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Connecticut Prepares to Honor Nurses at 7th Annual Nightingale Awards for Excellence in Nursing

NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT—Seven years ago one home health care agency in New Haven set out to make a difference in the nursing shortage in Connecticut by celebrating the profession of nursing. May 3, 2007, will mark the 7-year anniversary of the Nightingale Awards for Excellence in Nursing program in Connecticut, an annual event honoring nurses for going above and beyond the call of duty in an array of clinical and educational environments.

The Visiting Nurse Association of South Central Connecticut created the Nightingale Awards for Excellence in Nursing in 2001 as a Gala program to "celebrate and elevate" the nursing profession. The goals of the program are to focus public attention and recognize the breadth and scope of nursing practice at the local level, to encourage retention, and inspire future nurses.

Over 300 very special nurses will be honored this year at four exciting events in Wallingford, Stamford, Groton and Hartford. The Nightingale Awards for Excellence in Nursing will be presented to registered nurses and licensed practical nurses in all fields of practice. Criteria for selection, established by a panel of professionals, require that an honoree has: made a significant impact on patient care; gone "beyond the call;" demonstrated excellence; shown commitment to the community; and/or had an outstanding life-long achievement.

Many of the State's major health care organizations and practitioners enthusiastically support this exciting program since they recognize the importance of increasing the number of nurses in this state in order to meet future health care needs of the "baby boomer" population. Over 100 health care organizations, including hospitals, medical practices, long term care facilities, home health care agencies, nursing schools, and community health centers attended and nominated nurses for the special honor last year.

Again this year, Connecticut Schools of Nursing will not be able to accept all qualified students even during a severe shortage of registered nurses in the state. For example,

Sheila B. Solernou, Division Director of Nursing at Gateway Community College in New Haven, reported a total of 678 applicants for the next academic year, yet they will only able to accept 72 students.

Both the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) and the National League For Nursing (NLN) recently voiced concern that proposed cuts to nursing education would seriously hamper the education of new registered nurses across the country. "Nursing schools today are unable to accommodate all qualified students wishing to enter entry-level nursing programs given the pervasive shortage of nurse faculty," said AACN President Jeanette Lancaster. "Focusing solely on funding the education of new nurses will not work as a effective solution to the nursing shortage since schools are already limited in the number of students they can accept due to an insufficient supply of nurse educators.

A recent NLN Survey found 8.6 percent of faculty were 61 years of age or older, and 75 percent of the current faculty population is expected to retire by 2019. Approximately 1,800 full-time faculty members leave their positions each year.

"It is painfully apparent," said National League For Nursing CEO Dr. Beverly Malone, "that nurses need to be fearless advocates for increased funding for workforce development if we are to have a chance to meet our health care needs in the coming years."

Connecticut Regional Hosts for this event are: VNA Health Care, Inc. – Hartford; VNA of South Central Connecticut, Inc. – New Haven; VNA of Southeastern Connecticut – New London; & Visiting Nurse & Hospice Care of Southwestern, CT-Stamford.

For more information on the Nightingale Awards, please visit www.nightingaleawardsct.org. ###