

'I've spent my life taking care of everybody else': Mom of 7 preps for new nursing career

Kelli Hall among first students to benefit from new partnership between Rogue Community College and Providence Medford Medical Center

Job offer in hand, a Medford mom to seven kids is nearing the finish line toward a new career caring for others.

Kelli Hall was brimming with nervous anticipation Tuesday morning as she wrapped up her clinicals at Providence Medford Medical Center. The final coursework leaves her only a couple of certification steps away from completing the journey toward becoming a registered nurse that she started two years ago.

Hall was already focused on the next step of her practicum starting next month. It will be followed by her licensing exam — the National Council Licensure Examination, or NCLEX — but Hall was focused on the learning opportunities her practicum would provide. She sees the longer shifts as an opportunity to apply the knowledge she's gained from the two Providence nurses she's worked with over the past eight weeks.

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"I'm ready," Hall said. "It's been a long program, so I'm excited."

Hall is among the first students to benefit from a new and growing partnership between Rogue Community College and Providence, which had working nurses teaching nursing students, according to Deneen Silva, RCC's director of nursing and allied health occupations.

RCC has long had a relationship with Asante, but Silva described the partnership with Providence as a growth area to expand RCC's capacity to accommodate nursing students.

There were 19 students in Hall's program winter term, according to Silva. Planned expansions will bring the number of students this fall to 32 students, and with the planned addition next year of a second cohort of nursing students, RCC will be able to accommodate 56 per year.

Silva said the challenge has been that the state limits faculty to eight nursing students per clinical instructor, but the college has traditionally struggled to hire more nursing instructors because the position is part-time. A working nurse would have to give up their benefits to pursue teaching.

RCC's solution? A "joint-appointment relationship."

"That's a contractual relationship where we are accessing Providence's nursing staff to support us by filling those positions as joint-appointment clinical adjunct faculty," Silva said.

In short, RCC contracts directly with local hospitals, and the working nurse instructors get the same pay and benefits for teaching as they do attending to patients.

"They maintain their benefit structure, so it's a win-win for everybody," Silva said.

Providence RN Kevin Molleson, who normally works the night shift at Providence as a bedside nurse, was one of two instructors from the hospital who completed their first term teaching Hall's cohort. Molleson described it as an opportunity to try his hand teaching without making major career changes.

"I think it's a unique way to branch out and also work on a different aspect of nursing," Molleson said.

Molleson gives up one of his three 12-hour shifts bedside for instructional time, and splits the teaching shift to meet with nursing students twice a week.

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"But now, because it's a part of my position here, I can spend two days with the students and I have two days bedside," Molleson said. "So it makes me a little bit more, I guess less burnt out."

It also allows him to share his enthusiasm for the profession with his students. Molleson said he appreciates that he's there for people in a moment of need.

"You have hands-on ability to care for a patient," Molleson said.

Sometimes it's help brushing their hair or a request for a warm blanket, other times it's listening as the patient shares their love stories or their tragedies. Molleson said he tries to be there for his patients as best he can within the job's time constraints.

"You as a person or as a nurse — you are bedside in their life in that moment," Molleson said. "You know, they don't come to the hospital because they want to but because they need us."

"I wouldn't change my career for anything," Molleson added.

For Hall, the path to becoming a nurse these past two years has hardly been easy. She juggled her coursework with the demands of parenthood.

"I have seven kids and I've spent my life taking care of everybody else," Hall said. "I wanted to do something for me ... My life aspiration is to take care of other people so I thought nursing was the perfect route."

Provided that Hall is certified by this summer, she has a job lined up at Providence starting July 22 in the hospital's night float pool.

"I figured if I'm going to take on this challenge, I may as well jump in head first," Hall said.

She wasn't expecting a job offer so soon. Hall said she showed up to a hiring event in January, "and the interview went awesome." She got a

follow-up text by the time she got back to her car. The next week she had the job offer.

Hall encourages everyone considering the nursing program to apply.

"If you are even thinking about it, just do it," Hall said. "Don't put it off."

RCC's nursing program, although growing, remains selective. The college is planning monthly Zoom information sessions about the program scheduled for 10:30 a.m. Tuesdays, March 19, April 16, May 21 and June 18. For more information, including prerequisites, visit roguecc.edu/dept/nursing/.