

The Nurse Education Imperative

Risa Lavizzo-Mourey, MD, MBA

Nearly 18 months after the release of the Institute of Medicine (IOM) report "The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health," it makes sense to ask: what changes are occurring? how can we make the most difference? and where can the report's recommendations take us toward improving patient care?

One of the report's focal points, and a priority for the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, is ensuring that nurses are educated and trained to excel as 21st century health care delivery becomes more complex and extends beyond acute care settings. The Future of Nursing report emphasizes that if nurses are to maintain their effectiveness in providing high-quality patient care, they will need to be better prepared. Specifically, the report recommends creating a system that produces more nurses educated at the bachelor of science (BSN) level and policies that allow nurses to transition seamlessly from an associate's degree to the BSN or a higher degree. From the perspective of the IOM committee that developed the report, increasing the percentage of the workforce holding a BSN to 80% by 2020 is both an achievable goal and a necessary step to meet workforce competency and capacity requirements (Institute of Medicine [IOM], 2011).

As a physician, I have seen the tremendous capabilities of nurses—capabilities that are essential to meeting patient needs. But to ensure that they maximize their contributions to health and health care, nurses will need advanced skills and expertise in care management, interdisciplinary teamwork, problem solving, and more. This makes higher levels of education imperative. In addition, having a larger pool of highly educated nurses will be necessary to expand the ranks of nurse faculty, addressing the shortfall that now causes



nursing schools to turn away thousands of qualified applicants each year. These advanced degree nurses are also needed to help ameliorate the worsening primary care shortage.

For numerous reasons, employers will benefit from advancing levels of nurse education as well. For one, the advent of value-based payment systems will place an even greater imperative on having a highly trained health care workforce. As payers increasingly focus on hospital readmission rates, nurse-sensitive quality measures, and care coordination, nurses' performance will be even more critical to the bottom line. More BSN-prepared nurses will mean a bigger cadre of nurses prepared to fully participate in interdisciplinary care teams and to take on leadership roles at the staff and executive levels in a transformed health care system.

In a recent survey conducted by AONE (Caramanica & Thompson, 2012), 51% of nurse leaders said their organizations preferentially hire BSN nurses, although just 32% pay BSN nurses more at the time of hire. Lack of access to BSN nurses and lack of support from organizational leaders were cited as the top barriers to such policies. Ninety-three percent

of survey respondents noted that their institutions offer tuition benefits to support associate's degree-to-BSN advancement.

Some of the leading nurse employers favor advanced degree nurses. The well-respected Johns Hopkins Hospital has a stated preference for hiring BSN nurses and requires nurses to obtain at least a BSN before going beyond a certain point on the career ladder. The for-profit Tenet Health Care Corporation has adopted similar policies, and the Veteran's Health Administration also links education to career advancement (Pittman, Horton, Keeton, & Herrera, 2011).

These policies can yield positive benefits, but monetizing the return on investment is challenging. We know that turnover rates are sensitive to human resources policies, including tuition reimbursement and career-ladder programs that provide growth opportunities (Pittman et al., 2011). There is evidence that organizations that earn the Magnet Recognition Program^a credential for nursing excellence have lower turnover rates among nurses and thus have improved clinical outcomes (Drenkard, 2010). In Magnet-designated organizations, chief nursing officers and 75% of nurse managers are required to have a BSN degree or higher (Frellick, 2011). An important consideration for employers is that education progression policies may yield savings that result from lower nurse turnover and vacancies, estimated to cost from \$22,000 to \$64,000 per position

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(Strachota, Normandin, O'Brien, Clary, & Krukow, 2003).

We cannot wait to take action; failing to grow a better educated nursing workforce risks disastrous results. This is particularly important in light of the aging nursing workforce as well as the coming expansion of health insurance coverage in 2014. Although a recent study shows faster growth in the supply of nurses than anticipated, its authors caution that more progress is needed to meet our aging population's need for highly skilled nurses (Auerbach, Buerhaus, & Staiger, 2011).

Around the country, educational institutions are finding creative ways of encouraging and facilitating progression to BSN and higher-level degrees. For example, the Oregon Consortium for Nursing Education has created a shared curriculum across 8 community colleges and the Oregon Health & Science University School of Nursing, which enables students to complete BSN coursework without leaving their home community. Graduates are trained in clinical judgment, patient-centered care, systems thinking, leadership, and evidence-based practice. In New Mexico, leaders will discard 24 separate curricula in favor of a uniform nursing curriculum and a shared faculty pool. Florida is developing RN-to-BSN educational models, including community college transition to state college programs and community college transition to state university regional partnerships. Colorado is developing such partnerships as well.

