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### **Unique program addresses state's nursing shortage**

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Like a proud parent, Oregon State Hospital will celebrate when six employees receive their nursing degrees at Saturday's graduation from Portland Community College.

Eighteen months ago, these employees were put on a fast track to an RN degree and upon graduation have agreed to provide nursing services to OSH for 30 months. In return, the hospital paid for their tuition and provided flexible scheduling to accommodate their work and school needs.

"To be successful, the program requires a tremendous commitment from both the student and the employer," said Nancy Frantz-Geddes, director of OSH Nursing Services. "As the students earn their academic degrees and begin a new career, the hospital develops and grows its own professional nursing workforce."

The N2K Nursing Education Program, which is a collaborative effort among Oregon Health Career Center, Portland Community College and OSH, is one way the hospital is addressing a critical nursing shortage. Estimates are that Oregon will experience a 44 percent vacancy rate for nurses by the year 2020 if health care providers don't do a better job training, hiring and retaining nurses. OSH has set a very aggressive goal of reducing the nursing vacancy rate from 22 percent to 10 percent in 2009.

The N2K model is a unique program in which health care employers design and implement a program that targets their own employees as nursing students and ultimately members of their nursing staff. A second program for OSH employees is under way in partnership with Clackamas Community College.

The graduation ceremony for the 18-member nursing class is from 1 to 5 p.m., Saturday, Dec. 13, at Kaiser's Town Hall, 3704 N. Interstate Ave, Portland.

The Oregon State Hospital graduates are:

Dagmar Amrein, Salem

Heather Matthews, Tigard

Marcie Nellist, West Linn

Melanie Pension, Salem

Forrest Stewart, Portland

Chong Vang, Portland

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