



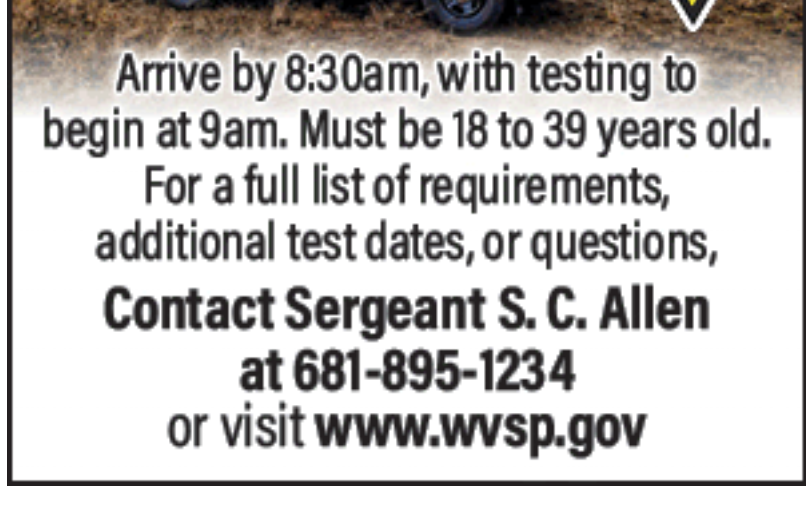
# Tara Hulsey: Nurses with bachelor's degrees have higher ceiling (Opinion)

By Tara Hulsey Sep 14, 2024 Updated 41 mins ago 2 min to read

I knew from the time I was a little girl that I wanted to be a nurse. I have always said nursing isn't just a profession, it's a calling.

When I enrolled for my undergraduate education, I knew I wanted to be able to provide the highest level of care for my future patients. My Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree prepared me to do that and so much more.

My BSN established the educational foundation I needed to pursue my Master's of Science in Nursing, where I received specialized training in maternal-child nursing, which is a true passion of mine. These degrees allowed me to later pursue my PhD in Nursing Science, along with a teaching certificate.



Without that foundational BSN degree, I could not have become an advanced practice nurse, a nursing educator, a nursing school dean nor a nursing board president.

When choosing a nursing program, it is essential for prospective students to take their future career trajectories into account. A BSN is the highest entry level degree into the nursing field. It not only prepares graduates to provide better patient outcomes at the bedside, but it also establishes a path forward for nurses to pursue higher education. With higher level degrees, nurses can then become managers, advanced practice providers or nurse educators.

The research is clear: Patients who are cared for by baccalaureate-prepared nurses experience better outcomes, lower mortality rates, and lower failure-to-rescue rates.

Experts called for increasing the number of baccalaureate-prepared nurses in the workforce to at least 80% by 2020 in The Institute of Medicine's The Future of Nursing report. As of May this year, the Health Resources and Services Administration reports the U.S. is still behind on that goal by 11%. With roughly 4.7 million nurses employed, according to the National Council of State Boards of Nursing, that's a shortage of more than 500,000 baccalaureate-prepared nurses.

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Graduating registered nurses at any degree level is important, as HRSA's Health Workforce Analysis projects a shortage of more than 78,000 RNs by next year. But the demand is high for advanced practice nurses, too. The Advanced Practice Registered Nurse workforce is expected to grow by 38% through 2032. Nearly 30,000 new APRNs will be needed to meet the demand for primary and specialty care. APRNs can also provide access to care in the rural areas and underserved populations.

