POSITION STATEMENT  
ON  
EDUCATIONAL ADVANCEMENT  
FOR REGISTERED NURSES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INA supports the action report adopted at the House of Delegates. ANA (O’Brien & Gural, 2008) recommends:

Increasing the level of education required for continued registration as a registered nurse by requiring registered nurses (RNs) to attain a baccalaureate degree in nursing within ten years after initial licensure while maintaining the multiple entry points into the profession. The purpose of requiring the baccalaureate degree for continued registration as a registered nurse is to be responsive to meet the increasingly complex health care needs of the residents of the U.S. Registered nurses currently licensed or enrolled in a nursing program would be grandparented. (p. 9)

BACKGROUND

INA supports the ANA (O’Brien & Gural, 2008) action report, which found the following:

- Since 1965, the ANA has supported the baccalaureate degree in nursing as preparation for entry into practice.
- The changing health care environment and consumer expectations emphasize the need to reevaluate nursing education.
- ANA recognizes the value of all entry levels into the progression and does not propose to eliminate any of those choices.
- A strong foundation in the liberal arts and sciences strengthens the student’s analytical and critical thinking skills which are needed for safe, culturally competent care; and these skills, which are further developed through baccalaureate programs, better prepare registered nurses to seek process improvements that address medical errors and other challenges in the healthcare delivery system.
- Numerous options, including accelerated RN/BS programs, distance learning programs, online programs and “college” at work-site programs, exist for registered nurses to more easily achieve a baccalaureate degree in nursing.
- The current faculty nursing shortage is negatively impacting the ability to educate future nurses.
- Requiring all registered nurses to achieve a baccalaureate degree will significantly enlarge the pool of potential nursing faculty.
• Continuing professional education is encouraged for all registered nurses, only future graduates of diploma or associate degree programs would be required to meet the academic requirement of a baccalaureate degree in nursing within 10 years of initial licensure. (p. 9-10)

In Illinois:

• There is increased availability of program articulation.
• Other professions in Illinois have consistently higher levels of entry-level education requirements. Baccalaureate degrees are required for Athletic Trainers. Masters degrees are required for Certified Art Therapists, Occupational Therapists, Speech and Language Pathologists, Audiologists, Licensed Certified Social Workers, Licensed Mental Health Counselors, Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists. Additionally, doctorate degrees are required for Pharmacists and Physical Therapists.

DEFINITIONS

Diploma Program - Nursing education administered in hospitals, last about 3 years (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008)

ADN- Associate Degree in Nursing. ADN programs, offered by community and junior colleges, take about 2 to 3 years to complete. (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008)

BSN- Bachelor’s of Science Degree in Nursing. Offered by colleges and universities, take about 4 years to complete. (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008)

RN to BSN- Entry level nurses who then take advantage of tuition reimbursement benefits to work toward a BSN by completing an RN-to-BSN program. (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008)

Accelerated BSN Programs- available for individuals who have a bachelor’s or higher degree in another field and who are interested in moving into nursing. (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008)

Articulation- A linkage between community colleges (associate degree schools of nursing, or ADN programs) and 4-year colleges or universities (baccalaureate degree nursing programs, or BSN programs). Articulation agreements provide for a seamless transfer of associate degree credits to baccalaureate nursing programs. These agreements facilitate credit transfer and baccalaureate degree completion. In Illinois, there is a Statewide articulation plan. (AACN, 2005).

Partnership- Strategic partnerships between schools of nursing and hospitals are created in order to increase nursing education capacity, and include a variety of approaches. Some of these are initiated with the financial support of other organizations, such as foundations and government organizations. An example of a model is where a hospital agrees to an arrangement where their Master’s prepared staff serve as clinical faculty for groups of students from a School of Nursing.
DISCUSSION

ANA (O’Brien & Gural, 2008) found the following:

The nursing profession’s educational history is rich with opportunities for career advancement. Since the introduction of associate degree programs in the 1950’s, thousands of nurses have entered the nursing profession through this level of education. Associate degree programs prepare graduate nurses to take the National Council of State Boards of Nursing Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses (NCLEX-RN) (national licensing exam) and to begin functioning competently as novice nurses.

Baccalaureate degree programs provide additional emphasis on key areas of nursing theory and the use of evidence-based research in nursing practice. Typically, baccalaureate students are exposed to settings and areas of practice that are not part of associate degree programs, such as public health, home care, and other outpatient settings. The baccalaureate curriculum provides students with leadership skills that enable them to better supervise and monitor dependent practitioners such as licensed practical nurses (LPNs) and unlicensed assistive personnel (UAP) (AACN, 1998).

The increasing complexity of technology, medications and treatments, and chronic health conditions (in all age groups) underscores the need for nurses to continue their education. The changing environment and consumer expectations emphasize the need to reevaluate nursing education. A strong foundation in the liberal arts and sciences strengthens the analytical and critical thinking skills needed for the nurse to provide safe, culturally competent care (AACN, 1998). With the shift toward providing care in home-based settings instead of institutions, baccalaureate prepared RNs will be better equipped to meet this population’s needs. In its 2001 report to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the National Advisory Council on Nursing Education and Practice urged that two-thirds of the basic nurse workforce hold a baccalaureate or higher degree in nursing by 2010.