These are shining examples of the evolution that needs to occur nationwide. To meet our nation's health care needs, we must strengthen the nursing profession at all levels, from the front lines to the executive ranks. That is precisely why we partnered with the IOM to develop the report and why we are actively engaged in facilitating its implementation through the Future of Nursing: *Campaign for Action*.

Tackling the barriers to educational progression requires a multifaceted approach. Far from being solvable with a single action or within a single arena, realizing full-scale change will take the commitment of many in health care, education, business, and other sectors. A key component of our effort is working with national stakeholders through the Center to Champion Nursing in America, an initiative of the AARP, the AARP Foundation, and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Because nursing is so critical to improving health care, it is a priority for our foundation and one to which we have devoted more than \$300 million over the last 10 years. At the Robert Wood Johnson

Foundation, the IOM report is our blueprint for transforming the nursing profession to help ensure that all patients receive the care they need and deserve. We will continue to address its recommendations and encourage many others to do the same to fully realize the *Campaign for Action's* vision: a nation where all have access to high-quality, patient-centered care in a health care system in which nurses contribute as essential partners in achieving success. **DN**

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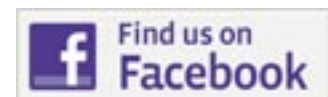
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Upcoming Events

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November 8-11, 2012

San Diego, California

NSNA 61st Annual Convention

April 3-7, 2013

Charlotte, North Carolina

Visit www.nсна.org/Meetings.aspx for more information.

What It Means to Be a Nurse: New Film Needs Your Support

On Nursing Excellence (ONE) is producing a film that explores the complex, exciting, and challenging world of being a nurse in today's society. The film will show what it means to be a nurse, the many different roles that nurses play, from the front line to the board room, and the realities of nursing, its joys and sorrows and the many ways that nurses impact the lives of others.

Needs Addressed by Project

Tremendous change is expected in health care. By deepening the understanding of nursing, we strive for a future where policymakers and health care leaders make well-informed decisions, where the public better understands the role and value of nurses (beyond TV and news perceptions), where nurses are inspired toward excellence and diversity of roles, and where others are inspired to join the profession.

Project Honoring

This film is in honor of Joyce C. Clifford, PhD, RN, FAAN, for her countless contributions to the profession of nursing; dedicated also to DAISY Award Recipients, nurses recognized by patients and their peers for going above and beyond the call of duty; and to nurses everywhere, recognized or not, who give so much of themselves to the art and science of nursing.

Target Audience

This film is for nurses, health care leaders, policymakers, payers, patients, their families, and the public at large. This film will be available to professional nursing organizations, hospitals, schools of nursing, news media, and a broad range of audiences for individual and group viewing.

Who We Are

On Nursing Excellence, Inc. (ONE), is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization committed to a strong, healthy, empowered, engaged, and effective nursing workforce. This organization is run by nurse leaders who volunteer their time to promote the work of nursing. Any funds raised beyond covering the cost of this film will go toward similar projects that support ONE's overall mission and commitment to promoting and supporting nursing.

Project Oversight Committee

Bonnie Barnes, DAISY Foundation; Carol Ann Cavouras, MS, RN, CNA; Kathy Douglas, MHA, RN; Karlene Kerfoot, PhD, RN, NEA-BC, FAAN; Karen K. Kirby, MSN, RN, NEA-BC, FACHE; and Ann Van Slyck, MSN, RN, CNA, FAAN

Your Generous Support

Projects like this cannot happen without the generous support of individuals and organizations committed to nurses and nursing. The goal is \$80,000 to cover the cost of this production. The film release is expected in October 2012. *Please act now. Help further the understanding of nurses through one of the following sponsorship levels.*

"We are in a time when understanding who nurses are and what we do is essential to shaping our future. This film explores the power, the beauty and the expansive roles of the Registered Nurse in today's world."

Kathy Douglas, MHA, RN
Film Director

Track the Film's Progress
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You Can Help Bring Nursing to the Big Screen

Join the many volunteers and donors who are making this film possible. Make a tax deductible donation from yourself or in the name of your favorite nurse or organization. Every dollar helps.