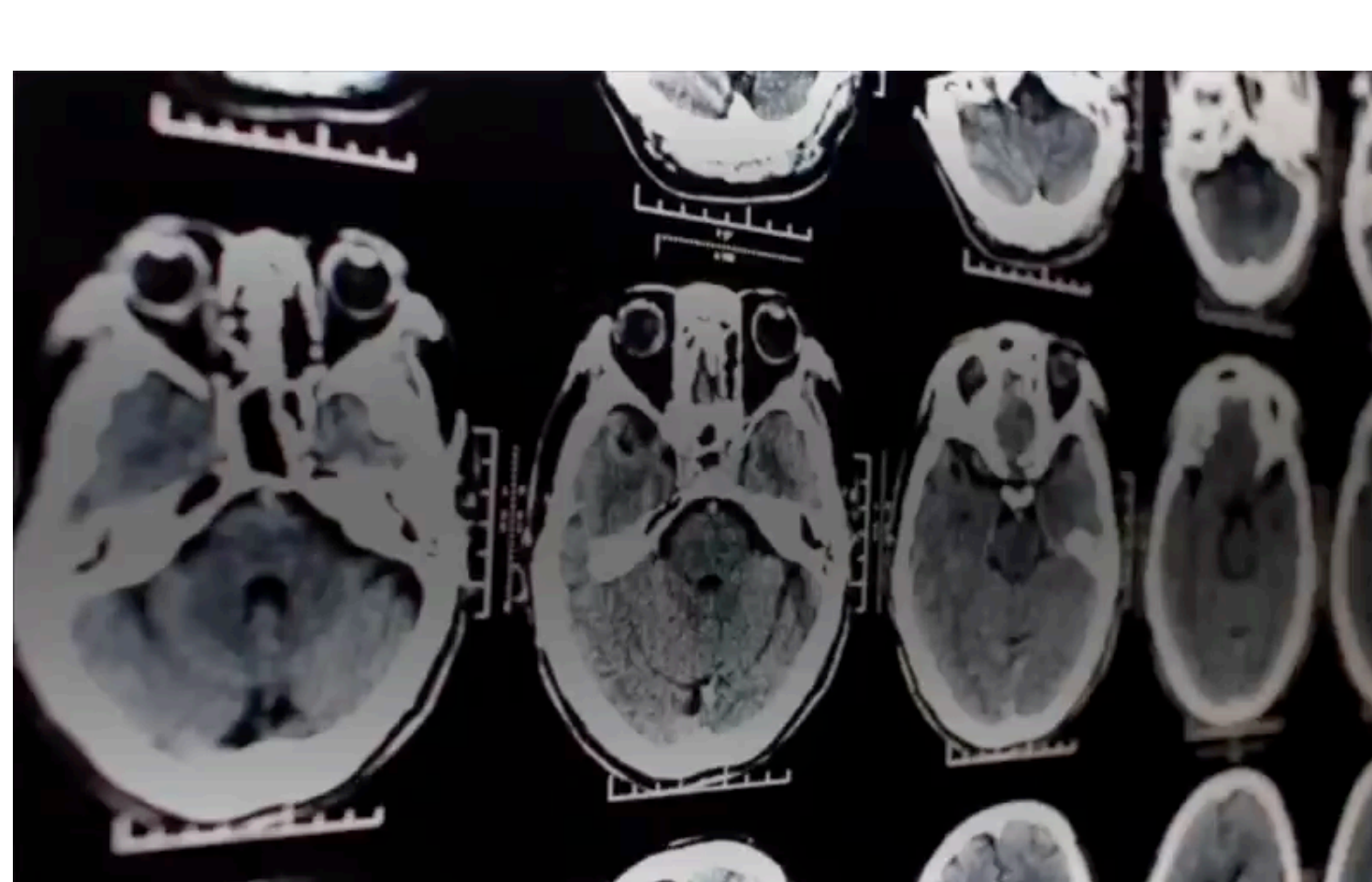
By educating and graduating BSN-prepared nurses from five campus locations (Beckley, Bridgeport, Charleston, Keyser and Morgantown) and online, the West Virginia University School of Nursing is part of the solution. Time and time again, employers express their gratitude for how well prepared our graduates are for their nursing careers.

I urge prospective students and their families to consider the benefits of a bachelor's degree when applying to a nursing program. Higher salaries, opportunities to become managers and leaders in your field, and the chance to educate the next generation are among the many pros of becoming a baccalaureate-prepared nurse. Also, be sure to look closely at accreditation information, as well as transferability for program credits when considering your nursing education.

The WVU School of Nursing offers many scholarship opportunities are available to students, and many hospitals offer financial incentives and student loan reimbursements for work agreements. A BSN is a worthwhile investment.

We also partner with 11 community colleges for RN to BSN transfer agreements. These agreements provide students the affordability and proximity of a community college, with the opportunity to seamlessly transfer into a fully online RN to BSN program with the WVU School of Nursing. These partnerships include Blue Ridge Community and Technical College; BridgeValley Community and Technical College; Columbus State Community College; College of Southern Maryland; Cuyahoga Community College (Tri-C); Eastern West Virginia Community and Technical College; Hagerstown Community College; Harford Community College; Hocking College; New River Community and Technical College and West Virginia Northern Community College.

Choosing the BSN path was certainly right for me, and I hope it is for prospective students across the state, too.



Dr. Tara Hulsey is dean of the WVU School of Nursing and president of the West Virginia Board of Examiners for Professional Registered Nurses.



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