

Staten Island Advance
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Editorial Page

Our opinion

The need for nurses

It was conservatively estimated recently that there are 150 vacancies for registered nurses in Staten Island's hospitals, including Willowbrook State School and Sea View Hospital and home. That's a considerable shortage—it means that there are only 81 per cent of the RNs that should be taking care of the patients.

To be sure, hospital authorities have been making do by using licensed practical nurses and nursing assistants to fill in wherever possible. But the question is, are these truly adequate substitutes? No one questions their dedication, but knowledge, education and training are vital, too.

Obviously, this situation isn't unique to Staten Island—it's nationwide. Medical care for the young and for the ever-growing number of elderly has increased both in scope and quality. Specialized knowledge has become vital to nurses in hospitals where new and complicated equipment are an ingredient of everyday care but especially a part of areas for intensive care.

It's time for some action on the federal level to cure this shortage. One way would be to make it possible to study for a registered nurse's certificate at little or no tuition, possibly even with a living allowance. This would have the happy effect also of providing career opportunities for those in low-income families.

This could be termed a welfare proposal for adequate nursing care is for the welfare of every one of us when illness or accident occurs.