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Healthcare officials consider nursing pipeline

Industry facing issues of filling open positions with well-trained applicants

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NORWICH — Marcia Proto, executive director of the CT League of Nursing, said that getting healthcare students into clinical placements is one of the challenges facing the healthcare industry.

"It's a huge systemic issue that we need to focus on," she said.

This and other issues were addressed at the Eastern Connecticut Workforce Investment Board (EWIB)'s 2019 Eastern CT Healthcare Conversation at Three Rivers Community College on Friday.

The goal of the conference was to figure out ways to fill open positions in the healthcare industry with well-trained employees and keeping them in eastern Connecticut.

One way the need for employment is being addressed is through creating a healthcare pipeline modeled after EWIB's Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative (MPI).

Chris Jewell, EWIB chairman, said that healthcare in eastern Connecticut is in a similar position that

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By the Numbers

57%: Percentage of Connecticut registered nurses that are 50 or older, as of 2017, according to CT League of Nurses.

73%: Percentage of qualified nursing school applicants turned away because of lack of space.

EWIB

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manufacturing was more than six years ago, referring to the demand for positions versus how many qualified people there are to fill them.

Jewell wants to apply his experience with MPI and apply it to the healthcare field, as officials seek to create their own healthcare pipeline to supplement other vehicles for employment.

"You've got a lot of lessons learned from the manufacturing people," he told the audience.

Jewell also stressed that competitors should work together to solve workforce problems.

State Sen. Cathy Osten (D-Sprague) said that progress on the healthcare pipeline has started. Working with State Rep. Toni Walker (D-New Haven), Osten has set aside state money from the General Fund and from bonds to provide money for workforce training.

Osten said the next step is to let the healthcare industry decide what positions it needs to fill.

"I do not believe it should be driven from the Legislature," Osten said. "The Legislature does not know what types of workers are necessary to work in nursing homes [or] a hospital."

Proto said that this is important, as there are more healthcare jobs in the state than manufacturing.

"Unless we have a robust and sustainable healthcare workforce," Proto said, "it's going to be challenging for the state of Connecticut to provide the care that residents need."

Proto said the state's nursing programs are already very competitive, and many qualified nursing applicants are turned away from the programs due to not having enough places where students can work a sufficient number of clinical hours.

"Unless our schools get more clinical placements, our schools can't expand," she said.

Allen Boutin, administrator for the Avalon Health Center for the StoneRidge Retirement Community, said that since they're in Mystic, they have difficulty being able to recruit.

"We only have one side of the state we can pull from," Boutin said. "It becomes more challenging when there [are] not enough people out there."

Boutin said that another issue is the ability to offer competitive wages compared to other fields. He said that people in education and the community need to work with facilities like StoneRidge to solve issues related to clinical placements.

"We need not only downstream, but upstream supports, so we can be a part of that growth process for the nursing field," Boutin said.