

When it comes to recruitment and retention, thinking outside the box is a must for rural healthcare providers. Blessing Health System has adopted an innovative mindset to address one of the biggest issues facing hospitals today: building up their staff to meet the needs of the community.

In addition, the system is focused on enhancing the skills of current staff to create a stronger pipeline, as leaders are “committed to propelling our employees forward” and to helping them “find their passions within the healthcare setting and retain them for life.”

Here are three strategies the system—which includes Blessing Hospital in Quincy and Illini Community Hospital in Pittsfield—has implemented to strengthen its staff.

#### Internal Career Fair and Career Planning

Blessing Health System has put a twist on the typical job fair. In addition to looking for new hires, the system in 2023 launched an annual internal career fair and quarterly individual career planning sessions. Nearly 190 employees have participated, with 26 moving into different positions within the system. Department leaders across the system attend the fair, along with leaders from Human Resources and Organizational Development. Also present are representatives from Blessing-Rieman College of Nursing, John Wood Community College and Grand Canyon University.

#### CNA Training Program

To bolster the nursing pipeline, the system in 2023 implemented a training program for certified nursing assistants (CNAs), which runs year-round. This summer, 18 high school students attended the training. Of those 18 CNAs, 15 are still employed in the system.

#### Connect Nurse Program

A new program geared toward nurses, Connect Nurse, is a paid internship that runs during the academic year. This extension of the system's summer nurse intern program pairs students with a nurse mentor to give them more hands-on training so the students can determine where in nursing they would like to begin their career. Eight students have gone through the program, as of August 2024.

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