Regionally Increasing Baccalaureate Nurses (RIBN) Project
Advancing the Education Level of the Nursing Workforce

DESCRIPTION
RIBN, an evidenced based practice model, is a seamless educational pathway characterized by its economically feasible dual enrollment, 4-year nursing education track between community colleges and universities. Evidence indicates the RIBN model is one BSN attainment option that increases the educational level of the nursing workforce.

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE
Two-thirds of NC graduates are prepared at the Associate degree (ADN) level (NCIBON 2013) and less than 16% ever achieve higher degrees (NCCN 2006). According to the Future of Nursing Report, increasing the educational level of the nursing workforce through an improved nursing education system is critical to ensuring the delivery of safe, effective care within a complex and rapidly reforming healthcare system. Nurses must have the requisite competencies to respond to calls to "fill expanding roles and to master technological tools and information management systems while collaborating and coordinating care across teams of health professionals." (National Academies 2010) In addition to enhanced clinical outcomes, preparation at the baccalaureate (BSN) level provides the foundation for advanced degrees required for faculty and advanced practice roles. The Oregon Consortium for Nursing provided a successfully implemented program as the basis for RIBN. (Tanner 2008)

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS
Growth and Expansion
The first RIBN partnership enrolled students in 2010; 7 universities, 23 community colleges, and one private college are now involved in the project. Additional regions have declared their intent to join RIBN and are developing partnerships. Student enrollment currently approaches 200 and the first graduates will be awarded BSNs in 2014. The model is projected to create an additional 175 BSN prepared nurses for NC annually beginning 2020. Ongoing evaluation and program refinement is identifying best practices in regards to policy, student qualifications, and success factors and strengthening the program as statewide expansion occurs.

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Replication
Replication is feasible as evidenced by rapid program expansion. RIBN's strength, critical to its success and sustainability, is a regionally based leadership model. While a statewide coordinating body exists, local advisory boards of academic and practice partners and other local stakeholders are established and provide leadership to each regional program. Student Success Advocates, a critical role within each collaborative, serve to recruit, mentor, and nurture RIBN students through the rigorous course of study.

ECONOMIC IMPACT
- Entering the workplace as a BSN early in the nursing career offers career progression and financial earning advantages.
- The cost of earning a BSN through RIBN is economically feasible at $6685 > ADN and $9175> traditional BSN.
- The net cost of RIBN, adjusted for incremental increases in revenue from student tuition, is incurred by the community colleges and universities primarily in support of the Student Success Advocates (SSA).
- Hospitals and practice settings realize significant cost avoidance as a result of reductions in employee turnover and tuition assistance costs.

The cost savings for hospitals and other practice providers that benefit from hiring RIBN graduates exceed the overall additional costs and expenses for the community colleges and universities to offer RIBN as RIBN graduates enter the workforce. By the year 2020, the annual savings for practice providers is almost double the overall annual expense for community colleges and universities to offer RIBN.

RECOMMENDATIONS
- Expand and embed RIBN state-wide as an economically feasible option to increase the proportion of BSN nurses in North Carolina to 80% by 2025.
- Hospitals and other practice providers should financially support the expansion and sustainability of RIBN given the robust return on investment.

PRESENTERS
Polly Johnson, MSN RN FAAN President and CEO, Foundation for Nursing Excellence
Nettie T. Evans, MSN RN NEA-BC Program Director, Foundation for Nursing Excellence

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REFERENCES