

VA's New "Travel Nurse Program" Hits the Road

Program Offsets Personnel Losses, Improves Quality

WASHINGTON -- To deal with a nationwide shortage of nurses and to improve the quality of care for veterans, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has created a "Travel Nurse Corps" to enable VA nurses to travel and work throughout the Department's medical system.

"VA is committed to putting health care facilities closer to veterans," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. James B. Peake. "The Travel Nurse Corps will make it easier to bring our world-class health care professionals closer to veterans, too. And it will make it easier for us to shift personnel during times of crisis."

The Travel Nurse Corps, headquartered at the Phoenix VA Health Care System, is beginning as a three-year pilot program. Initially, it will place as many as 75 nurses at VA medical centers across the country. The goals of the program are to improve recruitment, decrease turnover of experienced nurses and maintain high standards of patient care.

Under the program, participating nurses may be temporarily assigned to distant medical centers and clinics to help nursing staffs that have vacancies, to reduce wait times or the reliance upon contractors, or to maintain high-skill services and procedures.

On February 20, the Department announced plans to create a Rural Health Care Advisory Committee to enhance VA services to veterans in rural areas. The Travel Nurse Corps will work with this national VA panel to support VA health care in rural areas.

"Those who join the VA Travel Nurse Corps will become key members of a talented group of professionals who are dedicated to providing the best care possible to our nation's veterans," said Cathy Rick, R.N., VA's chief nursing officer. "The program helps VA medical facilities address supplemental staffing needs while also ensuring there is a continued commitment to quality and safety."

Those who become VA travel nurses are compensated for their time on duty and their travel. They also receive standard government per diem allowances, which include lodging, meals and incidentals.

"This program is competitive with the private sector. VA has state-of-the-art facilities, high-tech computer systems and professional colleagues second to none," said Jacqueline Jackson, Travel Nurse Corps director at the Phoenix VA Health Care System.

The program is also designed to establish a potential pool for national emergencies and serve as a model for an expanded VA travel corps with nurses who have varying specialties. The program is designed to reduce the use of contracted nurses, thus preserving resources that can be used elsewhere to care for veterans.

To learn more about VA's Travel Nurse Corps, visit the Web site at www.travelnurse.va.gov, email travelnurse@va.gov or call toll free at (866) 664-1030 or in Phoenix at (602) 200-2398.