There is a growing body of research investigating the relationship between the educational preparation of nurses and patient outcomes. Aiken, Clarke, Cheung, Sloane, and Silber (2003) found that for every 10 percent increase in the number of BSN prepared nurses there was a corresponding 5 percent decrease in the mortality of surgical patients in Pennsylvania hospitals of various characteristics. These findings were replicated in a study done by Estabrooks, Midodzi, Cummings, Ricker and Giovannetti (2005) that indicated a lower 30-day mortality rate for patients cared for in Canadian hospitals staffed by higher percentages of BSN prepared nurses.

Aiken and colleagues have also studied the relationship between staffing levels and nurses’ perceived control over their practice. They found that hospitals
identified by nurses as having a positive practice environment had lower Medicare mortality rates (Aiken, Smith & Lake, 1994). These results demonstrated that an organization's structure and support for nursing improved recruitment and retention (McClure & Hinshaw, 2002). The empowerment of nurses and staffing were seen as keys to job satisfaction, patient satisfaction, and reductions in nurse burnout (Aiken, Smith, Lake, 1994; Aiken Clarke, Sloane, Sochalski, & Silber, 2002; Aiken, et al., 2003). In the study, Magnet hospitals had a greater preference for baccalaureate prepared staff and these supportive environments attracted increased numbers of highly educated nurses, who were seen as best prepared to assume active roles as patient advocates. Rambur, McIntosh Palumbo, and Reiner (2005) also found that baccalaureate prepared nurses were more likely to report higher job satisfaction scores in relation to opportunities for autonomy and growth, and to remain in practice longer than others.

The current nursing shortage is well documented (HRSA, 2006). Strategies for recruiting future nurses are dependent upon having adequate numbers of faculty to provide instruction and leadership (American Nurses Association, 2001). Lack of faculty prevents significant numbers of potential students from being admitted to nursing programs. The average age of nursing faculty is approximately 53, and many are expected to retire within the next five years. Advanced education and experience is required for nurses to serve as faculty in nursing education settings. This action proposal, which requires additional education for the continued registration of RNs, would expand the pool of nurses who could pursue graduate studies to fill these nursing faculty roles. By requiring the baccalaureate degree for continued registration as a registered nurse this action request seeks to be responsive to meet the increasingly complex health care needs of the residents of the U.S., as well as the faculty shortage.

This action proposal recognizes that the diploma and associate degree in nursing are important entry points for many into the profession; that diploma and associate degree nursing education are academically demanding and clinically challenging courses of study; and that the abilities of diploma and associate degree nursing graduates are demonstrated in high NCLEX-RN pass rates and excellent feedback from employers. As superb as these graduates are, research suggests additional education makes a difference in the skill and competence of nurses, just as it does for other health professionals (Aiken, Clarke, Cheung, Sloane, and Silber, 2003). By maintaining diploma and associate degree entry into nursing, the proposed action request recognizes this expertise and provides a reasonable compromise that precludes many of the more controversial plans for educational standardization that were proposed in the past and continue to be advocated by some.

This proposed action would apply to future graduates of associate and diploma nursing programs. All currently licensed RNs and current nursing students would be grandparented and not need to meet the baccalaureate criterion. For nurses
who are affected by this action request, the increased accessibility of distance learning programs will afford them greater flexibility in furthering their education, despite busy work schedules and other life commitments. Institutions with BSN programs are already making accommodations for associate degree and diploma prepared RNs by accepting their nursing credits without requiring validating exams. Many colleges offer work site programs that bring education courses to nurses’ facilities. On-line options, as well as other types of distance learning modalities are now plentiful and allow individuals to select how best to achieve a baccalaureate degree in nursing. Given these choices this initiative can be implemented without disadvantaging future new grads. (p. 10-12)

RECOMMENDATIONS

Illinois Nurses Association (INA) supports and recommends the following as guidelines:

1. Support the following resolutions made by ANA (O’Brien & Gural, 2008):
   
   - Affirm that increased numbers of registered nurses with a baccalaureate degree are needed to address the ongoing challenges of an increasingly complex health care delivery system and a critical nursing faculty shortage.
   - Support initiatives to require registered nurses to obtain a baccalaureate degree in nursing within ten years after initial licensure, exempting (grandparenting) those individuals who are licensed or are enrolled as a student in a nursing program at the time legislation is enacted.
   - Advocate for and promote legislative and educational activities that support enhanced degrees in nursing (p. 10)

2. Collaborate with other Illinois nursing organizations and schools of nursing to promote, support and implement strategies for the further educational advancement of registered nurses.

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References


Health Resources And Services Administration (2006). *What is behind HRSA's projected supply, demand, and shortage of registered nurses?* Bethesda, MD: Health Resources Services Administration.

