

CURRICULUM INNOVATION IN NURSING EDUCATION



A WCN Workgroup Briefing Paper

In March 2008, the Washington Center for Nursing submitted the Master Plan for Nursing Education to the state Department of Health. In that plan, we proposed a comprehensive set of reforms to the nursing education system in this state, organized around the broad areas of competency, supply, diversity, and access. We are now developing plans for implementing those proposals, through stakeholder workgroups and research on best practices. This workgroup is focused on curriculum innovations in nursing education.

Background

Scientific knowledge is expanding exponentially, and healthcare practice is changing rapidly. New challenges in practice include an aging population, a shift from acute to chronic diseases in patients and therefore in treatment models, increasing attention to patient safety and quality of care, and recurrent calls to decrease healthcare costs. The locations of healthcare delivery are moving from hospital to outpatient and community settings, resulting in increased inpatient acuity and diminished availability of traditional clinical teaching sites. Student demographics have also shifted, and new technology offers alternative delivery systems. Meanwhile, nursing curricula are already overloaded, and it is difficult to imagine adding yet more “content.” Both classroom and clinical teaching systems pose challenges in the current environment. A new system for the integration of these two domains is needed, along with greater support for the transition from education to practice.

Making these issues even more challenging are the concurrent faculty shortages and the current economic crisis. Nonetheless, educators and clinicians are in agreement about the need for curricular innovation, if not about the details of needed change.

The 2003 “Innovation in Nursing Education: A Call to Reform” by the National League for Nursing provides a clear and compelling directive for nursing education:

“What is needed now is dramatic reform and innovation in nursing education to create and shape the future of nursing practice. All levels of nursing education, undergraduate and graduate, are obligated to challenge their long-held traditions and design evidence-based curricula that are flexible, responsive to students’ needs, collaborative, and integrate current technology... Faculty, students, consumers, and nursing service personnel must work in partnership to design innovative educational systems that meet the needs of the healthcare delivery system now and in the future.”

Q: What are the areas of concern or issues?

- Ensuring that clinical education reflects current practice
- Classroom teaching and content overload
- Changing paradigms of health and health care: Prevention, chronic care, and community-based care
- Integrating new technology: simulation labs, interactive and web-based media
- Joint education with other healthcare professionals

Q: What can we do?

Two specific recommendations from the Master Plan are:

- Implement the recommendations of the Carnegie Foundation's project on Preparation for the Professions
- Foster collaborative development of "best practices" and shared resources related to improved teaching

Other proposals have included:

- Establishing a Washington Institute for Excellence in Nursing Education, to facilitate the development and spread of expertise in teaching and learning.
- Coordinating research efforts to evaluate pedagogical practices and inquiries
- Investigating successes in other states to increase the collaboration between education and practice in curriculum development and delivery

What's next?

In the spring and summer of 2009, key stakeholders from education and practice will work together to develop a plan for implementation of the Master Plan goals, through coordination of proposals from several workgroups. The plans from the Curriculum Innovation Workgroup will include the identification of best practices in approaches to teaching; strategies for enhancing partnerships between education, practice, and research; cost estimates for additional resources and strategies for system efficiencies; and recommendations for strategic priorities.

Additional resources and references:

NLN Call for Curricular Innovation

- National League for Nursing. (2003). Position statement: Innovation in nursing education: A call to reform. Available at: <http://www.nln.org/aboutnln/PositionStatements/innovation.htm>

AACN Baccalaureate Essentials (new)

- American Association of Colleges of Nursing (2009). *The essentials of baccalaureate education for professional nursing practice: Faculty tool kit*. Available at: <http://www.aacn.nche.edu/Education/pdf/BacEssToolkit.pdf>

Content overload in curricula

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