

Idaho Business Review Online, Wednesday, Feb. 16, 2011 – by Anne Wallace Allen

Recession reversed nursing shortage; higher-level nurses still needed

The employment balance between available nurses and nursing jobs has swung in favor of employers. A statewide shortage of registered nurses has eased a year longer than expected by the Idaho Department of Labor. But while hospitals have a ready supply of registered nurses, they still need more nurses with advanced degrees and licenses than they can find.

“We now have an ample supply of new graduates to fill entry level nursing positions,” said Ken Dey, a spokesman for the Boise-based St. Luke’s Health System. “Where we are still experiencing a shortage is for positions that require more experience specifically in areas such as coronary care, intensive care, neonatal, operating room and pediatric intensive care.”

Nurse hiring at St. Luke’s, the state’s largest private employer, dipped in 2009 and picked up again in 2010, Dey said. The health system, which includes several hospitals and clinics in southern Idaho, now has 86 open positions for registered nurses, or RNs, five openings for nurse practitioners or physician assistants, and 26 openings for technicians, Dey said.

More people enrolled in nursing programs over the last few years than analysts at the Department of Labor had expected, said department spokesman Bob Fick. In 2010, nearly 500 more adults than expected entered Idaho nursing programs, sending enrollment to more than 2,800.

Analysts at the Labor Department said in [a study published this week](#) that the recession likely led some nurses to delay their retirement plans. Sixty percent of Idaho’s registered nurses are 45 and older - an increase from 53 percent in 2008, Fick said. One in five nurses is under 35.

Fick said the number of RNs will meet demand everywhere in Idaho except in the southwestern part of the state, where a shortage will continue through 2015 and beyond.

Saint Alphonsus Health System, also based in Boise, has 23 openings for RNs, and two openings for licensed practical nurses, or LPNs, said Elizabeth Duncan, a spokeswoman for Saint Alphonsus. LPNs work only in Saint Alphonsus clinics, not in its hospitals, Duncan said.