was nowhere to go but up. The vertical expansion of the Center for Advanced Care has resulted in four levels being added to the top of the building. Three inpatient surgical units moved into three of those floors; the fourth level will accommodate a relocation of the Blood and Marrow Transplant (BMT) unit. The surgical units moved in July 2019, facilitating the expansion of the Cardiology/Cardiothoracic Surgery unit by 20 beds, as well as supporting the opening of a new 24-bed medical unit. The BMT unit move will take place in March 2020, allowing a second Hematology/Oncology unit to open at that time. The additional beds and their geographic locations were strategically planned to optimize having the right patient in the right bed, with specialty populations cared for by the nurses

who practice in that specialty. “This inpatient expansion is the equivalent of opening a small hospital. The work effort and diligence in preparing for this expansion has been amazing, all done while operating at peak capacity and undergoing significant operational changes,” said Kathy Bechtel, MSN, RN, NEA-BC, Vice President Patient Care Services and Chief Nursing Officer.

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Nurses moving to the new units were engaged in the architectural design process. Their involvement supported ensuring the environment would align with clinical processes and workflows, as well as best practices. Clinical nurses were also invited to view and provide feedback of full-sized mock-ups of the environment prior to construction. At different stages of completion, they were able to visit the units when decisions or clarification of design intent were needed. Prior to moving, the nurses participated in

five hours of education to assure they were competent in use of the units' new systems and equipment.

Resources and staffing for the inpatient bed expansion was a priority focus. Hundreds of new Froedtert nurses, and a complement of certified nursing assistants and health unit coordinators needed to be hired. To meet and sustain the nursing workforce needs, the value of addressing nurse retention, recruitment and onboarding was recognized. Outcome and process goals were set for each component. The Transformation of Nursing Retention, Recruitment and Onboarding Team was formed to guide, monitor and energize the work. A focus on retention of existing nurses was vitally important. Close scrutiny was placed on tracking and addressing nurse turnover. The findings of the 2019 RN Nursing Excellence Survey were used to inform how current nurses perceived the professional practice environment. The findings demonstrated a high degree of satisfaction and engagement; opportunities for even higher engagement were noted and incorporated into the annual Nursing Strategic Plan. As part of the organization's commitment to market competitive pay and benefits for all employees, elements of base pay rates and equity were addressed for registered nurse (RN) positions. Multiple benefit enhancements were made that addressed areas of importance for work-life balance. These steps were important for not only retaining but recruiting nurses as well.

An acceleration of RN hiring efforts resulted in an aggressive recruitment campaign for both experienced and graduate nurses. Four RN recruitment events and a certified nursing assistant hiring event were held, including on-site interviews and on-the-spot employment offers. Clinical nurses participated in hospital recruitment events and attended external recruitment fairs with recruiters, giving potential nurses and students the opportunity to speak directly with a nurse peer. Meetings were held at the hospital with nursing student clinical groups as well. Froedtert staff were recognized in the form of a referral bonus for referring new staff to the critical roles needed for the inpatient expansion. Nurse leaders worked closely with Human Resources to plan for and implement all these efforts. Human Resources recruiters availed the use of all avenues for job postings and outreach to potential nurse hires. The massive undertaking resulted in more than 450 registered nurses being hired for Froedtert Hospital's inpatient units over the course of nine months, with more than 200 of them being graduate nurses. Over 60 certified nursing assistants and 25 health unit coordinators were also hired during this time-frame.

Onboarding of this large volume of nurses required multiple strategies. One such plan included significant growth of the nurse extern program, hiring over 100 senior nursing students into that role several months prior to the expansion. This enabled the nurse externs to begin their onboarding and become acclimated to Froedtert Hospital nursing practice; orientation was then fully ramped up upon graduation.

Multiple enhancements to RN onboarding included revamping orientation tools, resources and processes. One important enhancement included revitalizing the preceptor program and processes. A nurse mentorship program was also developed for clinical nurses, available to them following completion of orientation. The program contains support for both the clinical nurse mentor as well as the mentee. These programs are critical components to successfully retaining the professional nursing staff.

Kathy Bechtel shared, "Assuring we would hire more than 450 new Froedtert nurses and complete their onboarding effectively, while providing excellent nursing care on a day-to-day basis for our existing patients, took an incredible amount of teamwork, ingenuity and perseverance. I'm immensely proud of what we have accomplished." The inpatient expansion — truly an exemplar for growing excellence at Froedtert Hospital. ■

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