Bakersfield College Nursing Program students answer the call for support during COVID-19

Bakersfield College (BC) has responded immediately to the COVID-19 crisis with Registered Nursing (RN) students helping Kern Medical, Dignity Health Systems, and Bakersfield Heart Hospital in a historic new externship program.

In a bold, forward-thinking move, on Monday, March 23, 2020, Bakersfield College and its community partners for healthcare clinicals coordinated to help meet pressing local healthcare needs. Kern Medical, Dignity Healthcare Systems, and Bakersfield Heart Hospital will onboard all 69 Level 4 RN students – senior students in their final semester, just prior to graduation. The nursing students will work in a nurse extern capacity alongside a RN and provide direct care to a team of patients.

“I absolutely love seeing how our nursing faculty and students have responded to this call for help from our hospitals,” said Dr. Sonya Christian, President of Bakersfield College. “This is a time when we should all pause and say a big ‘thank you’ to every nurse, doctor, and every other healthcare provider as they work on the front lines to care for our community.”

The local announcement comes at a time when across the nation, many nursing students have had their education put on hold. The State of California requires RN students to complete at least 75% of their clinical hours in a “face to face” setting, providing bedside care to patients. With this clinical opportunity, provided by our community partners, the Bakersfield College RN students will be able to complete their required clinical hours and lectures concurrently, be eligible to sit for their national exam, and enter the workforce serving as an essential part of the healthcare team.

Weeks prior, while Bakersfield College transitioned approximately 2500 courses to a virtual learning environment, Associate Dean of Nursing Carla Gard was already seeking creative partnerships to assist students in meeting their clinical requirements during the shutdown. It was only natural for her to reach out to the practice partners for collaboration.

Continued on Page 2
Continued from Page 1

Bakersfield College Nursing Program students answer the call for support during COVID-19

Russell Judd, Chief Executive Officer of Kern Medical, did not hesitate to collaborate with Bakersfield College to implement a solution to meet the needs of the community, the hospital, and Bakersfield College nursing students. “This action affirms the strong ties and mutual commitment Kern Medical and Bakersfield College have in meeting our community needs,” said Judd.

Students are exceedingly grateful that their education and ability to work will not be put on hold indefinitely only eight weeks before their expected graduation. “It is a privilege and honor to respond to the urgent need for nurses in Kern County at this critical moment,” said Shantelle Rubio, President of the ADN Class, Spring 2020. “We are thankful for the opportunity to complete our program and take the Boards on-time, so we can start working as RN’s as soon as possible.”

Instead of waiting for this crisis to pass, the externship program will allow nursing students to start applying their hard-earned knowledge now, so that as soon as exams are held, they can immediately turn around and join the workforce as RN’s.

“The opportunity for these 69 students to get real life experience dealing with a pandemic on a scale we have never witnessed before in our lifetime will certainly make them better nurses,” said Carla Gard, Associate Dean of Nursing at Bakersfield College. “This will be a trial by fire, and they will come out the other side with confidence that they can rise to face any challenge, throughout the rest of their careers.”

###