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For more information, contact Kathy Douglas (415-747-2164, Kathy.S.Douglas@gmail.com) or Karen Kirby (610-667-1800 ext. 306, kkibry@kirbybates.com). **DN**

Nursing Programs' Future Of Nursing Initiatives

Dean's Notes invited nursing programs involved in the implementation of the Robert Wood Johnson and Institute of Medicine's *Future of Nursing* report recommendations to submit summary information on their initiatives.

An overview of the variety of initiatives taking place in 29 nursing programs around the country to implement the recommendations of the *Future of Nursing* report can be accessed at <http://www.nсна.org/ConsultantsAdvisors/Publications.aspx>

Many thanks to the following nursing programs and best wishes for success as you execute your plans!

Austin Peay State University, Clarksville, TN
Bay State College, Boston, MA
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College of the Canyons, Santa Clarita, CA
Creighton University School of Nursing, Omaha, NE
Dominican College, Orangeburg, NY
East Carolina University College of Nursing, Greenville, NC
Gateway Community College, North Haven, CT
Jacksonville University, Jacksonville, FL
Johns Hopkins University School of Nursing, Baltimore, MD
Louisiana State University, Alexandria, LA
MiraCosta College, Oceanside, CA
Monmouth University, West Long Branch, NJ
Nell Hodgson Woodruff School of Nursing at Emory University, Atlanta, GA
Northwest Florida State College, Niceville, FL
Ocean County Community College & Kean University, Toms River, NJ
Saint Anselm College, Manchester, NH
Salisbury University, Salisbury, MD
Samuel Merritt University, Oakland, CA
Simmons College, Boston, MA
South Florida Community College, Avon Park, FL
Stevenson University, Stevenson, MD
SUNY Delhi, Delhi, NY
Thomas Edison State College, Trenton, NJ
University of Colorado College of Nursing, Aurora, CO
University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM
University of South Alabama College of Nursing, Mobile, AL
University of Washington School of Nursing, Seattle, WA

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Mercy College of Health Sciences Discuss the Future of Nursing with Governor

In response to the most recent report from the Institute of Medicine (IOM) on the future of the nursing profession, members of the Mercy College Association of Nursing Students (MCANS) in Des Moines, Iowa, rallied together to address the findings and present them to Iowa state governor Terry Branstad this past December.

After drafting a letter to the governor which gathered 200 students' signatures addressing issues related to nursing faculty recruitment, transition to professional practice for new grads, advanced education opportunities, and an overall forecast of the profession, several students met with Branstad to further discuss their position. In the memorandum and following discussion, students highlighted the need for comprehensive nursing residency programs to aid in the transition to practice for new grads as well as the support for nursing professionals who seek positions as academic leaders.

Armed with data from the IOM report, students took turns discussing their concerns and the issues facing the nursing profession with Governor Branstad. "While preparing to meet with the governor, I discovered how important it is to bring attention to legislation about the topics we researched," explained MCANS Vice President Jenna Boyle. Students were able to discuss openly the issues facing nursing and the climate of the profession with the governor. Their hard work in researching the issues and excellent delivery of their position got the attention of the governor, who urged the students to continue with their research and advocacy. "Governor Branstad was very engaged in the discussion and was receptive to what the students had to say," explained MCANS Publicity Chair Nicole Scar. "The governor chal-

lenged us to research some of the issues further and revisit him." MCANS Treasurer Molly Murphy agrees: "I very much enjoyed talking with Governor Branstad about the importance of nursing. He seemed to be very interested in the ideas we had."

In addition to advocating for change, students gained experience in public speaking and the legislative process. "Speaking with the Governor has given me the ability to better communicate in front of a group alone," says Samantha Studer, Breakthrough to Nursing Chair at Mercy College. MCANS president Zac Ahmann, who describes the meeting with the governor as "inspiring," now looks forward to continuing being an active member in the nursing community after graduation. "[After meeting with the governor] I hope to be involved in nursing legislation when I become a registered nurse," he says.

The students at Mercy College of Health Sciences were able to use their knowledge and strength in numbers to call attention to the issues facing new nurses as well as those who have been in the profession for some time. By remaining current on the issues, nursing students across the country can contribute to what has the potential to be a rich and fulfilling future for the nursing profession. "By simply making the governor aware of these issues," says MCANS Secretary Emily Holtmeier, "I felt like we made a difference."

For more information and to view the IOM report that sparked Mercy College of Health Science nursing students to action, visit www.iom.edu/Reports/2010/The-Future-of-Nursing-Leading-Change-Advancing-Health.aspx. For more information on Mercy College of Health Sciences, visit www.mchs.edu/ or call (515) 643-3180. **DN**