

**Comments of scholarship donor Elaine Griffiths, representing Chesapeake
Regional Medical Center, at the 2009 TCC Educational Foundation
Scholarship Luncheon**

I'd like to share a little bit about myself: as I hope it can give one small example of how nursing provides opportunities and career growth.

I entered into practice as an Associate degree nurse, graduating from Essex County College in Newark, NJ and was told by my instructors that I would function as a technical nurse under the direction of a bachelors prepared RN. I started my career at Newark Beth Israel Medical Center in Oncology. I moved to Michigan when I married and worked for 20 years in Grand Rapids at Metropolitan Hospital, starting as the 3-11 supervisor and eventually became the Chief Nursing Officer. I've been with Chesapeake Regional Medical Center since 2005. I earned a bachelors degree from Aquinas College and a Masters of Management degree from Aquinas. I did this while raising our two sons, who are now themselves graduating from college next month. I am currently 2 courses from completing my MSN degree from Walden University and will graduate this summer. I love to tell my staff that learning is indeed a life long endeavor, if I can go back to school anyone can. And by the way, I never practiced as a technical nurse.

Nursing has provided me with many different opportunities and I believe that anyone with the desire and ability can take their career wherever they want to. The possibilities are almost without limit.

Now I'd like to tell you a bit about where I currently work and what the nurses at Chesapeake Regional Medical Center are doing to improve the care they provide and improve their own work environment.

CRMC has been a fixture in the area since 1976 when it was first opened as a 140 bed community, primary care hospital. Nursing is a cornerstone to the organization's successes over the years. We have grown to a 310 bed regional facility with 2400 employees and an array of services from our state of the art Emergency department which treats 65,000 patients annually to state of the art cardiac interventions and oncology and neurosurgery. We are the only independent hospital left in the region. We believe that our presence in the area provides our communities with choice and we are committed to provide the best quality of care possible. To that end we are the only accredited chest pain center in Hampton Roads, which means that heart attack victims can be assured that they will receive emergency treatment by a team of board certified interventional cardiologists and staff within 90 minutes of arrival to our ED. We have obtained grant funding to outfit half the Chesapeake EMS rigs with field EKG capability to further speed the process for patients arriving by ambulance. Our community deserves the best that we can offer and we pursue the path to excellence with passion.

Integral to every service provided at CRMC is the nursing work force. We in the Hampton Roads region have not been immune to the ever worsening nursing shortage. The US department of Health Resources and Services Administration estimates the shortage to increase over the next 10 years so that by 2020 the shortage will reach an estimated 800,000. This coincides with the largest growth of aging Americans in the Baby Boom generation. TCC has taken this challenge to the health of its communities by providing increasing program access to

prospective nursing students and providing our region with more qualified RNs which makes TCC a true exemplar in addressing the nursing shortage for our area.

The American life expectancy has almost doubled since 1900 at which time the average American male had a life expectancy of 50 years. Infection was the leading cause of death. Americans are living longer with chronic illnesses which require hospitalizations and nurses who can function at a higher level of practice. The hospital recognizes that nursing school education is only the beginning of a nurse's preparation to care for patients. I like to use the analogy that we don't take senior medical students and send them into practice, they are provided with internship, residency and fellowship training before they practice independently. Nursing deserves those post graduate opportunities as well.

We have developed a summer externship program for rising senior nursing students to provide them with opportunities to work along with experienced RNs in different settings throughout the summer as well as attending lectures by nursing educators and physicians. Upon graduation new RNs are brought into the nursing internship program which starts with a 3 month structured experience with an experienced preceptor. After that the nurse intern assumes increasing responsibilities as mutually decided on between management and staff until they graduate from the internship experience at the end of the first year of practice. We believe that these programs have contributed to a decrease in the RN vacancy rate to approximately 6% compared to the national average of 10.2% as reported by the American Organization of Nurse Executives.

We at CRMC are committed to changing our work environment to better support nursing practice. To that end we developed a shared governance model. The staff nurses developed by-

laws describing the structure by which the staff has oversight of nursing practice and elected members of the nursing staff come together with me monthly to approve nursing policy and quality improvement activities and for me to share information directly with the staff from the executive team and the hospital board. There are approximately 5,000 hospitals in the US today, and each of them has medical staff by-laws that govern the practice of medicine within their walls, there are less than 300 hospitals that have nursing by-laws.

The nursing staff chose the nursing theorist, Jean Watson for her theory of Human Caring to be the foundation for the practice of nursing at CRMC. The theory identifies caring as the foundation for all nursing practice. This is a departure from the traditional western medical model of “curing”. It calls nurses to view their experiences with patients and families as “caring occasions” in which the nurse is present and a transpersonal experience takes place between the nurse and patient. It is the human to human connection that as Watson tells us “expands our compassion and caring and keeps alive our common humanity”. This exemplifies who the nurses at CRMC are. We choose our staff based upon the attitude they bring with them. Nursing is a demanding profession and requires emotional intelligence as well as boundless compassion.

We have entered into a partnership with TCC to support selected nursing students who will become members of our staff. We believe this relationship will afford us opportunities to expand over time and continue to grow a relationship that will benefit the communities we serve. We support several students every year with scholarships in exchange for their employment with us after graduation. We ask that these scholarship recipients return to school within the year after hire to complete their BSN for which we provide tuition assistance and scholarship funding. We believe this to be one of the most significant strategies for our continued success.

I would like to close my remarks to you today by again thanking TCC for its commitment to the health of our citizens by helping to enhance the numbers of RNs being prepared for practice in our region. I would like to thank all the students for their efforts to improve themselves and thereby improve the health of our country through seeking higher education.

I'd like to close with a quote from Goethe "The moment one definitely commits oneself, then providence moves too. All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one's favor all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance which no man could have dreamed would have come his way. Whatever you can do or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it. Begin it now".