

Initiative promotes health care



Chris Huber/Republic

Christine Hamilton, left, and U.S. Sen. Tim Johnson, D-S.D., talk to nursing students enrolled in the Prairie Futures Initiative on Thursday afternoon at a Sanford facility in Chamberlain.

Program trains nontraditional students living in rural areas

By ANNA JAUHOLA
The Daily Republic

CHAMBERLAIN — There is a need for nurses to serve in rural areas, and a foundation in Chamberlain is working to supply that need.

The Prairie Futures Initiative is partnering with the Matson Halverson Christiansen Hamilton Foundation, University of South Dakota and Sanford Health to train nontraditional students living in rural areas who want to obtain post-secondary health care education. The initiative is meant to foster rural economic development.

U.S. Sen. Tim Johnson, D-S.D., visited with eight nursing students and Sanford medical personnel Thursday about the initiative.

Christine Hamilton, board president of the Matson Halverson Christiansen Hamilton Foundation, took part in planning the initiative and spoke during the event Thursday.

"The foundation is really centered around economic development and addresses the nursing shortage," she said. "It's focused on the nontraditional students. We like to have people who are already here and committed to being in the area for a while. They can get their education right here."

The nursing students who visited Thursday with Johnson are part of the initiative. They come from all over the area to the Sanford Chamberlain hospital three days a week to study in hands-on and classroom settings, said Erica Peterson, interim CEO at Sanford Chamberlain.

They also spend time in the laboratory, clinic and long-term care center.

"You are the only ones with hands-on rural training," Johnson said. "I feel you don't have many problems getting into a nursing career in Sioux Falls or Rapid City, but there are too few who go into rural nursing, and you are to be congratulated for that."

Hamilton said the initiative's first class will graduate in May and there are plans in the works to begin increasing numbers to provide better rural health care.

Hamilton hopes the initiative will be able to create a vision compelling enough for the entire country to see Chamberlain as a center for excellence in rural health care.

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