

Nursing in the Future

Although the Southwestern College Department of Nursing will not continue into the future, our graduates will continue to provide health care for decades to come. What will the nursing practice environment of the future look like? With national reports calling for improvements in the health care system, and with the recent passage of the Affordable Health Care Act, attention is now focused on providing higher quality, safer, more affordable, and more accessible health care. Increasingly, nursing is being recognized for the role it can play in addressing some of the nation's health priorities. According to "The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health," a report released last fall by the Institute of Medicine and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, nurses will be called upon to take greater responsibility in health care (RWJ/IOM, 2010). This report, completed after two years of study and deliberations, presents four key messages regarding the future of nursing, including:

1 Nurses should practice to the full extent of their education and training. There are two key points here. First, state laws that regulate nursing practice vary from state to state. Particularly for advanced practice nurses, autonomy is determined more by specific state laws than by education preparation. The report

encourages incentives for adoption of best practices and to address restrictions on business practices of health care providers. Second, research has supported the use of nurse residence programs to address the high turnover rate for new graduates. These programs help manage the transition from nursing school to nursing practice and help graduates gain skill and confidence as RNs.

2 Nurses should achieve higher levels of education and training through an improved education system that promotes seamless academic progression. Because of the increasing complexity of patient care and the need to deliver safe, quality care across settings, nurses need to attain higher levels of education. Doing so will assist nurses in gaining skill in leadership, health policy, system improvement, research and evidence-based practice, teamwork, collaboration, community and public health, geriatrics and information management. Nursing education will need to address the needs of nurses entering the profession at varying levels and facilitate advancement to higher degrees.

3 Nurses should be full partners, with physicians and other health professionals, in redesigning health care in the United States. As nursing develops models for cultivating leaders from within the profession, we will be prepared to work

collaboratively with leaders from other health professions. Such collaboration will encourage nurses to take responsibility for identifying problems with the system and to manage solutions. All nurses, regardless of educational level must take responsibility for their own personal and professional practice.

4 Effective workforce planning and policy making require better data collection and an improved information infrastructure. There will continue to be a need for comprehensive data on the number and type of health care professionals currently available and required to meet future needs.

The report is endorsed by the Tri-Council for nursing, an alliance of four autonomous nursing organizations: the American Association of Colleges of Nursing, American Nurses' Association, American Organization of Nurse Executives, and the National League for Nursing. It is exciting to see that nursing's contributions to high-quality, patient-focused care are widely recognized. In order to respond effectively to the challenges identified in the IOM report, nursing will, indeed, need to work collaboratively in advancing the report's recommendations and taking the lead in transforming the health care system.

Reference: Committee on the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Initiative on the Future of Nursing at the Institute of Medicine; Institute of Medicine. (2010). The future of nursing: Leading change, Advancing Health. Washington, DC: National Academies Press.