

HUMAN CAPITAL

A snapshot of the jobs — and people — powering Greater Baltimore's education community



NICHOLAS GRINER | STAFF

Nursing leaders

Firth says management training is critical

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Isabella Firth

Lifespan Network

TITLE: President

AGE: 46

EDUCATION: B.A. from the University of Virginia; Masters of Arts from Northeastern University.

The national nursing shortage impacts the industry top to bottom. Although shortages for hospital bedside nurses commands much of the attention, there is also unmet needs in leadership roles. That's where the Beacon Institute comes into play.

The Beacon Institute is the educational affiliate of LifeSpan Network, a Columbia-based senior care provider association. It offers nursing certification programs and leadership and management skills training with an emphasis on senior care.

Lifespan President Isabella Firth said the Beacon Institute had its highest enrollment in its 14-year history in 2010. She said nurses often move into leadership roles through seniority without possessing the necessary management skills.

As more senior nurses retire, a new generation of leaders will take the reins. Firth said that reality is partly responsible for the Beacon Institute's 60 percent enrollment increase in 2010. She recently spoke to the *BBJ* about the changing nursing industry.

BBJ: Why has Beacon Institute enrollment shot up in the past year?

Firth: We have a lot of clinical people who realize they don't have the skills they need to do the job well. If you go to nursing school, they teach you the basics but not the particular issues that

affect seniors.

We do clinical training. We also offer leadership and management skills. Often nurses are in leadership roles and haven't had that training. There just aren't enough trained nurses in all kinds of settings — senior care, hospitals and home health nurses.

BBJ: Have you added staff to meet the demands of increased enrollment?

Firth: We have. We're trying to figure out where else we can have our classes closer to Baltimore and metro Washington, D.C. We're also going to do half-day programs and take training on-site to senior care facilities.

BBJ: How important is it to understand the rules governing senior care?

Firth: It's crucial. We don't want to scare nurses away. They don't want to be in a job in which they fail. We want to give these men and women the skills they need so they can be successful.

The penalties for senior care organizations for not abiding by the rules are severe. It's absolutely critical that the staff caring for seniors is aware of the very complex and always changing rules.

BBJ: Are you seeing a lot of people changing careers to get into senior care?

Firth: I'm seeing more interest in senior care as a place for a career than in the past. The boomers are getting older and that generation is [trying to figure out] how do I take care of my parents? There is a whole group of businesses that help seniors. People are more aware there are opportunities for jobs whether its clinical, managerial or care givers.

BBJ: What traits must someone looking to enter the nursing field possess?

Firth: You have to be good with people. We prefer to see compassionate, giving people. We want smart, competent people who want to learn and grow.