

Twin Falls Times News, Monday, Nov. 24, 2008 – by Ben Botkin

As economy stalls, need for nurses in Idaho remains strong

Mike Slagowski isn't sure where a career in nursing will take him. But the 36-year-old single father of three is confident it will lead to a job so he can provide for his family - a common concern as the economy continues to struggle. "People are still going to get sick," said Slagowski, who is taking nursing courses at the College of Southern Idaho.

Despite a troubled economy that's soured the national job market, nursing stands out as a career where opportunities still exist for college graduates. Health care was predicted to be Idaho's fastest-growing and highest-paying field between 2006 and 2016 - with nursing leading the way, according to the Idaho Department of Labor. The agency predicts a need of more than 500 new registered nurses in Idaho each year.

The long-term need stems from retiring nurses belonging to the baby-boom generation, an aging population and the Idaho's unprecedented growth. "You can't really tie it to just one thing," said Jan Roeser, a regional economist with the department of labor.

On Friday, CSI nursing students milled around a career fair with recruiters. Some said there's also mobility in the nursing field, with opportunities in every state. "It's pretty much guaranteed that you'll have a job no matter where you go," said Heather Callen, a CSI nursing student from Twin Falls.

That also creates openings, along with nurses who move from one specialty to another, such as from the emergency room to orthopedics. "Even though we're a small facility, we always have at least one RN opening," said Shari Rumble, a nurse with Gooding County Memorial Hospital. "It's one of those fields where there's always people who are going to get sick and need medical treatment," said Matthew Flygare, a human resources consultant with Cassia Regional Medical Center in Burley.

Even so, Nina Hollifield, an assistant professor in CSI's nursing program, noted that a couple of recruiters canceled their plans to attend, which could be a sign of tightening because of the economy.

People interested in the profession should be aware there are plenty of opportunities for specialized career growth, she said, adding that nursing shouldn't be regarded as work consisting only of menial tasks.

After he graduated next month, Wallace Maxwell of Twin Falls will work next year in an intensive care unit for premature infants at St. Luke's Magic Valley Medical Center. After 10 years in the Army, Maxwell saw his military career sidelined by an injury, so he enrolled in the nursing program.

As for Slagowski, he'd like to travel as a nurse, possibly to Alaska for work. While he's interested in emergency room work as a nurse, he is also keeping his options open. "I have no idea what the future holds," he said.