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A shot in the arm

• Four-year program at SC may help reduce nursing shortage

By **Sophie L. Swecker**

Staff reporter

Wyoming is 30 percent short of the number of nurses it needs, and that was slated to rise to 60 percent by 2020, according to a 2005 news release by the University of Wyoming Nursing Department.

The grim forecast may have improved a little last week when Sheridan College announced the creation of the Edward A. Whitney Endowed Nursing Chair with a \$1 million donation from Whitney Benefits of Sheridan.

The chair will provide in-classroom teaching, advising and support for Sheridan College nursing students to complete a Bachelor of Science degree in nursing through a distance-education program, in which students take classes from the University of Wyoming's curriculum at the SC campus.

"It's quite an honor," said SC Director of Nursing Judy McDowell. "It's definitely a big

deal for a community college to have an endowed chair. We are really at the forefront of providing the educational needs that people in Sheridan want."

Sheridan College already has a nursing program that allows students to complete an Associate of Applied Science degree in nursing in four semesters.

Currently the program has 10 full- and part-time instructors and accepts 24 students each year, or 50 to 60 percent of program applicants.

The college is conducting a nationwide search for a qualified individual to fill the chair position. "It'll most likely be somebody with a doctorate in nursing education," McDowell said.

McDowell added that the search for the chair should be finished by spring semester, and the BSN program is scheduled to begin next fall.

The creation of the endowed chair should help alleviate the cur-

rent nursing shortage, said McDowell, because one of the biggest obstacles to training more nurses is a nationwide shortage of nursing teachers.

The four-year BSN program, all of which can be completed at Sheridan College, will allow more students to receive instruction, and the advanced degree they receive will put them one step closer to completing a master's degree in nursing, which is required to become a nursing instructor.

Peggy Callantine, nursing services director at Sheridan Memorial Hospital, said the hospital isn't feeling the brunt of the state shortage, but that many registered nurses at Memorial plan to return to school and complete the BSN program while still working at the hospital.

"The four-year program always has a positive impact on our patients," Callantine said, adding that



Judy McDowell

SC Director of Nursing

most students who study in the SC program tend to stay in this area.

Students who receive a BSN will have a broader background in nursing and will study its **management and leadership** side and less of the practical side, McDowell said.

"A lot of it is based on community health and community nursing," McDowell said.

First-year nursing student Randi Craig said she plans to complete the four-year degree in nursing and possibly a master's degree to do more specialized work.

"This is my third career," Craig said. "My kids are grown, it's a great career choice for infinite opportunities. I can choose so many fields that boredom would never be an issue."

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Nurses

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Fellow first-year student Annie Scherry decided to study nursing after watching her father suffer a heart attack when she was in high school.

"I watched the nurses there and decided that's what I wanted to do," Scherry said.

McDowell said several factors contribute to the nursing shortage, both state and nationwide: "The population is aging and growing, and fewer people are going into nursing."

In 2005, Wyoming was ranked 49th in the United States in nurses' salaries, according to the UW news release, making it more lucrative for a Wyoming nursing graduate to look for work outside the state.

"I think they're improving, there's been a push to improve nursing salaries," McDowell said. "The Wyoming Legislature's Invest in Nursing Act will pay for your nursing education as long as you stay in Wyoming."



The Sheridan Press/Ryan Brennecke

Kelly Zellmer, left, and Trista Horsley, both second-year students in Sheridan College's nursing program, change a patient's dressing this morning at the VA Medical Center.