

Idaho Statesman Online, Thursday, Feb. 18, 2010 – by Colleen LaMay and Jan Jarvis, McClathy Newspapers

## Treasure Valley's new nurses will have to look harder for jobs

*200 people have already applied for 20 openings this spring at St. Luke's.*

The jobless who returned to school to pursue "recession-proof" medical jobs may find it more difficult than they expected. "Do we have a lot more graduate nurses out there than there are positions?" asked Joanne Clavelle, chief nursing officer for St. Luke's hospitals in Boise and Meridian. "Absolutely."

It was a different story a few years ago. Treasure Valley hospitals were recruiting sophomore students, still two years away from graduating. Nationwide, hospitals were offering nurses \$10,000 signing bonuses and loan payoffs as incentives.

The starting pay for nurses in the Valley ranges from about \$21 per hour up to \$28 per hour, depending on experience, for nurses with bachelor's degrees. Today, some nursing school graduates say they're fortunate to find a job. "It took me a year to find something, and it wasn't easy," said Ann Karl, who graduated in 2008 and recently went to work for Huguley Memorial Medical Center in Burleson, Texas.

In Idaho, new nurses might not get their first choice of jobs, but they can find work, said Dr. Pam Springer, chairman of the Department of Nursing at Boise State University. There is always a demand in rural Idaho for nurses willing to move, she said.

Hospitals may employ the single biggest share of nurses, but large numbers work in public health departments, schools, doctor's offices and other settings, said Springer, who worries that if people turn away from nursing now, the once-dire nursing shortage will return.

The current surge of nurses from expanded nursing programs may need more than good grades to get jobs at area hospitals, said Karen Hodge, chief nursing officer at Saint Alphonsus. Hospitals are favoring registered nurses with four-year degrees over two-year associate degrees. They also are looking at volunteer work and other factors.

The poor economy, which reduced the number of patients, along with older nurses returning to the work force, has raised competition. Graduates nationwide are sending out hundreds of resumes, scouring hospital Web sites and bemoaning the shortage of jobs. In the Treasure Valley, Saint Alphonsus Regional Medical Center in Boise and St. Luke's hospitals in Boise and Meridian are hiring fewer nurses, but still are recruiting for positions that require more experience, such as operating rooms and critical care units. Not all Valley hospitals are cutting back on new hires. West Valley Medical Center in Canyon County is adding to its staff. "In 2009, we actually increased the number of full-time employees at our hospital, which expanded our nursing staff," Kathy Moore, CEO at West Valley Medical Center, said in an e-mail.