

## **Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida , MicroSpine team up for scholarships**

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Oct. 18--What began two years ago as a major initiative by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida (BCBSF) to increase training of new nurses has paid dividends after MicroSpine Surgery Center in DeFuniak Springs matched a BCBSF contribution for first-year Okaloosa-Walton College nursing students to receive seven Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida /Microspine Scholarships.

Crestview businessman Dale Rice Jr., president of the OWC Foundation, described as "win-win-win-win situation" the four-way partnership with BCBSF, the Foundation for Florida's Community Colleges, which together funded an initial \$5 million endowment, and the local participation of MicroSpine and the OWC Foundation, which uses private contributions to match the college's annual allocation from the endowment.

"With a growing nursing program and the addition of other health programs, we would like the community to join the college and foundation in being able to match these resources each year," said Rice. "That is one sure way we can say we are taking advantage of each dollar available to train and graduate students in these healthcare fields."

Patrick Byrne, a Niceville businessman, former OWC trustee, and chairman of the Foundation for Florida's Community Colleges (FFCC), said joining forces with Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida "was a natural for us because access to quality education is vital in creating nursing and allied health professionals."

Dr. Scott Haufe, who along with Dr. Anthony Mork began the MicroSpine facility, said, "We are proud to be associated with the college and Blue Cross in this endeavor. This type of health care training is important for our communities."

Catherine Kelly, vice president for public affairs, signature programs, for BCBSF, and Judy Wilson Green, associate director of the FFCC, joined OWC officials in announcing the partnership.

Kelly described the partnership as a "strategic initiative" of support for nursing and allied health programs at the state's colleges and universities. She said the objective of the endowment is seen as having a "sustained impact in a health care area of significant need" to improve a critical shortage of nurses and allied health professionals statewide.

Dr. Bob Richburg, OWC president, said as the college continues to grow its nursing program to combat the shortage of some 3,500 nurses in Okaloosa and Walton counties, the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida /MicroSpine Scholarships are a way of "making it financially possible for students to obtain an education in nursing and health fields, especially those whom Blue Cross is seeking to assist from culturally diverse and under-represented backgrounds."

As the college's allocation from BCBSF increases, Richburg said the OWC Foundation will seek local matching funds to award scholarships for dental assisting, surgical technology, and radiography technology. "As a steward of the resources made available through the endowment, the OWC Foundation is ready to prepare the next generation of nurses and allied health personnel in our community," Richburg said.

The students admitted to the OWC Nursing Program for 2006-2007 selected for Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida /Microspine Scholarships are: Jenesa Dawe of Eglin Air Force Base, Cheri Denney of Niceville, Eun-Sook Hahn of Fort Walton Beach, Tuianda Moore of Laurel Hill, Sheila Vega of Florala, Ala., Rosalee Wangerin of Fort Walton Beach, and Craig Wright of

Fort Walton Beach.

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