

## **COVER LETTER FOR 2006 LINKAGES AWARDS CALL FOR ABSTRACTS**

Project Title: Nursing Residency: Ensuring Minnesota's Future Workforce  
(branded as "N-Lighten Nurse Residency Program")

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## **N-Lighten: A Residency Experience for Nurses**

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### **Abstract**

The University of Minnesota (U of MN) School of Nursing has collaborated with five diverse health care sites including the Dakota County Public Health Department to produce the first federally funded nurse residency program in Minnesota. The N-Lighten Nurse Residency Program is a non-clinical residency program designed to support registered nurses in the first year of practice who have either recently graduated from nursing school or have changed specialty in nursing. This innovative program supports nurses through mentorship and a web-based curriculum in order to facilitate the successful transition of new graduate nurses into their roles as professional nurses. The website features learning modules which are interactive and were designed as “magazine issues” that focus on topics that will help nurses explore their practice and grow professionally. The combination of support from mentors and pertinent information to improve practice provides a unique environment for N-Lighten program residents and seeks to facilitate the recruitment and retention of new nurses by health care organizations.

Utilizing a partnership model in diverse sites creates a residency curriculum that is transferable and addresses the recommendations in *Health Care at Crossroads* to broaden programs beyond a single institution (JCAHO, 2002). Along with Dakota County and the U of MN School of Nursing, other partners on this project are Mercy Hospital and Health Care Center, Moose Lake; University of Minnesota Medical Center, Minneapolis; Methodist Hospital, St. Louis Park; and North Memorial Medical Center, Robbinsdale.

The objectives of this project that are being accomplished through this collaborative partnership between education and practice include: (1) Promote the professional socialization of the nurse residents from graduate nurse to professional nurse; (2) Create and test a curriculum to develop a professional nurse able to deliver culturally competent quality nursing care (3) Facilitate the achievement of nurse recruitment goals for each organization and improve the retention of new graduate nurses in the organization and therefore the profession and (4) Evaluate the effectiveness of a partnership model for nurse residency program development and implementation. Furthermore, an advisory board whose expertise is intentionally broad (and includes representation from the Public Health Community) is providing oversight and guidance related to the development and evaluation of N-Lighten.

The outcomes noted to date include partner site networking and resource sharing, the creation of a novel web based educational product which focuses on topics such as workplace communication, evidence-based practice, leadership and followership and mentorship support to new nurses during the first year of practice. The formal evaluation has two foci: 1) a process focus to answer broad questions about the quality and integrity of the project and 2) an outcome focus to address questions about the achievement of project objectives as well as evaluating the overall project. This evaluation is in progress.

### **Successes, Difficulties, and “The Unexpected”**

Recruiting Public Health Nurses (PHNs) to work for local public health departments has been increasingly difficult. A 2004 survey by the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) found a shortage of PHNs throughout the state. Thus, the practice of recruiting and hiring only experienced nurses to work in public health has changed in the past two years. As new graduate nurses have been recruited and hired in Dakota County for PHN positions, the N-Lighten Program has successfully been used as a recruitment incentive and an enhancement to the standard orientation process. The nursing learning modules can be easily accessed on the Web (<http://www.nlighten.umn.edu>) and compliment the independent nature of the orientation plan used in the agency. An unexpected bonus has been the N-Lighten mentorship program component where all three of the public health nurses have been paired with an expert public health nurse working at MDH. The connections with the mentors who are MDH staff have proven to greatly expand the PHNs understanding of local-state partnerships and given them a boarder perspective of public health. It has also resulted in the public health department being represented on a few key regional committees that are addressing health disparities.

### **Benefit to the Agency and the Community and Impact on Recruitment/ Retention Efforts**

As a partner in the N-Lighten Program, public health has been able to collaborate with the U of MN and other non-public health agencies to network and increase the awareness and understanding of Public Health Nursing practice. During Dakota County’s involvement with the N-Lighten program, three new graduate nurses have been hired as PHNs and there has been 100% retention of these staff. The connection with the U of MN has also helped recruitment efforts, as two of the new staff are U of MN graduates.