

# BIG STEPS *for* SMALL-TOWN HOSPITALS

*Rural health care professionals sharpen their skills and benefit their facilities*

**TWENTY-FOUR PERCENT** of Pennsylvania's 12.3 million residents live in small, rural towns. These residents rely on their community hospitals for emergency medical care.

"The hospital is the anchor of health care in any rural community," said Lisa Davis, director of the Pennsylvania Office of Rural Health. "Keeping these hospitals viable is absolutely essential."

In Pennsylvania, there are 13 rural facilities with 25 or fewer beds—designated by the federal government as Critical Access Hospitals (CAH). A major challenge for these hospitals is recruiting and retaining qualified individuals for clinical and administrative positions. To better learn their needs, the Office of Rural Health conducted a survey of Pennsylvania's

CAHs, with the help of Penn State Outreach's Office of Economic and Workforce Development (OEWD).

Dr. Janetta DeOnna of the OEWD found, among other things, that staff shortages in nursing and other clinical departments, as well as limited career paths, make "creating a culture that will entice new professionals to stay problematic."

The response: A new academy is helping to improve the supervisory and management skills of more than 100 participants from rural hospitals, emergency medical services units and health care providers. The Office of Rural Health, OEWD and another Outreach unit, Management Development Programs and Services, developed the initiative, with funding from the Outreach Thematic Initiative Fund and the federal Medicare Rural Hospital Flexibility Grant Program.

## *Team Project Key to Training*

Launched in 2007 at three Penn State sites (Altoona, DuBois and Williamsport), a team-based performance improvement project is a key component of the training.

"The goal is to take knowledge they gain in the academy, create a project that would benefit their hospital and share it with other hospitals," explained Lawrence Baronner of the Office of Rural Health. Fifteen teams presented their projects during the 2008 Pennsylvania Rural Health Conference held in June at Penn State.

Academy participant Joanie Delovich and her team at Troy Community Hospital in northeastern Pennsylvania created an interfacility transfer form to share medical information about a patient when transferring that patient within the hospital or to another facility. "It significantly helps us improve communication," said Delovich, director of nursing. Other Pennsylvania hospitals also are adopting the form.

Webinars gave participants hands-on experience with technology, another need identified in the survey, said Dr. Maureen Dodson of Management Development.

A second academy with an upper-level management program is planned for this fall.

For more information, contact the Office of Rural Health at 814-863-8214.



*Students acquire new skills for a career change*

# From COMPUTER SCIENCE to HEALTH SCIENCE

**WHEN IT CAME TIME** to pick a college major, Manan Shah chose computer science because, as he said, “Everyone is doing it.” But after working as a senior systems analyst at a Philadelphia hospital, Shah admits, “I couldn’t do this for 30 years.” Now he’s considering earning M.D. and Ph.D. degrees and working in the infectious disease research field, but first he needs to enhance his science knowledge.

Career-changers like Shah have chosen a booming employment field. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the

service-providing sector of the economy, which includes health care, is poised to add 8.1 million jobs through 2016. But qualifying for these careers will require additional education.

Penn State Brandywine Continuing Education is responding with the new Accelerated Post-Baccalaureate Medical Sciences Certificate program, which is providing college graduates with the science courses needed for entrance into medical, dental and other allied health schools. The one-year program, delivered online, with twice-a-month, on-campus

sessions, is “giving students the security of a job and the ability to make a life and career change,” said Susan Currie, administrator for the program at Brandywine Continuing Education.

Brandywine faculty Dr. Elizabeth Dudkin, associate professor of biology; Dr. John Tierney, professor of chemistry; and Dr. Paul deGategno, director of academic affairs, are currently preparing 12 students, spanning the ages 23 to 40, for new careers. This first group will complete the program in April 2009.

## NURSES WANTED

**BRIAN DIETZ AND TROY HARTSOCK** had each worked at Case New Holland, a farm equipment manufacturer, for nearly 20 years before the factory was slated to close. They decided to train for new careers as nurses at the Penn State Learning Center in Lewistown. As Dietz said, “I’ve always been interested in doing something where I could make a difference. Being a nurse is what I want to do. I’m glad I made this decision.”

More than 20,000 registered and licensed practical nurses will be needed by 2010 in Pennsylvania. The Learning Center in Lewistown—a partnership of Lewistown Hospital’s School of Nursing and Penn State Continuing Education—is responding to this need by conducting general education and science courses for nursing students. Dr. Kirk A. Gilbert, the center’s science coordinator and rural health educator, leads this effort, which was initiated by Tom Walker, the center’s director.

“Clinical care is an occupation that’s not dependent on the economy. We’ll always have patients to care for,” Gilbert said.



*Troy Hartsock (left) and Brian Dietz used to work in a factory; they are now training to be nurses at the Penn State Learning Center.*

Bill Wallace

# TEACHING STRATEGIES FOR ESL

**SCHOOL DISTRICTS** in southeastern Pennsylvania are seeing an increasing number of students who speak English as a second language. In Lebanon, for example, 35 percent of students need ESL assistance. To meet their learning needs, the No Child Left Behind Act and Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) recommend professional development in ESL for all teachers.

Teaching English language learners “used to be done by ESL specialists, but now it’s everybody’s job,” said Penn State Lehigh Valley faculty Dr. Mary Hutchinson, who is coordinating a \$1.31 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education (ED) for MODELL (Modular Design for English Language Learners).

The MODELL program will enable 150 teachers in Bethlehem and Lebanon school districts and 25 college students to earn 6 ESL credits. Participants are working with National Writing Project consultants on classroom research projects



*Penn State campuses respond to a growing population of ESL students with teacher training programs.*

and will present their findings at an ESL conference.

Penn State Berks has received \$1.35 million from the ED for Project ISLAS (Increasing Second Language Learner Acquisition Skills)—a five-course, 15-credit, Penn State ESL certificate program, which meets PDE’s ESL certification requirements, said Penn State Berks Director of Continuing Education Walt Fullum.

Kelly Paskowski, a teacher at Glenside Elementary School, said, “Project ISLAS has helped to bridge the gap that can be caused by language differences.”

## PennTAP Success Story:

# Leveling the Playing Field for Tech Companies

**IT CAN BE DIFFICULT** for small companies to get their technologies commercialized. That’s why Penn State Outreach’s Pennsylvania Technical Assistance Program (PennTAP) has teamed up with the NASA Langley Research Center: to give small companies with

innovative technologies a chance to link up with larger companies interested in acquiring and commercializing the technologies.

This program is called TecFusion, and since 2006, the TecFusion team has held 18 forums nationwide. “The program increases commercialization opportunities for small companies,” said Garry Miller, PennTAP technology transfer and commercialization specialist and TecFusion coordinator. PennTAP, a federal-state-University partnership for economic development, is the only organization nationwide working with NASA to coordinate TecFusion.

Major corporations host the forums, which feature technology mini-trade shows and presentations by small com-

panies that have received funding from the federal Small Business Innovation Research program to develop technologies of value to government agencies or to society.

Pittsburgh, Pa.-based Mine Safety Appliance Company (MSA), a global manufacturer of safety products that has had a long-standing relationship with Penn State, has held two TecFusion events. TecFusion “helped us identify eight companies as potential technology partners. We now have active relationships with four companies and are contemplating possible new products,” said Bob Bonahoom of MSA. MSA reported \$512,000 in cost savings, \$5 million in increased sales and 10 new jobs created from the program.

