One Step Ahead
Ridgewater’s membership in the CIHSEP partnership is helping position Minnesota as a healthcare leader.

It’s a well-known fact that there’s a national shortage of nurses. According to the latest statistics, here in Minnesota alone, 2,400 registered nursing and 1,100 practical nursing positions are unfilled—and the number of vacant positions is expected to double by 2008.

That’s just one challenge being addressed by the Center for Integrated Health Science Education and Practice (CIHSEP), of which Ridgewater College is a member. CIHSEP is a joint partnership of education, industry, and community created to transform healthcare education and delivery across the state. CIHSEP was awarded $3 million to help position Minnesota as a leader in healthcare education, research, practice, and innovation.

Taking the lead
Ridgewater, recognized for its progressive work in healthcare simulation, is taking a lead in CIHSEP by heading the organization’s simulation study group. Simulation training offers nurses and healthcare teams the opportunity to learn the complete range of likely medical experiences they’ll find in practice.

“The military and aviation have used simulation for years. Healthcare simulation is up and coming,” says Robert Cannon, Ridgewater’s vice president of Customized and Continuing Education. “Ridgewater’s two simulation centers use simulation mannequins and supporting technologies that allow students to work within scenarios they may encounter in a ‘live’ setting in their professional work. Simulation makes for a safe environment to make mistakes and learn practices—without the risks of ‘practicing’ on humans.”

Ridgewater’s role in CIHSEP is assessing healthcare simulation in Minnesota—how it’s used, who’s using it, and how it should best be used. CIHSEP, for example, is examining how simulation technology could help remedy the clinical bottleneck in nursing. “We need to produce more nurses, but the clinical experience is limited to 10 students,” Cannon says, adding that, by some estimates, hundreds of people are on waiting lists for registered nursing and practical nursing programs statewide. “We need to think creatively. One example would be using simulation to supplement the clinical experience, which could as much as double the number of local nurses produced.”

Lynn Johnson, Ridgewater’s director of nursing, says CIHSEP is well-positioned to help Minnesota advance the use of healthcare simulation. “We’re looking at gaps in its use and making recommendations,” she says, noting that students benefit significantly from the technology. “They do things they’d only observe in clinical settings. You learn by doing and by making mistakes.”

—Liz Wolf