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Boston University
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Dear Editor:

The health-care industry in Massachusetts is facing challenges that only a decade ago were of little concern. Today those challenges are approaching crisis proportions. This fall Boston University School of Public Health (BUSPH) is offering a unique program that addresses two issues that are central to the future of health-care: long-term care and opportunities for nursing leadership. The Executive Nursing Management Program for Long Term Care would be an excellent subject for an article on the current situation and some of the efforts under way to direct the course of this burgeoning industry—before the challenge becomes a crisis.

While nursing demands are increasing, the supply of nursing professionals is diminishing. The nursing shortage is becoming particularly acute in long-term care and is expected to worsen as the population ages and people over 85 become America's fastest growing population. Despite increasing demands for long-term care providers, it is an area of practice that has failed to draw essential resources. Many nurses simply are not aware of the opportunities available to them in long-term care.

Historically, long-term care nursing has been perceived as less challenging than acute-care nursing, according to Gail Douglas, director of Health Care Workforce Innovation at BUSPH. "This is unfortunate because it created barriers to exciting opportunities for leadership and innovation," says Douglas, a former acute-care nursing director. As one of the program's organizers and instructors, she is working toward creating a recognition of the choices, challenges and career alternatives available through long-term care nursing.

A nursing director of a long-term care facility faces a very different set of challenges than her counterpart in acute care, according to Douglas. Long-term care facilities are heavily regulated and face constraints that do not exist in acute care. This environment creates the need for new levels of knowledge and leadership to preserve the quality of health care. A long-term care nursing director must not only satisfy patients' medical demands, but must also understand and negotiate all aspects of long-term care delivery, including legislation, reimbursement, rate setting and human-resource management.

Beginning in early September and running for approximately ten weeks, the program will offer a broad base of experience and expertise, and will provide human-resource management training; an understanding of such issues as the regulatory framework, reimbursement and quality assessment; approaches to improving patient care; and information concerning facilities operations and support services.

"We are excited about this program and hope that nursing professionals, as well as those who are considering a career in the field, realize the opportunities for creativity and growth in long-term care," says Douglas.

If you would to interview Gail Douglas, please contact me (617) 638-8491.