

Gaining momentum: Collaboration for academic progression

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The path to obtaining a Bachelor of Science in nursing can be strewn with challenges. Helping clear the way, the American Nurses Association and the Organization for Associate Degree Nursing joined forces in July 2015 to release the joint statement, “Academic Progression to Meet the Needs of the Registered Nurse, the Health Care Consumer and the U.S. Health Care System.” The position statement emphasizes the importance of nurses having access to seamless models of academic progression from high quality, accredited nursing education programs.

Much of the discussion of academic progression began with the 2010 Institute of Medicine report, “The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health,” which stated that academic nurse leaders across all schools of nursing should work together to increase the proportion of nurses with a baccalaureate degree from 50 to 80 percent by 2020.

Since the release of the position paper, significant advancements have continued in the area of academic progression. First, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of RN-to-BSN programs as well as in the number of students enrolled in RN-to-BSN programs throughout the country. According to data from the American Association of Colleges of Nursing, there has been a 70 percent increase in enrollment in RN-to-BSN programs. In 2016, Buerhaus, Auerbach and Staiger cited this growth as a contributing factor to the increase in BSN graduates, as reported in a Nursing Economics article.

However, more significant is the collaboration of community colleges and universities in the advancement of innovative models of nursing education, thus maintaining the ADN nursing programs while promoting BSN completion. Many of these models facilitate an increase in the number of baccalaureate-prepared nurses and shorten the time frame until an associate degree graduate initiates BSN education. This approach maintains the foundation of associate degree education that is recognized to be a quality and viable educational pathway. Many communities in this country would not have access to nursing education, and the resulting robust nursing workforce, if not for community college programs; therefore, it has become imperative for community colleges and universities to partner to increase the number of baccalaureate nurses.



The ANA/OADN position statement defined five models of academic progression. Those identified were the RN-to-BSN degree conferred by a community college, dual enrollment community college-university partnership, the RN to Master of Science in Nursing, state or regionally shared competency-based curriculum model, and the statewide or regional curriculum model.

Progress continues with these unique innovative models. For example, the number of states that allow for the RN-to-BSN model of academic progression at the community college has seen an increase from seven to 10 states. Georgia, Colorado and Delaware are the latest states to confer an RN-to-BSN at the community college. Numerous dual admission/dual enrollment models also have been developed.

However, one emerging model that currently appears to be a dynamic strategy is a collaborative community college/university partnership. In this case, the student enrolls at both the community college and the university, where prerequisites and nursing curricula are aligned between the community college and university partners. Students enter the community college and take university courses concurrently or interspersed with community college classes. At the end of four years, a student graduates with an associate degree conferred by the community college and a BSN conferred by the university, respectively, and then the graduate takes the National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses. Students already have successfully graduated from this kind of partnership. Data will need to be collected and analyzed as this model begins to develop and there are more graduates.

According to the follow-up report from the IOM, “Assessing Progress

on Implementing the Recommendations of the Institute of Medicine Report, “The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health” released in December 2015, efforts to expand and encourage partnerships between community colleges and four-year universities, as well as other models for establishing these pathways, should continue to be promulgated. The report notes that employers play a critical role in promoting educational progression and should be encouraged to provide financial and logistical support for employees pursuing a baccalaureate degree. And, new models of education, such as partnerships between community colleges and four-year universities, show promise for increasing the percentage of baccalaureate-prepared nurses.

Collaboration as demonstrated in the ANA/OADN position statement will only continue to advance the recommendation of academic progression, and ultimately will strengthen and further unify the nursing profession while meeting health care workforce needs. ■

— Donna Meyer is chief executive officer of OADN, Pat Smart is president of OADN and Christy Dryer is president-elect of OADN.

Resources

“Academic Progression to Meet the Needs of the Registered Nurse, the Health Care Consumer and the U.S. Health Care System.”
<http://nursingworld.org/positionstatements>

AACN Policy Brief, 2015. A Progress Report on the Educational Recommendations
www.aacn.nche.edu/government-affairs/IOM-5-Years-Brief.pdf

PROFILE

Fast 5 with a Nurse Leader

Ann O’Sullivan has 45 years of experience in nursing, including as a critical care nurse, clinical nurse specialist, director of nursing and associate professor. She currently serves as assistant dean for Support Services at Blessing-Rieman College of Nursing and Health Sciences in Quincy, IL.



Ann O’Sullivan

Having been active in high level, state association leadership roles throughout most of her career, O’Sullivan currently serves as vice president of ANA-Illinois and chairs the Illinois Expert Panel of Scope of Practice. On the national level, she served as chair of the American Nurses Association’s Reference Committee and was a member and vice-chair of the Congress of Nursing Practice and Economics. She also led the workgroup that revised ANA’s 2010 “Nursing: Scope and Standards of Practice, 2nd Edition,” and she co-edited, “The Essential Guide to Nursing Practice: Applying ANA’s Scope and Standards of Practice” published in 2012.

- 1. What was your first venture into a leadership role?**
I was appointed as a head nurse of an ICU at the age of 25 with only three years of nursing experience! I was the youngest head nurse at that hospital and one of only a very few BSNs.
- 2. What’s the most important thing you tell students about leadership?**
All nurses are leaders. It’s about showing up and doing your best every day. You don’t necessarily have to know how to be a manager to be a leader; you learn from experience and good mentors along the way.
- 3. Is the way entry-level nurses are prepared changing and why?**
Health care and the role of the nurse are ever-changing and so is nursing education. There is increased focus on research, population health, care management, living with chronic conditions, leadership, conflict management, finances, etc.
- 4. What are you most passionate about and why?**
I am most passionate about developing nurse leaders at all levels and educating nurses to practice to their full professional scope in all roles and settings. I am passionate about increasing the power of the collective voice of nurses through the professional association and the impact we can have.
- 5. If you had a magic wand, what would you change about health care?**
Health care needs to be more patient/client/consumer focused. We’re improving but there is still too much focus on the business side of health care. Nurses need to be leaders in both, and to do that, we need more education and role models. ■

ANA resources

ANA’s Nursing Knowledge Center offers the Fundamentals of Magnet® course to help RNs sharpen their leadership and organizational transformation skills using the ANCC Magnet® Model. The course is designed to help foster nursing excellence in an organization. To learn more, go to <https://learn.ana-nursingknowledge.org>. For questions, send an email to fundamentals.magnet@ana.org or call 800-284-2378.