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## **Oregon State Hospital improves patient care and safety with additional nursing staff**

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Nurses play a key role for patients in the Oregon State Hospital. They provide care, stability and important oversight of a patient's condition. But like other hospitals, OSH has faced a chronic nursing shortage.

Just one year ago, the nursing vacancy rate at OSH was 24 percent. But thanks to aggressive actions to improve retention and recruitment of nurses, today the rate is 5 percent – below the national average of 8.1 percent.

“OSH had to take action,” says Kathy Deacon, OSH chief nursing officer. “The care and safety of our patients is our priority and having enough qualified nurses contributes greatly to assuring we are providing the best care in the safest environment.”

One of the biggest contributors to the national nursing shortage is that not enough people are attending nursing school. OSH solved this problem by working with Oregon Health Career Center to launch an accelerated 18-month RN degree program for qualified employees who agree to work at least 30 months at the state hospital following graduation. In return, the hospital pays for their tuition and provides flexible scheduling to accommodate their work and education needs.

In addition, as part of the Oregon Department of Human Services Transformation Initiative, OSH brought “lean” methods of management to the nurse hiring process. Wasted steps and unnecessary actions were eliminated and the time it takes to hire a nurse went from 80 days to, on average, seven days. In today's competitive market, that gives OSH an important edge.

“We have to be aggressive with our recruiting and hiring,” said Deacon. “Oregon is predicted to experience a 44 percent vacancy rate for nurses by the year 2020. Nurses have many choices and a lot of opportunities in their field.”

Michelle Schilz, who earned her nursing degree from Oregon Health & Science University in 2006, has worked as a nurse at private hospitals and county corrections. She has been at OSH since March and is assigned to the all-male patient admissions unit, 48C.

“What I have found here at OSH is a culture of safety and support where staff share a common mission and understanding about patient care,” she said. “If I was recruiting, I would say come work here and help people to someday help themselves.”

For more information about working at Oregon State Hospital, call 503-945-2815 or go to [www.oregonjobs.org/](http://www.oregonjobs.org/).