

Critical Skill Shortages Initiative: Here's Why Healthcare Professionals Should Choose Rural Southern Illinois

Healthcare professionals have many good reasons to live and work in rural Southern Illinois. With the increased growth in the region and the job opportunities offered at various health care facilities, the advantages are immense.

Four Documented Reasons:

Area hospitals and clinics have numerous job opportunities:



Southern Illinois Healthcare hospitals and clinics are thriving and growing. (Herrin Hospital, for example, is undergoing a \$20 million expansion.) Nursing and other healthcare related jobs are available at all SIH medical facilities including Memorial Hospital of Carbondale, St. Joseph Memorial Hospital of Murphysboro and Herrin Hospital.

Hamilton Memorial Hospital District in McLeansboro is a small healthcare provider which offers general healthcare services to the residents of Hamilton County and surrounding areas. The organization consists of a 25-bed hospital, a 60-bed

intermediate care nursing center, a home health agency, a physician's clinic, and a number of specialty physicians who provide an array of care to the local residents.

St. Mary's Good Samaritan is preparing for the future by expanding services and facilities throughout the region. As one of the largest healthcare organizations in Southern Illinois, St. Mary's Good Samaritan consists of two regional hospitals located in Mt. Vernon and Centralia, eight Family Health Centers, and numerous specialty programs.

Harrisburg Medical Center is a progressive hospital with 86 beds and over 40 physicians on staff. Ever growing, the hospital recently completed an expansion which includes an oncology and infusion unit and a geriatric unit in the Behavioral Health Services Department. "There are always healthcare jobs," comments Tracy Bragg, RN, BS. Bragg has over 20 years experience as a nurse and works as a case manager for Southern Illinois Healthcare. "Yes, there is a nursing shortage, but people will always need healing and care, and there are so many settings: home health, hospitals, case management and doctors' offices."



Vibrant Southern Illinois Lifestyle:

The region is bounded by the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers and dotted with accessible lakes nestled in the great hardwoods and hills of the Shawnee Natural Forest.

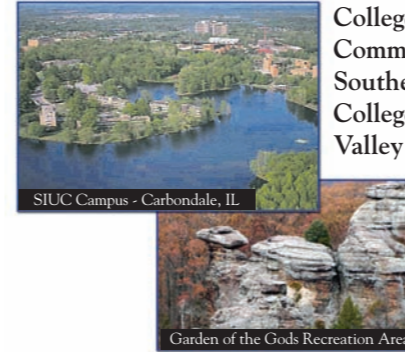
Southern Illinois is rich with state parks, including Giant City State Park

and Lodge, Garden of the Gods, Bell Smith Springs, Little Grand Canyon and Wayne Fitzgerald State Park.

"By staying here to work, I get a more peaceful lifestyle than in the city," Bragg explained. "If you want to unwind, you can take a drive on any of a thousand gravel roads and see a beautiful countryside. People in the city have to travel far to see what we see right out our windows."

Many rural areas benefit from having a college or university nearby. They bring big-city style culture without the hassles. **Southern Illinois University in Carbondale** boasts top-ranked academic and sports programs, especially in football, basketball and softball. A full schedule of theater, live music, operas, and other events are on tap at the historical **Shryock Auditorium** and **McLeod Theater**.

John A. Logan College is just ten minutes away from SIU and is one of the top-ranked community colleges in the country. Southern Illinois also is home to five other outstanding community colleges: **Frontier Community College**, **Rend Lake College**, **Shawnee Community College**, **Southeastern Illinois College** and **Wabash Valley College**.



People are friendly.

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"Folks are folks around here," Bragg said. "Everyone is kind and friendly; strangers wave at each other and people will stop to help you. There are a lot of trusting, caring people in Southern Illinois."

Healthcare workers are desperately needed.

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"Rural areas like Southern Illinois are so underserved. My heart is here. My whole desire to care for others came from my home and my family, and I want to give back," says Bragg.

OTHER DETERMINING FACTORS:

Cost of Living Savings:

One may purchase a new home with land and room for horses for less than the price of a home in many other cities.

Scholarships and grant opportunities are available:

Southern Illinois Healthcare implemented a scholarship program in 2000 for its employees and students. The average award covers tuition, books, lab fees, uniforms, and some supplies for a two-year program. If the student needs more funding, SIH will consider amending the contract to include additional needs. The scholarship recipient is required to work for SIH for two years (typically) after graduation. In the past year alone, the Southern Illinois Healthcare system has contributed over \$89,500 for the educational expenses of registered nursing students in the Southern Economic Development Region.

Hamilton Memorial Hospital in McLeansboro offers the same type of scholarship program as that offered by SIH. Though Hamilton Memorial is a smaller, more rural healthcare system, it fully supports and funds the educational opportunities and advancement potential for its employees in certain

healthcare-related fields. Any graduating high school senior living in Hamilton County is eligible for this program. The only requirement is that students must complete one full year of employment for each year of study paid for by the hospital.

St. Mary's Good Samaritan, Inc. (SMGSI) in Mt. Vernon has implemented its Forgivable Loan Repayment program. This program pays the full cost of two-year nursing program at Rend Lake College and requires a two-year work commitment after graduation. The loans pay for the entire nursing education, provide part time employment and experience while attending school, and guarantees employment upon graduation.

If a scholarship recipient fulfills his/her two-year obligation, the loan is forgiven. If a recipient fails to meet his/her two-year commitment, he/she must repay the full amount of the loan.

Harrisburg Medical Center offers a \$5,000 per year scholarship program for five nursing students per year. HMC also pays the cost of the nursing board exams for graduation, provided that the student passes on the first attempt. The student is guaranteed a position upon graduation and must agree to work at HMC one year for every year of educational assistance.

Title I funds:

Under the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 provides financial assistance to eligible adults who are 18 years of age or older, authorized to work in the US, compliant with Selective Service and have been recently laid off from a low-growth occupation or are not currently sustaining a self-sufficient family income. Through an Individual Training Account (ITA), the cost of tuition and fees for a one-year nursing program and/or a two-year program could be funded. Funds may also be available to assist with supportive services such as mileage, daycare, and uniforms, if needed.

Questions about the initiative?

If you would like additional information about the Critical Skill Shortages Healthcare Initiative, please feel free to contact:

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