

# Something for all of us in COCC bond

By [Patricia Cagney](#) / *Bulletin guest columnist*

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Central Oregon residents will soon be asked to vote on Ballot Measure 9-73. When a new bond measure is on the ballot, our natural response is to ask: What is in it for me? This bond measure has something for all of us. At some point, each of us will need the care of a nursing assistant, registered nurse or another health care provider.

Central Oregon, like the rest of the country, is facing a looming shortage of these professionals. If we want these professionals to be there to care for us when we need them, we should support the Central Oregon Community College bond to finance the construction of new health careers and science buildings. These buildings will house new anatomy, physiology and microbiology labs and will allow the space needed to expand the nursing and other health care programs.

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, employment of registered nurses is expected to grow 23 percent from 2006 to 2016, much faster than the average for all occupations and, because the occupation is very large, many new jobs will result. In fact, 587,000 new jobs are projected, among the largest number of new jobs for any occupation. Additionally, hundreds of thousands of job openings will result from the need to replace experienced nurses who leave the occupation as the generation of “baby boomers” retires.

Growth will be driven by technological advances in patient care, which permit a greater number of health problems to be treated, and by an increasing emphasis on preventive care. In addition, the number of older people, who are much more likely than younger people to need nursing care, is projected to grow rapidly.

Employment in nursing care facilities is expected to grow because of increases in the number of elderly, many of whom require long-term care. Employment in home health care is also expected to increase rapidly in response to the growing number of older persons with functional disabilities, consumer preference for care in the home and technological advances that make it possible to bring increasingly complex treatments into the home.

Employers in some parts of the country and in certain employment settings already report difficulty in attracting and retaining an adequate number of registered nurses, primarily because of an aging, retiring workforce, and a lack of trained younger workers to fill positions. Enrollments in nursing programs at all levels have increased rapidly in the past few years as students seek jobs with stable employment.

However, many qualified applicants are being turned away because of a shortage of educational facilities.

COCC would like to educate the future registered nurses our community will need. There are more than 400 pre-nursing students competing for one of 45 annual spots in the COCC nursing

program. They also compete for space in over-crowded anatomy, physiology and microbiology classes. Students interested in obtaining their certified nursing assistant license are turned away because COCC does not have adequate facilities or staffing to expand the program.

Health care jobs provide good wages and benefits. After just one term at COCC, a certified nursing assistant can earn \$10 to \$14 per hour plus benefits. If that student continues his/her education and obtains a degree in nursing, he/she can earn \$50,000 or more per year, plus benefits.

Additionally, the bond measure will allow for the renovation of old spaces vacated by the move of these programs into the new building. This renovated space will allow the college to expand offerings in other programs, easing the campus-wide space shortage.

I strongly urge you to look ahead to the future and to your own health care needs. Please support COCC in its goal to supply the health care professionals our community needs, now and in the future.

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